

**Kinship and belonging in the 'land of strangers' :
An ethnography of Caithness, North Scotland**

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the heart of Caithness, the northernmost region of mainland Scotland. Based on 18 months participant observation in the coastal village of Lybster and the surrounding area, it explores concepts of kinship and belonging. The thesis examines characters, places, and events in both everyday and ritual settings. I trace the creation and maintenance of community, and the construction and blurring of the boundaries of belonging as well as paths of social transformation. I examine how Caithnessians perceive themselves as 'strangers' in their own nation, thus creating increasingly localized ties that bind. Significant in all of this, in a locality where migration has historically been important, is an analysis of how 'others' and their identities play a constitutive role in the self-identification processes of Caithnessians. I consider ascribed and achieved ways of belonging - the genealogical and performative journeys that are involved in fitting into this locality. I examine the contradictions, nuances, and negotiations that are evident in definitions of selves and others and the constitutive relationship between them. All of this is part of a wider investigation into how people conceptualise themselves and others. I argue that what I have called 'island-mindedness' characterises the identities of this mainland population and leads to a side-stepping of national identity. In the context of current research on the nation, such ethnographic illumination of the complexity of notions of identity in specific regions is essential for a rounded anthropological understanding of Scotland. By offering a close exploration of a community based on kinship, this thesis aims to illuminate new ways of approaching the nuances of everyday life. I suggest that it is in the encounters of everyday life - more than in claims and categories - that identity work and kinship are most complex and most meaningful.

For Angus

**And in memory of Chuck Jedrej
and John Masson**

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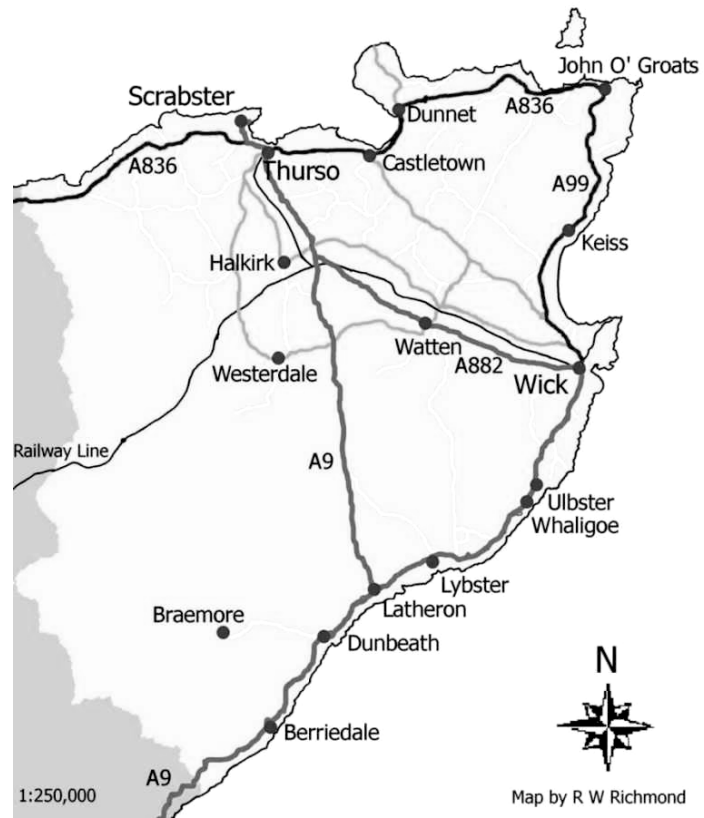
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Map of Scotland, showing Caithness

Caithness



Caithness, showing Thurso, Wick, Lybster, and Dunbeath

**This is not the back of beyond ...
This is the heart of beyond**

K. MacNeil 2006

**Caithness is infiltrated with a palpable sense of being under-imagined.
This was somewhere that nobody much had troubled to conceive of.**

Will Self 1998

...The people would yet live, the people themselves.

Neil M. Gunn 1946

Note on pronunciation

In Caithness dialects (of which there are multiple variations), a common marker is the length of vowels:

Broad ‘a’ becomes ‘aa’ – e.g. all is *aal*

‘i’ becomes ‘ee’ – e.g. big is *beeg*

‘o’ is shortened – e.g. home is *hom* and road is *rod*

‘oo’ becomes ‘ee’ in some words – fool becomes *feel*, foot is *feet*

Diphthongs such as ‘ea’ or ‘oy’ become ‘ey’ or ‘iy’ – seat becomes *seyt*, boy is *biy*

‘Th’ is sometimes elided – ‘the’ becomes *e*, ‘that’ becomes *at*

Final ‘-et’ or ‘-it’ becomes ‘-d’ and a word beginning ‘I’ is sometimes preceded by ‘h’. So ‘it’ becomes *hid*

The glottal stop is dropped in the Caithness accent such that the ‘t’ in words like ‘water’ or ‘later’ is not pronounced

Initial ‘wh’ becomes ‘f’ – ‘what’ becomes *fit*, who is *fa*.

Most nouns are suffixed with ‘-ie’: *mannie*, *bookie*, *shoppie* and so on.

The diminutive is created by ‘-agie’ such as *boyagie* and *lassagie*.

Finally, the clearest examples of Caithness accent are perhaps these:

‘J’ and soft ‘g’ become ‘ch’ at the start of a word. For instance, the *John O’Groat Journal* is the *Chonny Groat Chornal* and George is *Cheordag*

Any final ‘-ing’ word becomes ‘-an’. Saying becomes *sayan*, doing is *doan*.

Throughout, I have tried where possible to use phonetic spellings to aid comprehension.

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Introduction

This is a study of local identity, similarity, and difference in a population on the edge of the Scottish mainland. The thesis analyzes localized identities, kinship constructions, and their everyday realities in order to imbue contemporary research on identities and belonging in Scotland with the sense of how people live out these concepts. The research explores the northern-most region of Scotland, Caithness, and particularly its renowned fishing village, Lybster. By closely focusing on concepts of community-making, migration, perceptions of selves and others, and by being situated in everyday spaces such as houses, public houses, shops, and boats, this thesis offers an exploration into belonging. How do people use spaces, create relationships, contradict themselves, and even other themselves on their journey to belonging? In this particular border population – of 25,195 inhabitants¹ in a region spanning 40 miles north to south, and 30 miles east to west – people root behaviour, attitudes, and personal narratives in collective memories and shared stories, always eager to communicate their identities and distinctiveness from other places. At the same time, they limit this identity story to an extremely localized sense of being in the world, and have a type of island attitude in terms of belonging; indeed, it has been noted in parliamentary debate that ‘Caithness is almost an island.’²

This thesis will offer an exploration of this island attitude amongst a mainland population and demonstrate the ways in which the people of Caithness use concepts of, and encounters with, otherness to make sense of themselves and their world. This involves a local side-stepping of national identity, which in turn promotes an academic rethink about what might constitute belonging for people in Scotland. By exploring this small place and population, I engage with larger questions of belonging, kinship, identity, and representation in Scotland. While Nadel-Klein (1997) asks with concern, ‘is Scotland being constructed as an object represented only by some of its parts?’ I would amend that question to ask: is

¹ 2001 Census results for Caithness. Source: www.highland.gov.uk.

² This was first claimed in the Scottish Parliament by former Highlands and Islands SNP MSP Dr Winnie Ewing in February 2000. Source: www.scottish.parliament.uk. Accessed 02.12.08

Scotland being represented as simply the sum of its parts? This rural ethnography may seem to some to be an esoteric project: it is not. In learning how real people construct and experience identity in small places, we can both realize and fill any gaps in our claims about the nation.

Scenes from the life of Lybster

Taking my seat on the bus in Inverness, I am going on the same journey that once took me to my homeland. This time, I am venturing further north, to Caithness to begin fieldwork in the village of Lybster. The bus is completely full, because only two trips go so far north daily, and it is incredibly, though happily, noisy. Passengers young and old recognize each other and chatter incessantly; purchases from their trip to the city overflow from the racks above. Caithness and Sutherland accents, in their soft lilts and crescendos, fill the air. Some children, already bored at the prospect of a five hour journey to the Thurso terminus, are trying to scramble free of their seatbelts. A couple of adults have sought private time by listening to iPods, and I notice one man sitting near the front reading a well-known Sociology text. A woman sits next to me, and introduces herself: she is an incomer from an English town and settled in Freswick, north Caithness, thirty years ago. I explain my research and she says she'd be 'no use' because she doesn't like it very much, and doesn't know many Caithnessians. I try to engage her but she has the reluctance of someone who feels like an eternal outsider. When I explain that I am moving to Lybster, she has a vague knowledge of its location. She does not chat for the rest of the journey and I guiltily find myself eager to join in with the lively conversations of other people on the bus.

We follow the flow of the water, the low-lying road creating closeness between person and sea. I know this road and this closeness like I know myself, but see it differently this time, as an anthropologist as well as a migrant. We sweep into Sutherland through Dornoch and Golspie, then through Brora. This is the place of my family and my childhood. Passengers get on the bus here and we nod a hello, an elderly man asks why I have not been here for a while, another jokes I should be getting off the bus here. Combining this feeling of localness, of home, with my research pursuit might have been more complicated had the landscape not forced a

sense of difference and elsewhere on me. The Navidale Bends push us out of Sutherland. The Ord of Caithness soon approaches, that sweeping road built into the face of a cliff, the wide bend like a welcoming arm around your shoulder. The bus swoops around its bend and descends into Berriedale valley, over its high bridge with the fishing village far beneath. Suddenly, we are pushing up the road once more to encounter those steep gradients and hairpin bends of the Berriedale Braes. And then the road calms and we are in the lowlands beyond the Highlands. We are in Caithness.

It is at this point, as if from nowhere, that a fierce snowstorm begins. The windows turn white and, impressively, passengers seem able to identify where we are simply by judging the bends in the road. Passing a rare site of clearance in Caithness, Badbea, andcrofting settlements such as Borgue, we arrive at Dunbeath village, with its castle and its laird. This village is the rival and yet closest ally of Lybster where I will live, and Dunbeath will soon become my second Caithness home. We pass the settlement of Latheronwheel and reach Latheron, the village where the main A9 road heads to Thurso. Here, we continue down the A99 road towards the other Caithness town, Wick, and the bus halts at Lybster. Letting me off at the hotel on the main road that intersects Lybster village, the driver carries my suitcases. He shakes my hand and laughs ‘Ye’ve a return ticket til Inverness if Lybster’s too jumpin’, mind!’ And the bus is gone. My feet are rooted firmly in the thick snow and the biting crosswinds remind me of home. I look directly ahead and see Lybster village: the strikingly wide main street is deserted but the amount of houses and businesses hint at a dynamic small place. I become lost in my thoughts, pondering what I already know about this place. Facts and figures, which will soon be replaced by the realities of daily life, fill my thoughts.

Historically, I know that this place was Norse. I know that, despite centuries of British and Scottish rule, the sense of Norse identity has lingered long. As early as the ninth century, Caithness was not part of Scotland. It was annexed by the Norwegians, the Earls of Orkney, while Gaelic Alba was ruled over by Kenneth McAlpine. The ancient Deeds of Caithness lie dormant in Norway still today. Despite much protest within Alba at the time, Caithness remained annexed for four centuries by the Norwegians. Indeed:

‘[The Norse takeover] was never acknowledged as such by the Scottish monarchs; and nothing but its extreme distance from the seat of government, the divided state of the kingdom, and the difficulty of sending troops so far north, forced them to tolerate the usurpation.’ (Calder 1887: 91)

It was simply the lack of a male heir that saw the demise of Norwegian annexation of Caithness in 1331. The Earldom was handed to the Sinclair family and Caithness found its new place in Scotland: *Katanes* was now *Gallaibh* (Gaelic, pronounced ‘Gollach’) which means ‘the land of the stranger’. While this may seem like a centuries-old yarn, the story is a backdrop constitutive of belonging: contemporary Caithnessian narratives and feelings of belonging are situated in this collective memory. Personal names, surnames, and place names, school lessons and family narratives saturated in Norse heritage mean that this relationship to Scandinavia is not a dormant piece of myth history, but an ever-present (as the past tends to be) component of selfhood. Furthermore, the political decision to send no troops into *Katanes* and no attempt to retrieve the area from annexation due to geographical distance lingers long in contemporary Caithness. Political myopia and misrepresentation of Caithness is evident today. It was as *Gallaibh* that Caithness formed the Province of the Cat with neighbouring region Sutherland, which in turn was known as *Cattaibh* (‘cattach’, local, native, indigenous of the land). This flags up the significant fact that Caithnessians historically were not perceived as local or perhaps even as ‘Scottish’. This lingers clearly in today’s Caithness where locals use ‘gollach’ as a term to describe themselves. Essentially, then, Caithnessians self-identify as ‘the stranger’. Caithness is undeniably part of Scotland, but at its heart is an identity narrative that has trickled from the ever-present past and created a strong sense of separation and distinctiveness.

Lybster village lies on the southeast coast of Caithness, the northernmost region on mainland Scotland. Planned in the early 19th Century by Sir Patrick Sinclair, its design is notable for its coherent, neat structure. There has been a harbour at Lybster since 1810 and it was around this excellent resource that the village was designed. Essentially, the planned village was constructed on land belonging to the Lybster Ha’ estate of the Sinclairs in order to house those refugees arriving in Caithness from Sutherland during the Clearances. The very fact that it

was built with an incomer population in mind has arguably affected the Lybster perception of incomers: in a village where the locals are essentially incomers, a concept of belonging is heavily nuanced. And so it was here that the Caithness fishing witnessed a boom – from its modest Victorian beginnings to the 1960s – and became famous for its successes. Such fishing success placed Lybster at the heart of the Scottish fishing industry, and it was classed the third most important port in the country after Fraserburgh and Wick. Fishing, as will be explored below, is at the heart of Lybster life and – despite industrial decline in the 1960s – remains a crucial part of village identity.

Caithness has a total population of 25,195: just over one thousand of those people live in and around Lybster. In the village, there are 500 households which are 67% owner-occupied and 22% rented from the council. It is also reported that private rents in Caithness can match city rents at £600 while buying property is cheap, one example being a five-bedroom, three-storey immaculate home selling for £71,000 shortly before my arrival in the village.

Employment in Lybster – like much of Caithness – has a very localized touch. Men work in the fishing and split this with jobs at the Dounreay nuclear power plant, near Thurso. Others make a living by running small creel boats and also working offshore in the oil industry. Some work on the neighbouring Dunbeath estate. There is something quite gendered about employment here, because women tend to work within the village: at the hotels, in the bank, the post office, cafes, hotels, shops, or run their own B&Bs (there are four in the village). Some work in Wick, particularly for the Council or in offices at Wick harbour. Young people in Lybster find seasonal work in the Lybster hotels.

Lybster has one primary school, which in the school year 2006/7 had a roll of 109 pupils, with 4 teachers and no headteacher. There are currently two churches in Lybster: The Central Church (Church of Scotland) and the Free Church of Scotland. A few decades ago a further two Church of Scotland churches were in operation. One was converted into a private home, and the other is not in use. The ministers at these churches are not permanent, and perform sermons at the other churches of Latheron parish on alternate Sundays. During my fieldwork, Lybster's Church of

Scotland weekly average attendance would be 30, while the Free Church would have an attendance of 10.

Lybster is represented by the Liberal Democrat councillor for South East Caithness. Caithness itself is represented at Holyrood by Jamie Stone, Liberal Democrat MSP for Caithness, Sutherland, and Easter Ross. The current political controversy in Caithness is over the arrival of Gaelic road signs. The region has an awkward relationship with the language, which (historically at least) had a transient though not constitutive place in Caithness life. Brought to the region mainly by Sutherland migrants, Gaelic was never truly a 'native' language in the way that Norse had been and Gaelic died out quickly with a generation. Gaels themselves perceive Caithness as the 'other' and realized that it was never part of the *Gaidhealtachd*: this is clear when Highland Gaels refer to Caithness as 'the lowlands behind the Highlands'. Traces of Gaelic remain, particularly in place names and a few individuals, and it was always more evident in the Caithness hinterland than on the coast near Lybster. The 2001 Census results reveal that 0.9% of Lybsterians have any knowledge of Gaelic, a figure which supports their reluctance to incorporate the language on the local road signs.

As I get lost in my thoughts trying to remember what I've read and heard, a car trundles up the road and two women step out. I hear one whisper 'ach, she's just wee like you!' and wonder why this matters and who they were expecting in me. The other woman – Dora – is the person I will be living with until I am settled in the village. She approaches me and I put out my hand to shake hers. Dora instead hugs me and kisses me on each cheek. She holds my gloveless hand and exclaims that I'm too cold: 'Come on, lassagie, let's get you home'. And although I am not aware of it yet, the process of making this home soon tells me everything I need to know about kinship and belonging in Caithness.

We slowly make our car journey in the snow through the main body of Lybster village. Dora points out houses, recreational facilities, businesses, community buildings, and general points of interest along the way. To situate this thesis, this journey should be recreated in detail.

Leaving The Portland Arms hotel on the busy main road, and before venturing to the main part of the village, one can turn onto Norland Road, the so-

called ‘Millionaire’s Row’ where 1960s bungalows were purchased by fishermen rich in success. Literally separated from the main village by a road, this area has always been perceived as affluent and different to the rest. Norland leads to Upper Lybster, a virtually deserted area which was the scene of crofting when Lybsterians found work as crofter-fishermen. Today, some ruined crofts and the occasional new-build pepper this land.

To picture Lybster well, it is best to imagine one very long, very wide main road, everything placed along it in succession. There are only three roads which branch off from this structure of the village, creating the image of fluid, boundless houses and other buildings: doors and windows are so flush to the buildings that it looks like one large building. It is never quite clear where one stops and another starts.



Fig. 1: Main body of Lybster, including harbour (Alan Moat)

Venturing back into the main body of Lybster village, we pass first the old church (now a private home), Northlands Glass factory and the private houses of Quatre Bras. Quatre Bras is known locally as ‘e top o’ ‘e rod’ as it forms the entrance to Lybster. ‘E top o’ ‘e rod is also a phrase used to distinguish Lybster boundaries. Anywhere ‘by’ (past) ‘e top o’ ‘e rod is deemed to be outwith Lybster proper. Northlands Glass factory provides workspace for international artists and holds renowned classes for those interested in glass art. This has opened Lybster up to creative tourism, and provided jobs for some local young people.

Quatre Bras gives way to the first set of council houses which were built around pre-existing Victorian private housing in such a way that houses appear to huddle together. The council housing is semi-detached, the two front doors next to each other and joined by a brick arch: this bringing together of houses is a distinctive Caithness council design. Next to these lies Lybster Primary School, where each village child – like their ancestors before them – is educated. This building also houses the Lightbeams nursery school for toddlers. It is at the school that much of Lybster's social activity happens: badminton lessons and dance lessons, for instance, are provided here by villagers on weekday evenings. Both formal and informal time for children is spent here.

Opposite the school I am shown the Lybster Football Club ground. A small pitch, it has goal nets that always need repaired by the fisherman's tools and impressive floodlights. This is the scene of both senior and junior football. Local initiatives to fund more equipment and resources for Lybster F.C. are underway. Adjoining the football pitch is a children's play park. Even this suggests Lybster's fishing heritage as each structure, the see-saw, slide, and swings are made in the shape of boats and other fishing paraphernalia.

More housing stands opposite this and next is the Central Church, the Church of Scotland, where villagers congregate on a Sunday. While around 30-40 villagers attend on average each week, this church also acts as an important social space where friends and neighbours catch up with each other. Over the years, Lybster has had five functioning churches; today, this and the Free Kirk are still in use. Of the others, one is a private house, one in ruins, and the last is currently subject to proposals to be converted into housing. The Central Church is an important marker to villagers regardless of their religious beliefs or practices: this is where life-cycle rituals and family events occur. For Dora, this is where her mother was christened and married and had her funeral, Dora's own christening and wedding, along with those of her two sons, all happened here, and it is where she already knows her funeral service will one day take place. This church is about time and community as much as religion.

More sport is available along from here on the Lybster golf course. This lies exactly where Lybster train station and line worked in the late 19th and early 20th

centuries. Claimed as the smallest, most northern and most challenging 9-hole course in Scotland, golf is a popular pastime for villagers. Local businesses (like Dora's shop, for instance) have sponsored and named a hole each, and here villagers, young and old, male and female, play singles and doubles golf. Even more tempting than the golf itself is the golf club. In this small building, where the logo is a steam train, nightly competitions, dances, live bands, impromptu instrument-playing and singing occur.

More private houses line the way before we reach Lybster's branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland. Here, five tellers and the bank manager work and the customers are normally only from Lybster as neighbouring villages use banks in town. Lybster is quite a renowned banking village in the north, with some successful bank managers hailing from here, and banking being a crucial part of the village's early days.

Across the road from the bank is Lybster Hall. This is the location for annual events such as Hogmanay celebrations, ceilidhs, and Harbour Day dances. On a daily basis, villagers rent out the hall privately to run classes such as Cuban Salsa and sports such as indoor archery.

One of Lybster's old, ruined churches – St. Mary's – lies next along the road and plans to renovate it are currently underway. One suggestion is to create an arts and crafts centre with private flats for sale above it, another is to sell it as a private house. The local community council is open to all village suggestions. Villagers enjoy the opportunity to have their say and be part of creating the village future.

Neighbouring this is the start of the Main Street proper, marked by the Commercial Hotel. 'E Comm is very popular with Lybster adults, particularly the elderly. While it is a hotel and does host the occasional tourist, this is the epitome of localism: other Caithnessians do not come to the Comm, and villagers treat it as a home from home. The bar is very small, with a coal fire and someone eager to find an instrument to play. There are a few seats, but everyone stands, taking it in turns to buy a round, or helping to walk one of the elderly villagers home.

Across the road is the butcher's shop, a long-standing family-run business in the village. Locals have a certain commitment to Lybster businesses: in past generations, this one street had seventeen shops in business. The butchery sells all

types and cuts of meats, and a wide-range of fruit and vegetables, along with store cupboard supplies. The shop sells a wider range of produce than ‘butcher’ connotes and this variety is typical of local Lybster businesses.

It is on Main Street that some private houses function as bed and breakfasts – there are at least four on this single street. They are particularly popular with the lorry drivers and traveling salesmen who regularly visit Caithness from Orkney. Here, the B&Bs act as a comfortable home from home, with close relationships formed – i.e. calling the owner ‘auntie’ – and links to the village cemented. These regular visitors become almost half-in, half-out Lybster residents.

Across the road is ‘E Café. This has, for more than forty years served as a general store, but in previous decades also housed a café, and is therefore ever-known as ‘E Café’. There is a special charm about this place, where self-service is unheard of and all the wares lie behind the counter. Glistening jars of sweets wait to be weighed out into paper bags for eager children, while villagers can find everything in terms of food and household supplies that they could possibly need. More significantly than its indispensable service is ‘E Café’s centrality in social life. Open from 7am until 10pm every day, this is the first and last stop of a villager’s day. This is where village news and events are announced, heard, and discussed.

A very different type of shop, a branch of a national convenience chain, sits awkwardly directly opposite ‘E Café. Here, similar items are sold, but with the addition of rental DVDs, alcohol, and a cash machine; this convenience store claims a more ‘modern’ offering. In addition to village loyalty to ‘E Café and its heritage, this convenience store has had four different managers in the space of a year, which has led to a certain distrust of it. Furthermore, it is negatively associated with incomers: it is from an English chain and has mainly been run by newcomers from England who, when they leave the shop, leave the region. This is not to say that Lybster is anti-English, more anti-downfall of its local community, economy, and relationships. I would soon find myself entering this store to withdraw cash when it was ‘too rainy’ to walk to the bank, or to rent a film when our satellite reception was down. Each time I would use this shop, it would be accompanied by a guilty excuse, and through loyalty to ‘E Café, I would go directly across to our local shop and

spend even more money. I, like everyone, was never to fund that chain without funding 'E Café.

Next door is another 'incomer' business, the post office. This is another village hub – the local bus times are hand-written and pasted in the window. This is where the local newspapers – *The Caithness Courier* on a Wednesday, *The John O'Groat Journal* on a Friday – are sold. Working villagers depend on the post office to collect their letters and parcels, while others depend on it for benefits and pensions. The post office, more than the convenience store, has an in-betweenness about it. It is a hub and yet, run by incomers, it does not have the links to pre-existing relationships that are witnessed in E Café. Villagers depend on its services and bump into each other here, but a trip to the post office remains transient, unlike the socializing that can take up a whole afternoon in E Café.

These businesses all merge almost seamlessly with the identical buildings around them which function as private housing. The businesses themselves were originally houses, and the way in which domestic life and economic life flow together creates a reassuring sense of camaraderie and simultaneous pressure to keep local businesses alive. One Lybster business which is notorious for constantly changing hands ('incomers!') and perceived as peripheral by the villagers is The Cross. So-called because it marks the crossroads of Lybster village, this is a small restaurant and chip shop. The business is seen as 'English' because it is always run and taken over by English incomers, has an 'English' menu - for instance, saveloy puddings but no red puddings, cod but no haddock – and an 'English' atmosphere – no Caithness chat, no sense that one might want to spend time there. Passing tourists 'and other incomers' use this place while locals discuss what drama may befall it next.

At the Cross, one can head up the road to Hillhead, a section of Lybster that lies outwith the main body of the village, but within the boundaries of the original Lybster Ha' estate. Hillhead is sparsely populated, mainly by Lybsterians who have decided to buy land and build detached and usually very large houses. This area is similar to farmland in appearance, but is home to members of four fisher families who have expanded Lybster's boundaries. Unlike Upper Lybster, the Hillhead residents do not pass by the village or opt for Wick and nor are they peripheral.

There is a steady stream of cars, bicycles, and pedestrians between this area and the main village, connecting at the Cross. In the other direction from the Cross, one reaches the Free Kirk, and more private and detached houses.

Venturing down Russell Street we encounter the Bayview Hotel. This is yet another central point of the village where young and old gather and enjoy their evening. Naturally, alcohol is involved, but much of the time this is simply a space where villagers catch up with each other after work. This is where they gossip, play games, laugh, fight, cry, put the world to rights, sing Simon and Garfunkel songs with an anthropologist, and analyze almost anything that comes to mind. While it is a hotel where tourists sleep and private functions are held, these seem a world away from the everyday realities of the bar. This place feels like the microcosm of Lybster: it is where community is acted out, where ‘others’ rarely appear, and where – whatever Lybsterians *say* about community life, kinship, and identity – the *doing* of belonging comes into clearest focus. This location is a dream for any ethnographer.

From here, we encounter the ‘granny hoosies’ – the sheltered housing for elderly Lybsterians. Older people tend to go from their large fisher houses on the main street or at the harbour to this quiet Lybster back street. It is something that is almost inevitable in village life. If an elderly resident cannot look after him or herself and has no relatives nearby, they are likely to be moved into the residential home in Wick. Lybsterians shudder at the thought of this: ‘we like to keep everybody here’. However, for those older residents, the move to this crescent is ‘e waiy til e grun’, meaning one step closer to the cemetery. They are much aided, however, by the neighbouring health centre. Lybster benefits from having two General Practitioners and a nurse on its back street. There is also a prescription service which means that no villager needs to travel into Wick for their medicines. Intriguingly, the two GPs here are foreign: one German, one Spanish. Unlike the English incomers (who are not disliked or excluded, but who have an exceedingly awkward relationship with locals), these two men are extremely popular. The reason ‘they are giving us something, no’ takin’ hid’.

Going back on ourselves and returning to the middle of Main Street, we encounter more council housing. This is the troubled part of Lybster, which houses some notorious residents and is regularly visited by police. This area is known

locally – by both young and old – as ‘the bronx’. The ‘Bronx’ opens up to the more pleasant Southend, a mixture of council and private housing with terrific views of the sea and a close, neighbourly feel. Unlike the main street’s long terraced appearance where houses huddle together, Southend houses cluster. Back doors look on to other back doors, gardens are close to each other. While domestic life spills easily into neighbourly life in Lybster, the layout of housing in this particular spot makes this all the easier.

At Southend is the small, very old and precarious ladder that descends to Shelligoe beach. This is a spot where young people go to escape adults and the pressures of close-knit life, and where villagers take evening strolls. This is a relatively private beach, that certainly tourists do not visit. From Shelligoe, we can reach the harbour. The best way however is from the main street.

The sign, made entirely from seasonal flowers, shows an arrow pointing right and reads ‘To The Harbour’. Following the sign, we pass an old Victorian house that is now private flats, and a cluster of private bungalows. The road is exceptionally steep and winding. Modern houses are dotted along its curves. We reach ‘the bench’ – literally a bench where everyone stops to take a deep breath and gaze out across the stunning harbour. Continuing on the winding road, the bridge crosses Reisgill Burn. A spectacular waterfall cascades, and the soothing sound of the water enhances the anticipation of reaching the harbour. We pass the two houses of the harbour and the Inver of Lybster. We finally reach the harbour, with its visitor centre and café, once the scene of intense fishing hustle and bustle. Now home to smaller creel boats, the harbour has a feeling of solitude about it as the creel boats sway gently in the breeze. The lighthouse stands proudly as it always did, now guarding over this tremendous place in quiet reflection. From here, there is the perfect view of Lybster’s very heart. Here is a place where people live and work. Here is a place where people make sense of themselves and their world.

The ethnographic method

This thesis is an ethnographic analysis of kinship, belonging, and identity concepts in Caithness, a border population. In researching a border population, I expected to find a certain in-betweenness in identity concepts, a focus on close community, and a

side-stepping of national identity. I explore the nuances, negotiations, and contradictions that people demonstrate in understanding themselves and the world around them, and how they present their identities and worldviews to others. I demonstrate the significance of localized identities in a border population, and investigate the effects of in-migration and out-migration. I look closely at the difference between the impact of ‘others’ who arrive and settle in the region. I explore internal relationships between various Caithness towns and villages. I elaborate on this by arguing that while some identity boundaries are fluid, others remain rigid: the flux and crystallization of belonging is central to this thesis. I am to show how the village community is one of kinship. I explore how relatedness is more open and fluid than belonging, and how people forge the most significant links through the former. I set this argument in everyday life: entering people’s homes, serving people in pubs, and participating in gala week are mundane and crucial aspects of belonging and kinship in Caithness. I aim to demonstrate that, in a border population, there is a relationship between feeling peripheral and classing Caithness as the centre of the world. I also explore what happens to concepts of place, kinship, and self when Caithnessians leave the region. Moreover, I explore how this intricate identity work is carried out in a complex, ever-present history of migration and otherness. This research also illuminates the contemporary identity problems faced by Caithnessians when, on a governmental level, the community’s identity is being completely rewritten.

While semi-structured interviews were not my main method, I prepared a list of questions in advance, should it seem appropriate to seek such an interview. They included open questions such as these:

- Where were you born? How long did you live in your place of birth?
- In what ways is your place of birth important or not important for your sense of belonging?
- Does your family have a history of being in that place? Can you tell me about that?
- If not, how did you arrive in Caithness? What has that experience been like for you?

- How important were your formative years - the place where you grew up, went to school, made friends, made choices - in your idea of where you 'fit in'?
- What was your impression of your home town/village when you were growing up? Did you plan to stay forever? Were you planning to leave? How did these ideas develop or change?
- How important do you think, personally, ancestry and bloodlinks to a place are for a sense of belonging?
- Is being in the place important for a sense of belonging there? For instance, in your view, do out-migrants still belong and claim to be from Caithness?
- How do you think incomers are received by the Caithness community?
- In Caithness, and your town/village specifically, what does the word 'community' mean to you?;
- In what ways do you feel a sense of any national identity? Why do you think that is?

As demonstrated by the questions above, my concerns match those of other social researchers currently investigating Scotland. Importantly, though, my research goes further: rather than conducting interviews or offering questionnaires and examining what people claim or say, I investigate how such themes are conceptualized and realized over time and in a variety of contexts. The complex reality of identities and belonging in small Scottish communities, and the real lives behind identity claims deserve attention. My focus on localized identity is also innovative as most Scottish research is concerned with the national.

However, on the topic of localism, It has been noted by Jane Nadel-Klein that:

Local identity becomes methodologically problematic because it cannot be taken for granted as having a continuous, clearly bounded existence and uniformly experienced tradition. Rather, such identity is historically produced and may be strategically renegotiated by those who claim it. (1991: 501)

My research does not explore ‘what’ local identity is *per se*. Rather, I focus on the nuances and negotiations of localism, why it occurs, and the contexts in which it supercedes other ways of being in the world.

An ethnographic approach has been encouraged within sociology and anthropology. For example, Kiely et al. highlight the importance of not forgetting local identity: ‘we have always sought contexts where national identity is either salient or problematic as identity construction then becomes most clearly apparent...[where people] mobilise a specific identity strategy of localism’ (2000). Paterson et al. have argued that ‘surveys cannot tell the whole praxis of doing Scottishness’ (2004: 6). Here, I offer a rounded, detailed analysis of identity in a Scottish region. In terms of the absence of national identity from this thesis, and from Caithness life, I follow the crucial indication by Anthony Cohen that:

My argument has been that to see identity as being derivable from membership of a nation...is implicitly to deny that individuals constitute their membership and their selves in very different terms. In a sense, it renders individuals *merely* members of such collectives. (1996: 803)

The ways in which people constitute their own identities, relationships, communities, affiliations, and the wider world around them are at the heart of this thesis. To fully explore identities and relationships in a border community, it is essential to be immersed in that culture. To achieve my aims, I lived in Lybster for eighteen months over 2006 and 2007. In using a method of participant observation, and taking on the role of a young village woman, I was able to experience at the heart of the community how large issues such identity, migration, community and kinship are experienced and understood. With one key informant, Dora (mentioned above), I set off on my journey of learning how to be a villager. Villagers who are perceived by the community as experts on aspects such as history, genealogies, and fishing were introduced to me, thus providing a good framework for understanding what matters to this community. I encouraged people to tell me their stories – both personal autobiographies and community narratives, which are almost inextricable – and allowed the research to be guided by those issues significant to villagers themselves. I went into Caithness with general ideas for direction, those themes mentioned above, and a list of questions in the event that a villager might prefer a more structured interview session (this rarely occurred). I achieved my aims by

watching as village life was played out in front of my eyes, by learning my own way of correctly participating in the community, asking many questions, and being fully aware of the contradictions, nuances, and negotiations of kinship and identity that surrounded me.

In my position as an ethnographer, I was well placed. To the Caithnessians, I was recognizable, hailing as I do from the neighbouring region. With friends, stories, and experiences in common, the Caithnessians and I had a solid foundation together. Difficulties of language learning, acclimatization, and incorporation were not large issues. It must be noted, however, that being so close to one's participants means that knowledge is assumed: when I asked awkward anthropological questions, villagers would exclaim that surely – as an 'almost local' – I already knew the answer. During my initial days in Lybster, I lived with Dora and her husband Angy above 'E Café on the Main Street. Later, I briefly lived with a young incomer in her twenties who was researching archaeology and also lived on Main Street. Following this, and for the longest period, I lived with Sanny (a Lybster fisherman), his wife Elsie, and their daughter Mary, in the Southend area of Lybster. They became my village family, and Sanny and Elsie are often referred to as my village parents in the thesis. Throughout the research, Dora remained my village guide, and it was with her direction that my fieldwork snowballed. Upon my arrival, Dora had a list of village experts with whom I could discuss a range of topics: for the fishing, ask Hugh, a Lybsterian in his seventies; for history, ask Cathie, a Lybsterian in her eighties, for example. Dora set up the household census I carried out, by suggesting people who would wish to talk to me. This was a village that anticipated my arrival and Dora was a remarkable research assistant. In the beginning, before I was well known in the village, people would drop by 'E Café (at times designated by Dora) and chat to me over a cup of tea. Once a certain rapport was built between the villagers and me, it was in taking on the responsibilities, obligations, and relationships typical of a young village woman that I learnt most about village life. Before reaching Caithness, I could not have envisaged that in helping my friend Angy build a replica Buddhist dagoba in the grounds of a Caithness castle that I would learn more about his roots and identity than in any interview. I could not have imagined that when Mrs Gunn's chimney caught fire and I went to help her that I

would learn all the village genealogies, or that when I went to collect the John O’Groat Journal I would be offered opinions on devolution. Dora, Angy, Sanny, Elsie, Hugh, and Cathie were key participants and while I spoke to as many people as possible – fisher, non-fisher, local, incomer – these characters will appear frequently in this text.

In providing the reader with a notion of ‘being there’ some characters from fieldwork appear throughout this thesis, reflecting their closeness to me during fieldwork. I spoke to vast amounts of people, but a small amount extremely closely and for the entire duration. The nuances, contradictions, and associative threads involved in how people here present themselves are in constant flux. The sheer tapestry of stories and relationships that people presented me with, the wisdom with which they reflected, would be emaciated by over-translation and over-intellectualization. I allow them to stand alone – so that villager and reader alike can capture their own imagination of Caithness life – and illuminate it with my anthropological analysis. Intending that their stories ‘might act as a lens to reveal new patterns and connections in the construction and collapse of borders’ (Borneman 1998: 189), I offer scenes from people’s lives.

Communities, imaginations, and boundaries of the mind

At the forefront of research on belonging and kinship in Britain in the 1980s was Anthony Cohen. Cohen defines community as both ‘the people residing in a place’ and ‘a relational concept’ (1989: 14). Furthermore:

The boundary is far more complex than its physical, legal, or administrative bases; more complex than the ethnic, racial, religious, or linguistic differences which it may enclose. Many of the elements which constitute the boundary may not be objectively apparent at all but, rather, exist in the mind of the beholders. Like other symbols, the boundary does not entail given meanings. Rather it presents people with forms which they may then invest with meaning. (ibid.)

Cohen’s interest in community and belonging emerges from his ethnographic research in Whalsay, Shetland. There, he theorizes in a way that is pertinent for this thesis, that:

a community may gather behind a generalized statement of the community's character, in order to advocate the distinctive interests of the community or to promulgate its collective identity. Their own interests are refracted through the collective statement of identity. Whalsay people all use the idiomatic shorthand of 'being Whalsa' 'wis' (us); 'here ...'; the way *we* do things. Their shared use of these forms absolves them from the need to explain themselves to each other – and leaves them free to attach their own meanings to them. (1989: 15)

These statements are crucial to an understanding of the Caithness community. Identity distinctiveness, separation from other communities, collective statements of togetherness, and the short-hand version of that as 'being Whalsay/Caithnessian': all of these aspects are used as means of explaining life in the community. Sharing knowledge of this makes an individual an insider, whilst ignorance of such symbols is a marker of outsidership. A border population – a peripheral community – is particularly likely to have a preoccupation with identity matters. In Whalsay, as in Caithness, this 'compulsion of identity' marks 'the most crucial and most effective defense against disintegration' (ibid.: 17). A constant referral to 'who we are' and 'who we are not' is not about superiority or inferiority, or about feeling peripheral or central. It is more to do with an insecure community in fear for its future. In a peripheral community characterized by migration, a focus on what makes the place and the people different to elsewhere and others is perhaps an attempt to strengthen community ties.

This defensive imagination of community as something bounded, which needs to be maintained and distinctive is common in rural British society. In the 1980s Marilyn Strathern has asked of Elmdon identity:

Why should [someone] identify himself as 'real Elmdon'? Why should immigrants be 'strangers?' or men from places close by be seen as rivals? ...The village is imagined as a social unit, although there is more to this than some vague in-group feeling ...A claim to 'real Elmdon' status is not based simply on [one's] own long association there, but on a model of the village, shared by most of its residents, which uses the idioms and images of kinship to give it a certain structure and set it into the context of villages around. (1981: xxix)

These idioms and images were predominant in the studies of community and kinship in the 1980s. Schneider argued that *American Kinship* was a cultural system, a

system of symbols (1984: 1). Here we are introduced to the notion that blood is one such symbol, representing the core of kinship in both America and Britain. In reality, Schneider explains, social links often eclipse consanguineal relatedness. This is certainly true in Whalsay where: ‘people “belong” to Whalsay. But their pre-eminent belonging is to more intimate groups, often glossed as ‘kin’, which are composites of kinship, neighbourhood, crew membership – people who are known, people who are us.’ (Cohen 1989: 73). This is a theme of this thesis but also crucial for the study of kinship. In a small, close-knit rural community of shared symbols, activities, and experience, what might from the outside be classed as ‘neighbourliness’ is definitive of kinship. Where Cohen calls this ‘gloss’, it will become clear in this thesis that community-kinship is more complex than that. Strathern also points out the centrality of kinship in the constitution of a village:

Ideas about relationships between kin are central to the formation of what constitutes a village. They give to the village symbols of a community by nature, antiquity through presumed ancestry, bonds of an inviolable kind. They provide categories whose meaning can be manipulated depending on context and equate ‘belonging’ with the biogenetic priority of affiliation through birth. Village identity gives to kinship a social dimension...The concepts of ‘villager’ and ‘outsider’ thus bring together within one frame an association between geographical immobility and family [for the former] and mobility and individual [for the latter]. (ibid: 202)

This opposition of local and incomer is played out in Elmdon in imagination, expectation, and experience. Incomers moving into the village ‘seek an “authentic village” [where] natives will be friendly and, my implication the [incomer] will be accepted.’ (ibid: 222) Meanwhile, villagers believe ‘one “ought” to be involved and “contribute”’ (ibid.) What is missing here, of course, is communication between the two. The incomer is unaware of the symbolism and meaning that, say, Whalsay villagers attribute to boundaries. Those boundaries, to the incomer, are invisible (Cohen 1989: 16). The incomer lacks the knowledge of boundaries of the mind, or of rivalry with the neighbouring village, or why locals go to such lengths to identify themselves as original or core residents.

The symbol is also central to Benedict Anderson’s notion of *Imagined Communities*. In his 1983 work, Anderson claims that all individuals, even in small

nations, are unlikely to meet one another in a face-to-face scenario. Despite this, they hold a certain imagination of togetherness and it is through shared practices, reading the newspaper and other types of mass consumption, for instance, that powerful sentiments of community are mobilized (1983: 6-7). In border populations of rural Scotland, this is a complex notion. This imagination is preceded, in some cases eclipsed, by a stronger feeling of loyalty to the local to, as Cohen puts it, 'express continuity' amongst themselves:

Historical consciousness does not betoken a stubborn traditionalism, nor a society stumbling through the [new] century looking over its shoulder. Quite the opposite is the case. [Rural communities] use history to orient themselves in the volatile present, and to give themselves a sense of stability in circumstances of structural instability. They also derive from it substance and precedent for their sense of boundary. The past is evoked to express essential continuity and, thereby, to mask or mitigate the idiosyncratic consequences of flux. (Cohen 1989: 132)

Once again, a certain defensiveness is mobilized: it is not simply the passage of time and longevity that secure an individual's belonging in village communities. Much of rural belonging is based on knowing how to play the game of boundary-drawing, symbol-spotting, and meaning-making. This is a matter of knowledge. Cohen draws this from Whalsay:

'Knowing' means more than acquaintanceship. In the small-scale milieu of Whalsay, it has to indicate more than that. Virtually all islanders are known to each other at the level of acquaintanceship. 'Knowing' invokes the same sense of relatedness and opposition as the notion of boundaries. Membership of a group implies opposition to, or exclusion from, some other. (ibid.: 70)

All of this points to the fact that community, kinship, belonging, and identity are implicit, symbolic, and predominated by tacit knowledge. The arrival of incomers not only places unknowing residents in the village, it also forces the locals themselves to recognize and reinforce their own boundaries and symbols.

White Settlers, creative kinship and rethinking representation

Incomer and rural migration issues came into academic focus with particular force in the 1990s. Jedrej and Nuttall introduced us to the term 'white settler' which refers to

an English incomer who settles in rural Scotland. The white settler is normally the first of the following categories :

Migrants are usually, on the basis of their motives, classified into three categories: one, those for whom employment is not a factor but who find living in a rural area more congenial than a large town; two, those who have had to move into the rural area because of their employment; and three, those who have tried to meet a preference for living in the countryside with a need to earn a living. (1996: 2)

Groups calling themselves ‘Settler Watch’ and ‘Scottish Watch’ protested against what they claimed was the ‘Englishing of Scotland’ (ibid.: 2) and went as far as to send letter bombs to the Scottish Office in Edinburgh and the Dounreay nuclear power station in Caithness. While this is all presented as the ‘rural repopulation’, connotating a depopulation, the actual negativity towards incomers runs deeper than this. Jedrej and Nuttall highlight that ‘evidently people are more sensitive to and disturbed by *changes* in the population than to absolute levels of population, no matter how stable’ (ibid.: 6, my emphasis). Overall, incomers become the metaphor for negativity: in some places, incomers represent ‘changes to the way of life and tradition’ (ibid.: 9) and in other places, incomers represent ‘a feeling of loss of community’ (ibid.) Change and loss: locals often see themselves as passive, affected communities taken over by others. Their role in the interaction is downplayed. This is also in part due to an imagination of identity hierarchy:

In Scotland the dimensions of meaning in the use of terms such as ‘local’ or ‘incomer’ are a function of the inescapable experience of asymmetries in social relationships. The relationship between local and incomer borrows from the richly ambiguous and asymmetrical national (or inter-national) relationship between Scotland and England, or Scotland and Britain. It is debatable whether the phrase ‘white settler’, which is heard often as ‘incomers’, borrows from the image of Scotland as a colonial subordinate of England/Britain to express the meaning of the relationships at local level between incomers and locals, where the thwarted expectations of those who ‘belong’ are seen as having been usurped by those who do not. (ibid.: 15)

Rapport and Dawson elaborate on these themes in their edited volume *Migrants of identity* (1999). Here, we encounter a world where migration creates ‘many different kaleidoscopes of cultural combinations, amounting to no discrete wholes, only heterogeneous and interpenetrating conglomerations’ (ibid.: 25). This is problematic

for a rural community such as Caithness where local knowledge is connected with belonging, a knowledge that in-migrants do not possess, and where ‘to know was to see the world as singular, made proportionate’ (ibid.: 22). Locals, perceiving incomers as ‘the metonym for social change’ (Jedrej and Nuttall 1996: 61), see their singular, proportionate world at risk of change with the arrival of the unknown.

Knowledge and relationships were also part of research on kinship at this time. David Schneider told us that kinship studies had ‘risen from the ashes’ (1995: 193) and Marilyn Strathern reconsidered English kinship, in particular pointing out the significance of what she terms ‘constitutive knowledge’ (1999: 68). Here, kinship knowledge is coupled with identity: ‘it is a particular kind of knowledge: the information (and verification) on which it draws is constitutive in its consequences’ (ibid.). Having found some formative information about themselves and others, people ‘acquire identity by that very discovery’ (ibid.) For the incomer arriving in the rural community, this knowledge is absent. To acquire it and therefore identity, relationships must be attained. In a circular link, however, such relationships come from said knowledge. Jedrej and Nuttall note the complexities involved:

‘Far from their own familiar network of personal relationships and patterns of interaction ...the [incomer] finds that there is nothing but shared residence in the same locality as the basis upon which to build personal relationships’ (1996: 88).

David McCrone is correct in arguing that (on one level at least) ‘Scottish identities are not derived from descent ...but from the fact that people work and live together’ (1992: 62). In this case, incomers can find their routes to knowledge and relationships, and a sense of place through participating in the community they join.

If incomers arrive in a new community with their children, or have children when in the new locality, this too can enhance a feeling of being part of the community. Carsten has noted, in a different context and for Malays, that children are the ‘agents of transformation between two points of opposition’ (1991: 437). The child who grows up part of the new community – being educated there, forging their own local story – can form a bridge between old and new for the incomer parent. When incomers lack local knowledge and their own story of belonging elsewhere is irrelevant to the story of the new community, the child can go some way in rooting

the incomer. As will be shown for the children of Dounreay incomers, often it is the case that - despite their incomer parentage – these young individuals become local in a way that is impossible for the incomer adult.

Scottish identity, roots, and routes of belonging

Since 2000, research on Scotland has particularly explored constructions of identity by considering so-called ‘identity markers’ and focused on national identity. While national identity *per se* is as absent from this thesis as it is from Caithness daily life, the literature remains relevant.

Scottish sociological research in recent years has benefited from a wealth of articles by social scientists at the University of Edinburgh. The most significant for my work is the 2000 study of identity in Berwick. Here, the researchers ‘Sought contexts where national identity is either salient or problematic’ (Kiely et al. 2000: 1.1) because this is where identity construction becomes most clearly apparent. Furthermore, the authors argue that ‘close proximity to a border is not always the reason for identity mobilization’ (ibid.) and that a combination of unique forces (historical, cultural, demographic) lead people to explicitly articulate a definitive nationality.’ (ibid.) Berwick is situated on the border between two countries, between two large identities. Meanwhile Caithness is not, but its position on the border of Scotland has interesting implications for its identity work. In Caithness, as will be shown, the situation is similar to Berwick, with no explicit articulation of national identity. Kiely et al. go on to point out that much cultural and symbolic significance imbues identity (ibid.: 1.2): this is often responsible for what the authors call ‘side-stepping national identity’ (ibid.: 1.7). Crucially, the Berwick case is an example of a community which does not highlight feelings of national identity, in part due to its border population status, and ‘Instead they mobilize a specific identity strategy of localism.’ (ibid.: 1.1) This final statement is central too for an understanding of Caithness.

In 2001, an article by Kiely et al. on the specific markers and rules of Scottish national identity appeared in the *Sociological Review*. Categorized as ‘practical’ and ‘performative’ markers, similar to the distinction between ‘ascribed’ and ‘achieved’, in brief the markers are: place of birth, ancestry, name and accent, which are

practical and concerned with 'given' identity and rootedness. Then, residency, behaviour, and commitment/contribution to the place are discussed: these are performative, acted-out and a way of finding a route into community belonging. Importantly, Kiely et al. do not take such markers for granted:

How claims or attributions are received, assessed, challenged, or upheld depends crucially upon the interpretation of identity markers. We have, then, three related processes: people's own claims to identity, how they attribute identity to others, and how they themselves receive the claims of others or react to identity attributed to another by a third party. (2001: 36)

Furthermore, the authors ask three central questions about the appropriation and attribution of identity:

Were some markers perceived to be stronger than others? Why were some markers regularly used to attribute national identity but not to claim it? Why were some markers often mobilized together to make a claim? (ibid.)

These are concerns within this thesis, and demonstrate both the fluctuating nature and creativity of identity matters. As these authors put it, 'how the rules operate depend on the context' (ibid.) and while the article concerns national identity, the same rules operate with the mobilization of localized identities. This context-dependent view of identity is in keeping with Bauman's assertion that:

Instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, we should speak of *identification*, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged. (2001: 152).

Is identity, then, a spectrum, a scale? Tamara Kohn believes this to be true. In her exploration of 'the ways in which community belonging may be imagined and enacted' (2002: 143) in the Scottish Hebrides, Kohn argues that incomers to this Scottish community become 'invisible' and that 'through social action in the present can find a local belonging as an incomer-islander' (ibid.). Kohn is correct to point out that 'one must move, speak, sit, and generally embody one's engagedness and mutual obligations. You have to do to the place, not just let the place do to you.' (2002: 153) This is certainly important for incomers in Caithness in terms of fitting in. However, any kind of 'invisibility' would be inconceivable to the Caithnessian.

Commitment to a place and being resident for a long time cannot always guarantee one's belonging. Kohn writes that:

I would suggest that action which takes place in the humdrum of everyday life is often not consciously equated with ethnic or group identity by our informants, but may in some cases be a more revealing marker of identity than more overt things like birth, ancestry, locality. (ibid.: 145)

This consideration of the 'humdrum of everyday life' is crucial in a realm where research focuses on national identities and categorization. The everyday actions and perceptions of identity reveal more about who people think they are and where they do or do not belong than the claims they might make in, say, a questionnaire on national identity.

Linking the appropriation and attribution of identity back specifically to the phenomenon of White Settlers in Scotland, we encounter Murray Watson's 2003 study *Being English in Scotland*. Watson claims to 'dismiss the myth of the English in Scotland' (ibid.: 1) by suggesting that there exists no real problem with or for the English incomer. Watson argues, like Kohn, that there is a 'near invisible absorption' of English incomers into Scottish communities and that:

Suspicion of the incomer and his motives are natural enough. There is, however, abundant sign that most locals welcome the infusion of new blood and ideas, while quietly and politely declining any values considered inappropriate to their way of life. (ibid.: 59)

The complex realities of everyday life in a small rural community as presented in the thesis will question the straightforward journey to belonging that Watson suggests above.

McIntosh et al. give a sense of the complexity of local-incomer interaction in Scotland between Scottish locals and English incomers. The very title of their article 'We hate the English, except you, 'cos you're our pal' sums up the context-dependent scenario. Here, the authors reiterate the important point that 'for most of the time an individual's national identity is something that is a cause for little concern or debate.' (2004: 45). This is reflected in Kiely et al.'s later work, where they claim that 'most people going about their daily lives do not find it necessary to stack up degrees of Scottishness' and that if they are asked to, will simply know how

to mobilize one of the above identity markers according to context (2005: 152). National identity, certainly in the case of Caithness, is mobilized in response to someone else's identity claim, or to demonstrate who one is *not*. Unlike Kohn and Watson, McIntosh et al. demonstrate that 'a key experience for many English people in Scotland is that of a constant reminder of difference... This can make questions of 'belonging' problematic.' (2004: 43). This is pertinent for my thesis. McIntosh et al. also underline the fact that 'for many Scots, the English remain the key "other" and help define what it is to be Scottish' (ibid.) These same concerns also work on the level of localized identity and the boundaries of a rural community.

Jeanette Edwards takes up the theme of roots in her ethnography of English kinship. Here, Edwards argues that 'to be rooted is to be connected, to be without roots is to be unprotected' (2000: 122). This works well in the case of Scottish rural migration, where incomers rarely gain certainty of their place in the new location. Edwards is referring to a context of genealogical belonging, which is different, but the sentiment remains. Genealogical tourism fits well in this discussion of roots and belonging, and it is a topic addressed by Paul Basu. Basu himself carried out research in Caithness, specifically in Dunbeath, a village eight miles south of Lybster, where I was situated. Our research directions differ: Basu is concerned with history, landscape, heritage and tourism while I explore contemporary identity issues, everyday experiences, migration and kinship. Both concern people with roots. Basu suggests that genealogical journeys – of, say, the Canadian whose family were evicted from north Scotland in the Sutherland Clearances – provide a sense of stability for these people whose identity, through diasporic history, is defined as 'elsewhere' (2007: viii). While the identity of incomers is also rooted elsewhere, these genealogical incomers who arrive then leave are different to unrooted incomers who stay. Rather than attempting to find a route to incorporation, they are able to reclaim and transiently mobilize roots. Basu reflects on the work of Dunbeath novelist Neil M. Gunn to highlight the fact that in rural borderland populations of Scotland, emigration is almost inevitable (ibid.) and that *émigrés* 'never really leave' because although not physically present, they continue to dwell on the place (ibid.). I would add, there remains a social space in that place for them to refill. Basu suggests – as genealogical tourists return to Dunbeath to find the initials of an

ancestor scratched into the stone of a now ruined croft – that there are ‘originary places from which the identity of the self is perceived to derive, and to which the self, thirsting for identity, may resort for sustenance (ibid.: 158). In ‘recovering their sense of home and self-identity’ (ibid.: ix), genealogical tourists are arguably on the same journey of belonging as those Caithnessians who stay at home

North-east fishing communities have been both ‘stereotyped and stigmatized’ (2003: 2). Jane Nadel-Klein found that the fisherfolk had ‘managed to construct a positive sense of their own value’ (ibid.) and worked through this against the views of outsiders. The perception of self in the community is not the same as the perception of incomers looking into the community, and nor is the relationship between the two an equal dialogue (ibid.). Nadel-Klein highlights that for communities like this ‘identity-in-dialogue’ is never complete (ibid.), precisely because this image prevails and an accurate picture of the rural fishing community is never fully presented. The ‘clannishness’ amongst fisherfolk to which Nadel-Klein refers (ibid.: 21) means that internal boundaries of crews and kinship, for instance, are relatively fluid. Meanwhile, external boundaries such as that between local and incomer are reinforced.

Having considered the situation of English incomers and the genealogical tourist, it is important to consider that ‘inevitable’ Caithness experience to which Paul Basu refers: emigration. In the past few years, academic attention has turned to the experiences of young people in rural Scotland, in particular their intention to depart, or feelings of inevitability about departure. Lynn Jamieson has researched young people’s reasons for leaving or remaining in the Scottish Borders which demonstrate a more ‘contradictory and complex pattern’ than the stereotype of ‘traditional backwater stay-at-homes’ allows (2000: 203). Simultaneously, though, Jamieson admits that other stereotypes do have some resonance in local culture where ‘rootless incomers have little sympathy with “the community”’ (ibid.) This perspective is illuminated by Glendinning et al. who carried out similar research. Themes to emerge from the latter’s research include: opportunities locally, the future and staying on, as well as local amenities and services; but older teenagers also spoke at length about their social lives, family and social networks, and their community, both as close-knit and caring and as intrusive and controlling (2000:

129). In particular, this awkward relationship between community as ‘caring’ on the one hand and as ‘intrusive and controlling’ on the other hand, must be kept in mind if we are to understand both young people in rural areas and the depopulation patterns of the rural.

Here, although in a slightly different context, identity is ‘both stable and fluid’ as Fiona Gill (2005: 90) has highlighted. ‘Shifting, multiple, contingent, and most clearly evident when it is in flux’ (ibid.), this betwixt and between status is not only apparent in the liminal stages of young people’s lives, but more generally in rural, borderland populations. Gill’s work focuses on a town in the Scottish Borders. Between Scotland and England, there is more boundary-blurring and identity ambiguity than in Caithness. Significantly, though, the themes are the same. Take for instance, the notion that in the Borders ‘publicly [locals] are ascribed an ambiguous identity’ and ‘privately [locals] unambiguously assert identity’ (ibid.: 83). By this, Gill refers to the fact that others outwith the town problematize identity on the behalf of locals, and assume an awkwardness between choosing Scottishness or Englishness. In private, however, locals find it easy and straightforward to identify as one or the other. As I will show in Caithness, the opposite is true: from the outside, people assume that Caithness is culturally, politically and by jurisdiction, Scottish. Its position on the mainland hints at this. In contrast, the everyday reality is that Caithness national identity is totally ambiguous, if claimed at all. Gill notes that ‘geographical certainty does not easily translate into social reality’ (ibid.: 84). In terms of ‘us’ and ‘them’ being separated by social and geographical boundaries, the opposite is true when incomers arrive in the locale, or when identity is attributed to the local community. When this occurs, Gill points out, ‘there are things to be fought over and defended’ (ibid.: 90). In Caithness, such ‘things’ include localized identity itself.

It is fruitful in any consideration of identity not to restrict focus to ‘selves and others’ or ‘locals and incomers’. The relationship between various Caithness towns and villages can illuminate this. The relationship between various types of ‘local’ is an awkward oscillation between being close and being different. As David McCrone has argued, sometimes ‘otherness has more to do with similarity than with difference’ (2001: 162) and similarly Jonathan Hearn has highlighted the

significance of the ‘significant other’ (2000: 1) in the determination of one’s own identity. These close, ‘othered’ relationships form a central theme of this thesis.

These distinctions – local and incomer, selves and others, similarity and difference – are joined by a common distinction in kinship studies. That distinction is one between the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’ business of relatedness. Jeanette Edwards and Marilyn Strathern have explored the notion that – within English kinship – relatives can be ‘added and truncated’ (2000: 159). Here, ‘social and biological claims of the English kind, each endlessly ramifying in themselves, serve equally to link and to truncate *one another*. Both afford perspectives from which kinship can be claimed and the one may either lead to or be played off against the other’ (ibid.) Janet Carsten points out that while a distinction between “social” and “biological” kinship was once seen as fundamental to this domain of anthropology, it is now more likely to be scrutinized (2005: 6). This is significant for an ethnography of Caithness, where social and biological kinship are blurred, mixed together, and transformed into a blended relatedness. Carsten attributes the recent marginality of kinship studies to the debate about its very meaning, and goes on to place kinship directly at the heart of people’s lives. By focusing on such tropes as gender, the body, the person, substance, the house and the nation, Carsten resituates kinship studies in real areas of kinship (ibid.). In this thesis, kinship appears in people, places, and events in its most everyday shape, which is precisely where any boundaries or distinctions are blurred. In terms of who is related and who is not, As will be demonstrated for Caithness, certain relationships (be they consanguineal, affinal, or fictive) eclipse one another depending on context. The same can be argued for internal and external boundaries of belonging.

Structure of the thesis

The literature reviewed here has focused on Scottish identity, kinship, belonging, and community, alongside the impact of both in-migration and out-migration. These are all tropes which are important in my argument and will be developed through the following chapters:

Chapter one – ‘Waterlines: learning Lybster harbour, learning Lybster life’ – focuses on the heart of the village, the harbour. Its place in Lybster’s construction

along with the success and end of the fishing are significant here. Crucially, though, this chapter is about the ways in which Lybster villagers gain a sense of selfhood and togetherness through ‘knowing’ and ‘experiencing’ the harbour. It is about gendered and generational relationships, about the link between fishing and family life, and about the economics of the village and changing employment patterns. This chapter explores how the harbour is perceived as the giver of life, and yet a risk to life. Life-cycle rituals such as weddings and christenings are celebrated here. The harbour encourages quiet reflection in solemn moments such as funerals. Everyday life – gossiping with friends over lunch, or working a boat – happens at the harbour. Rituals in the village – like the Knotty and Silver Darlings Day – also happen there. It is the harbour that gives people a centre, provides hope, and distinguishes this village from others around it. Furthermore, I argue that this space is not merely the scene of Lybster life: it is a major player in local identity.

The argument of chapter two – ‘Homes and public houses: the centrality of intimate space’ – is that we must rethink notions of public and private space, particularly in a kinship sphere. For instance, this chapter explores how people’s homes are explicitly public, with other villagers free to enter the unlocked building with ease, and to join in family life. My point is that domestic and general village life are very fluid and spill over, blending together. The issue of private, closed space comes up in the public house. While it may seem ‘obvious’ that a family home would be private and a pub is a social hub, it is evident that Caithness public houses are the one place that incomers receive a frosty reception. Different facilities, rules, and experiences are available to different groups of customers: to locals, the pub is a home-from-home. For incomers, it is a marker of exclusion. The negotiation of space in these scenes is explored here.

Throughout the introduction and early chapters, the thesis explores how Caithnessians self-identify through comparison and encounters with others. Chapter three – ‘Togetherness and difference: Relationships between communities, villages, and regions’ – explores relationships between Caithness villages and towns and inter-regional relationships with neighbouring Sutherland. The argument here is that if Caithnessians self-identify through encountering otherness, then the absolute epitome of self-identification comes through encounter and comparison with the

‘almost othered’, the ‘nearly we’. By this, I mean the intra-regional relationships that crucially shape Caithness. The closeness and rivalry of Wick and Thurso, the playful competition between Lybster and Dunbeath, and the ‘four different parts’ of Caithness, all flag up the notions of similarity and difference that permeate this thesis. In Caithness, to know who you are *not* is essential in promoting belonging.

Chapter four – ‘Knowing your *aishan*: the close family and family-friends’ – comes to the heart of belonging and identity by considering familial relationships and kinship of parents, grandparents, children, siblings, and cousins. This is particularly important for a study of kinship because these relationships – indeed these very terms - refer both to genealogical (given) links and also what might be referred to as ‘fictive’ links. In this thesis, the term fictive is not used specifically because Caithnessians – in everyday life – make no such distinction. This chapter focuses on the desire, creation, maintenance, and loss of these relationships, while exploring children’s lives from babyhood to primary school-age. It looks not just at ‘local’ or ‘personal’ identities, but *aishan* identity: the reputation of one’s kin, one’s ‘stock’. The complexity of managing step-families and broken families also appears here..

The ways in which young people find their way in the world is developed in chapter 5 – ‘The best place to be young? Young people, becoming, and belonging’. I focus on young people and no other specific age category for one significant reason. Young people in Caithness embody the themes of this thesis: they belong and yet feel left out; they show a pride in their rootedness yet yearn to uproot; they know and yet do not know their place in the world. Young people recognize and comment on the contradictions and dilemmas of Caithness belonging, and thus reveal much about life there. Set against a backdrop of migration and an aging population, Caithnessians place a lot of attention on their young people. The quandary, dilemmas, and struggles facing young Caithness people are often intensified by a lack of resources or potential in the area. This chapter explores what is being done to mitigate these problems (e.g. the setting-up of youth-centred initiatives), how familial relationships affect the situation, and young people themselves cope with the world around them. Often, they find themselves ‘waiting’; sometimes they get into serious trouble, and currently, many of them find themselves with new households and children of their own. These young people have a very dichotomous relationship

with Caithness: a pride and a despair in their belonging. With the weight of responsibility for Caithness' future, and the search for potential in their personal futures, young people are a fascinating group in Caithness society.

This push-pull relationship with 'home' is at the heart of chapter 6 – 'Myths and motivations of movement: Caithness exile and expectation'. Here, my focus is on out-migration. Currently a phenomenon that political circles and locals alike aim to stem, 'exile' has been a characteristic of Caithness identity for generations. This chapter is an exploration of people who wish to leave, those who do not wish to leave but find it inevitable, those who left, and those exiles who wrestle with return. I also explore 'myths' of movement: stayers who are always planning but never mobilize their departure, leavers who yearn for home after 40 years and never return. This chapter substantiates and questions the popular perception of rural depopulation.

Chapter 7 – 'Incomers don't have a story: processes of belonging amongst Atomics and White Settlers' – explores the changing population of Caithness and its identities by focusing on incomers. In particular, the chapter is concerned with the two groups of incomers who have had the most dramatic and lingering effect on Caithness: White Settlers and Atomics. 'White Settlers' is the term applied in a contemporary sense to refer to those English migrants who move to rural parts of Scotland. 'Atomics' are those incomers – along with their spouses and descendants - who arrived in Caithness from the 1950s onwards to work at the Dounreay nuclear reactor site. This chapter essentially deals with the fact that to be in Caithness, to go on a journey of 'becoming' or 'belonging' there, one must have recognizable kinship 'knowledge' and a 'story' of rootedness. Caithness locals place much emphasis on their own stories of rootedness. Incomers, of course, have stories of their own. Crucially, though, these are totally alien and not at all local to Caithness, hence the chapter title. Here, my focus is on the two-way transformative effect locals and incomers have on one another. Ultimately, the focus is on how Caithnessians – both today and historically - self-identify through their encounter with the 'stranger'.

Chapter 8 – 'Caithness is an island: self-representation and relationships with the rest of the nation' – deals with the fact that Caithness is opening up to the rest of the world in novel ways. For all the feelings of distinctive identity, separation, and

distance, it is undeniable that Caithness is tied to Scotland and the world. Dealing with the decommissioning of Dounreay, the potential of sourcing oil at Lybster, and new ventures in tourism, this chapter explores how an island-minded mainland population relate to the rest of the nation. This is explored through relational identities: by this, I mean ‘who we are *not*’. Highland, Gaelic, and Scottish identities are all jettisoned in favour of being Caithnessian, yet all three have formative and crucial effects for the Caithness future. The ways in which Caithnessians negotiate this, while developing sustainability and maintaining their distinctiveness, are at the heart of this chapter.

The thesis introduces characters, enters places, and witnesses events in both everyday and ritual settings. With them, I trace the creation and maintenance of community, and construction and blurring of the boundaries of belonging, and serious social transformation. A concern with the fact that Caithnessians perceive themselves as ‘strangers’ in their own nation creates increasingly localized ties that bind. Significant in all of this, in a land of migration, is an analysis of how ‘others’ and their identities form a constitutive role in the self-identification processes of Caithnessians. I consider ascribed and achieved ways of belonging: roots and routes, the genealogical and performative journeys to fitting into this place. I examine the contradictions, nuances, and negotiations evident in definitions of selves and all sorts of others and the constitutive relationship between them. All of this is part of a wider investigation into how people conceptualise themselves and others. In the context of current research on the nation, such ethnographic illumination of complex identity realities in specific regions is essential if we are to understand Scotland. By offering a close exploration of a community of kinship, this thesis aims to illuminate new ways of approaching the nuances of everyday life. It is in those nuanced moments and encounters of everyday life – more so than in claims and categories – that identity work and kinship creation are most complex and most meaningful.

1. Water-lines:³ learning the harbour, learning Lybster life

A Lybster woman in her sixties recalls for me the moment – thirty years ago – when she and her husband brought home their adopted baby daughter from Inverness. Before taking her to their house, they drove immediately down the harbour road. Sitting on the harbour bench, the couple took turns to hold the four-month old child and tell her little tales about what life might have in store for her. ‘At the time I said to her “that’s you home now, pet” and gave her a wee kiss.’

§

The girls meet in the local hotel bar one evening to celebrate Carla’s graduation. As we get ready to start the party, Carla exclaims we ‘have to’ go somewhere. With bottles of champagne in hand, bedecked in party dresses and heels, we make our way to the Inver of Lybster, overlooking the harbour. The girls sit together for a well-posed photograph on the harbour wall. As our heels click back up the harbour road, Carla says ‘now we’re ready to start celebrating’ as though without the harbour, the night would have had no meaning at all.

Anthropological studies of fishing communities often focus on labour, economics, ship crews, gender, and meanings of the sea. In main, the identity of fishing communities itself is a key focus. Acheson has pointed out that most anthropological research on fishing has focused on everything but the shore-based activities of fishing communities (1981: 275). Here, I present an ethnographic analysis of those shore-based activities and I explore the heart of village fishing: the harbour. By focusing on the harbour as opposed to the fishing activity *per se*, I explore a place that is used by everyone: locals and incomers, young people and old, fishing families and non-fishing families. At the harbour in its present-day state, there is little distinction (cf. Nadel-Klein 2003). The amount of time that people in Lybster spend at the harbour and the kinds of everyday and ritual activities happening there point to its centrality. The fact that it is not in the middle of the village but rather at the bottom of a winding road makes this a harbour to which people actively journey. Paying attention to this space, where boats may go out and fish may come in, it is

³ A water-line is, according to the OED online resource, is ‘the weather-mark or stain on a wall showing where a boat formerly terminated against the wall’. I use it here figuratively to evoke the sense of the marks left – and created still – on Lybster life by Lybster harbour. Additionally ‘Waterlines’ is the name of the Lybster Visitor Centre, chosen from the same definition. (www.oed.com accessed 05.09.07)

soon evident that the economic industry once housed here means far less than the enduring relationships, identities, and the world-view created in and of the harbour that constitute this community. This chapter does not deal much with the fishing trips or their economics, or the catch. Rather, it offers an exploration into the identities that are rooted in and played out at the harbour, where the fish are brought and prepared. Where fish provide the staple of the Lybster diet, the harbour provides the staple of community life. This is where ritual life and everyday life boundaries are blurred, where collective identity is most brightly illuminated.

The creation of ‘a spirited population’

Caring for a young boy in the early days of my fieldwork, I take Adam to the harbour for a walk. No sooner have we arrived than he is swinging on a threadbare rope attached to a tree which, with some force, sees him splash into the Reisgill burn, the water that streams out of Lybster harbour. Drenched and delighted, he races to the harbour wall and dangles his upper body precariously over the side. Instinctively worried about my seven year old friend, I lift him down: ‘I know what I’m doing, you’re just feared ‘cos you’re no’ a Coaster’. ‘I’m going to stay here for a year. Will I be a Coaster then, Adam?’ ‘Nope!’ he giggles, taking a running jump into a wave on the beach. He makes me smile, in his child’s reckoning, ‘knowing’ the water and ‘being a Coaster’ (i.e. a Caithness coastal villager anywhere south of Wick) could not be learned. And Lybster adults might heartily agree. ‘Coasters’ – a term used by Caithnessians, which is largely unknown by newcomers - are a distinctive group of people for this and more.

Here, I follow Palsson’s analysis that fishing is not simply an activity or an employment, but a process of tacit knowledge, learning through doing, and identity work (1995: 88). I specifically focus on the latter. The relationship between knowing and practice is central to Lybster harbour and to Lybster identity. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s work on *habitus* is applicable here: their specific connection to Lybster harbour is for locals the epitome of *habitus*, the less-than-conscious, tacit, structured principles that ‘generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming of ends...they can be collectively organised

without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.’ (1990: 53) This goes some way in explaining why – decades after the village was planned around the harbour and decades after the industrial fishing ceased to organize the village – the harbour still has a constitutive affect on village belonging. Tacit knowledge, passed-down practices through the generation, and one’s own active involvement at the harbour reproduces a structure that villagers maintain. So deeply ingrained is the significance of the harbour that people can stress its role in identity-making, their role in it, but find it exceptionally difficult to define.

I aimed the question ‘what’s a Coaster?’ at my village father, Sanny. He listed his extensive definitions, which included: being from the sea, going to sea, knowing how to fish, playing at the harbour as a child, having a good relationship with the water (i.e. no fear), marrying ‘a Coaster lassie’ and making sure your children enjoy the sea. Then he quoted the *Book of Lybster* and visitor centre leaflet by telling me: ‘We get called a “spirited population”’. Not once did he mention ‘being from a village south of Wick’ (as the Caithness Dictionary defines ‘Coaster’). He did not say ‘living *on the coast*’. His definition – like Adam’s – was about *being* coastal as a performative identity through so much more than geography or residence. It is a specifically Caithnessian identity: I wanted to know if I was a Coaster, coming as I do from the Sutherland coast. He replied in the negative: ‘You’re different there’. So this is something about Caithness, inherent to Lybster, to being a villager, which is neither teachable nor transferable.

Jane Nadel-Klein, in her study of an east coast fishing village further south in Scotland, attributes this to a type of ‘clannishness’ that exists amongst fisher communities: ‘it is often said that fisher folk are different to other people’ (2003: 21). In Lybster, this difference is constantly reiterated and mobilised: villagers find their togetherness precisely in being set apart, even from other Caithness fishing villages. Busby encountered a similar identity construction in a South Indian fishing community: ‘in general along the coastal area a person’s village is an important part of their identity and often perceived status, and it will be one of the first pieces of information elicited from a stranger.’ (2000: 47). Further, one fisherman told Busby that ‘if I saw a fisherman at sea, I could take a rough guess as to where they came

from' (ibid.) This is very similar to Lybster, and the same process is used to understand ideas of insiders and outsiders, the known and unknown.

The centrality of Lybster harbour to the lives of Lybster people cannot be overstated. It is the reference point of narratives, it is the scene of everyday life, and special trips are made there to mark out more ritual moments of life. The harbour has to be – and is – carefully negotiated, being as it is the scene of apparent binary oppositions: it provides livelihoods and can put life at risk; it created an entire village based on fishing and also saw its decline. The villagers carefully work between the lines of such division to make the harbour work for them. Whatever the situation – good or bad – the harbour is never blamed or neglected because villagers combine their notions of 'harbour' and 'life': it is a place where life is most amplified. The perilous relationship between the individual and the sea, the well-known fishing families born and bred there, and the everyday goings-on of life, happen at the harbour. Sometimes – such as in autobiographical narratives – this is spoken of in great detail. Most of the time, in its intrinsic importance, it goes unsaid. A close look at the comings and goings at Lybster harbour are revealing for both everyday life and its moments of ritual.

My own initiation to village life was marked by the harbour. On my first night in Lybster, and in the kitchen of my first Lybster home, a room so central to feelings of relatedness, we spoken about that other centre: Lybster harbour. Sanny commented: 'aye, I hear ye've a degree, lass. But ye hevna a boatie. Tak another drammie with me. Tomorrow, I'm takin' ye doon 'e herbour'.

The wide main street of Lybster narrows before you turn off to the village harbour. The unmissable seasonal floral display spells out 'To The Harbour'. The road is steep, narrow, and full of awkward bends, long bungalows perch high above you as you travel lower. The atmosphere is quiet and calming as you cross the Reisgill burn and its stunning waterfall and pass between the two houses which – in their quiet reflection – symbolise the life that Lybster harbour created.



Fig. 2: Above Lybster harbour (Kim Masson)

The Inver of Lybster is an undisturbed green and it is striking to consider the intensity of fishing industry that once took place on this exact spot. The inner harbour has a few creel boats berthed in it, gently swaying, the replacement of the dozens of successful seine-netter vessels which once embraced this place. The mini lighthouse stands as it always did, now guarding over solitude. Above the harbour, in the old cooperage – where fish barrels were once created – and stores building is Waterlines Visitor Centre.

Following the sharp decline in herring fishing in the 1950s, Lybster maintained a few seine-netters and creel boats. Soon, though, the last seine-netter was sold, and its skipper and crew were left with shares in the harbour stores and smoking station. Various plans were drawn up – they could turn it into holiday flats or a large house for the now ex-skipper. The skipper could not bear the thought of housing replacing what had become a different kind of home to him. So, the building was transformed into a visitor centre. The development was funded by Pesca – the European council of fishing which funds projects that demonstrate the relationship between community and fishing. Further, Pesca aims to show that when economic aspects of fishing decline, there remains much potential for fishing communities to thrive. Waterlines Visitor Centre is a successful example of this.

Today, the centre consists of a small café on the ground floor, which extends to an outside area of tables overlooking the sparkling Lybster water. Viewpoints are sprinkled between the seats to allow the best possible view across the bay. Indoors,

the story of Lybster is told through vivid, colourful pieces of art by the village children. Accompanying their telling of the history are small vignettes – by the same children – about what the harbour means to them. The stories range from play (‘I like splashing in the water, but sometimes my brother throws pebbles at the scorries, that’s not funny’), to learning (‘my dad takes me out to catch lobsters’) and reflection (‘when I am sad, it is nice to come here. Everyone is happy at the harbour. And when the sun shines it is really pretty’). The food is all made by a village woman, the menu geared towards the harbour, with the Waterlines crab sandwich featuring as a local delicacy.

Items for sale include *The Book of Lybster*, postcards, and models of vessels similar to those which once berthed here. This would appear to be for the benefit of tourists, but they are rare visitors: ‘I don’t know why we have them on sale, I mean, it’s only us that come here!’ is a usual opinion. The visitor centre is frequented on a daily basis by villagers old and young. The arrival of others – tourists or visitors from other parts of Caithness – is infrequent. Dotted around the café are *papier maché* boats made by the children. The staircase is decorated by the silvery glimmering models of herring – the silver darlings. The quote here from Neil Gunn accompanies the visitor up the staircase. Upstairs is the exhibition, a mixture of archival material and interactive displays. Each demonstrates a terrific combination of nostalgia for the creation of Lybster and forward-looking processes which hint at the village’s next adventure. ‘They forgot about everything...’ – Neil Gunn’s words make much sense when one becomes acquaint with Lybster harbour. Its centrality to Lybster life has created a worldview for the community which is displayed and protected with much pride. By this, I mean that villagers ‘think with’ the harbour: it is what sets their community apart from the rest of Caithness, and on a personal level, is a key facet of autobiographical narratives. In this sense, much of Lybster’s identity work is about the harbour.

At the spot where men used to arrive with their catch, which women gutted, while other men smoked the herring and barrelled, the locals are now drinking tea, eating cake, and sharing the day’s news. They wait for the creels to come in, to ensure crab sandwiches for lunch, and they entice people upstairs to the exhibition of Lybster’s story. I asked my village mother, Elsie, if she enjoyed sharing the story

she knows so well. ‘Yes, but it’s not a story that I learned or heard, it’s *my* story’. Individual takes on the same story make for interesting debate, but are also interesting battles amongst villagers as to who has the most ‘authentic’ account. Deciding who, for instance, would lead the first tour group was difficult. Elsie continued to tell me that one gentleman, a local laird who had ploughed money into the Centre, felt it his ‘right’ to show people around. His explanation was that his ancestral family (the Gunns) had contributed a lot of money to the area and formed much of the population. This is disputed – the Sinclair family are documented as being responsible for the planning of Lybster village and construction of its harbour.⁴ Besides, as one woman half-jokingly told Mr Gunn, ‘the Gunns have their own clan museum, they don’t need another place to show off’. The woman who eventually became the guide won out because her grandfather, three uncles, and husband were all renowned Lybster skippers. Creating and funding the Centre holds little weight in comparison to actual participation in the story being told *through* the Centre. This woman has a sense of ‘being there’ – through her *aishan* (consanguineal kin) – which a distanced contribution cannot override.

‘Lybster harbour is the place that put Lybster on the international map’, the leaflet tells us. And rightly so – the development of the wooden pier into a large fishing port in 1849 (which harboured 100 boats) not only created a village population in the first place, it quickly became the third most significant port in the whole of Scotland. Further, ‘Waterlines is the story of endeavour, hard work, and a spirited population, which you see in Lybster today’. On the one hand, this is a place of heritage and of nostalgia for Lybster’s birth. Simultaneously though, Waterlines is a kind of Lybster defiance. The industry may have declined, but the community (to them a far more durable and important mark of their fishing experience) is exactly as it was: spirited. Waterlines is not a reflection, a memory – it is about proving that Lybster’s past has such a function in its present and future that temporality is explicitly blurred. For every sign of the past – the display of the kippering process, the model wearing a ‘herring lassie’s’ dress – there is a mark of what is to come. A DVD whirrs in the background showing Hugh (our skipper) on a recent boat trip around Lybster bay, discussing its centrality to today’s Lybster. A

⁴ See Young 1996 *The Book of Lybster*

boat is being built in the next room. The continuous present always matches the reflection. ‘Don’t talk too much about the fishing itself, that whole industry, because then you’ve to say “decline”, and we haven’t really declined’, Hugh advised me.



Fig. 3: The working creel boats

‘The Boy John’: Fishing and family life

The bay was calm and the sky clear when I took my first trip to sea from Lybster harbour. Charlie asked me to join him on his creel boat, ‘The Boy John’. Sitting in the wheel house, I wondered why I recognised the registration number but had never heard this particular name, I thought it was called the ‘Gem’. Boats are often part of everyday conversation, named like people, and become a part of the community in their own right such that an unrecognisable one seemed odd.

It was always called the Gem. But when John [his first grandchild] was born [three weeks earlier], I changed it so it’s named after him now and the boat that replaces it will be too. If I have more grandchildren, I’ll just need new boats!

This is a regular pattern of boat-naming. It is believed to be lucky to name boats after one’s spouse or child. If the boat brings good catches, the name lingers long after the boat itself. Any luck attained by this particular boat is hoped to ‘rub off’ on the child it is named after. In the future when this vessel is defunct, new boats belonging to Charlie and his family might be called ‘The Boy John 2’.

The analogy between boat and familial life-cycle intrigued me. I did not have to create comparisons to processes of kinship whilst analysing the stories, because villagers themselves do this. Mary, Sanny and Elsie's daughter and also my village sister, is in her thirties. At primary school, Mary once wrote the story of the family's seine-netter boat for a school project. Fishing-related school projects have been part of Lybster school over the generations (later, Elsie gives her own example from the 1960s). It read:

I remember going to see her when she was being built, I was so excited and proud of her, and wondered what kind of success would bring. It was like watching her being born. Seeing her taken into Lybster harbour for the first time, watching the champagne bottle smash on her as we launched her – it was her starting properly. I was an only child and she was like my best friend, that boat was family. My dad would take me out on her and I'd sit and read or try to help out, she was good company. I remember being taken out on her overnight once. I was so excited, I was only nine. My job was basically to be really impressed when dad hauled the nets in. But I was in my wee sleeping bag and I fell asleep. At 4am, they were shouting and shaking me to get up, and it was amazing watching the net come up. Then back to sleep, I woke up when we came into Wick harbour. That kind of trip was how I grew up. When her time was up, I got a day off school, and we went down to the harbour to say our goodbyes, I've never cried so much. I still think about her to this day.

Here, the boat is gendered as female, spoken of as 'being born', as a 'best friend', as 'family', as 'good company', 'thought of'. Importantly too, the boat is the way in which this little girl grew up. The link between boats and processes of relatedness is a significant one for the Lybster fishing families, and also to the ways in which they relate to villagers and families without boats: comments such as the 'but ye hevna a boatie' directed at me seem to be a partial measure of Lybster belonging. Occasionally, those men who do not go to sea were described jokingly to me as 'sea-sick'. By this, they meant to demonstrate that not going to sea is not very 'Lybster' and that it must be illness not choice which keeps some men away from the boats. This, of course, was directed playfully towards individuals, but had an undercurrent of rejection: it is seen as admirable, true to the village, and collective to be at sea.

Long after her wedding day, I asked Alison, a Lybsterian in her fifties, about a photograph of the married couple taken at Lybster harbour. Did she choose it as a

location because the harbour is attractive, I asked naively. Her answer was no. They did not 'choose' it. 'It's just what you do. I don't know why, it's the harbour, you have to have it in your photo. Everyone gets their photo taken at the harbour for their wedding, it would be weird if you didn't'. Here, much like boats, the harbour is perceived not as the scene of Lybster life, but as an integral, often unsaid part of it. In this sense, starting married life by taking a trip to the harbour is a village ritual, part of the process of demonstrating Lybster belonging. It is something married couples in the village have in common, a kind of collective togetherness marked by their intimate relationship.

When people showed me their family trees, they were at pains to point out certain details which linked them both to the village and to one another in the present day. I elaborate on this below. Mostly, families (whether fishers or not) found links through individuals who are/were fishers. While nearly all villagers declined to be tape-recorded, my village 'parents' agreed and shared some fascinating genealogical notions with me:

Sanny : Look, my family tree goes back 9 generations. And every single generation had a Sanny Sinclair who was a skipper or a fisherman around Lybster Bay. That's my life I'm looking at.

Kim: Is that important to you?

Sanny: That's what makes me know my place. I'm just them, centuries on.

Kim: You feel a closeness to them?

Sanny: Aye, because I can imagine exactly the lives they had by living it myself. And it makes me feel safe.

Kim: Safe in what way?

Sanny: Like no one can take it away from me. This is ours, there's always been a 'me' in Lybster. I just have a daughter, but my nephew's called Sanny Sinclair too. He's not a fisherman. I just wish we could carry it on. We're a proper Lybster family, there's none like that.

[his wife joins the conversation]

Elsie: Aye, but Sanny, my family was the same too, mind. Our family trees link up. We're not brother and sister, like! But the same folk. My uncle Jack worked with your father and married cousins, did they? So you get two families kinda in parallel,

working together, living together, like brothers. Then we get married and join the two up again. It all stays the same really.

Kim: Elsie, can you tell me what stays the same?

Elsie: Being from here. It's not just that you've got a name or a job. It's not about who's 'more Lybster', who's got the longest family tree. We're all tied together on the family trees in one way or another anyway.

It is normal practice for fishing crews to be made up of family members in Lybster, though according to Acheson's review of fishing communities worldwide, it is rare to have an entirely kin-based crew (1981: 29). One fisherman told me that normally the partners split 50% and the crew share the other 50%. If each partner and each crew member are relatives, the income from the boat inevitably remains within the family. According to anthropological research on the economics of fishing, this is common: Acheson points out that no one is paid a flat fee or wage, instead everyone receives their share of the catch. This does two things: it increases the motivation of the crew and reassures the skipper that if a catch is poor he will not have wages to pay (1981: 278). While this is also true of Lybster, I would add that the skipper experiences much pressure and guilt: if a catch is insufficient, he realizes it will impact negatively upon the crew's family.

The definition of family – as will be explored in chapter four - is broad. This was explicitly clear in the structure of fishing crews, as explained to me by Hugh, a skipper, and elaborated on below. An example of this is the man who shared a boat with his brother, his cousin, and his wife's cousin. Another ex-skipper, George, said: 'hid was bloody hellish, because you're no' chuist payan a chiel for his work. Yer responsible for feedan his lassie and his bairns. Yer like 'e husband and e faither o' his femly as weel. And, biy, does it make ye want to do good by him'.

This feeling of familial obligation to one's fishing crew is both admirable and intriguing. It works both ways: when a fisherman suffered serious head injuries by falling through the unsecured hold on the boat, he was advised to sue the skipper. The very idea reduced him to tears: the skipper was his friend, 'like an uncle' to him. Each night after the accident the skipper telephoned to check his process. The involvement of compensation lawyers changed the dynamics of their relationship because the skipper was banned from contact. The injured man felt that his

relationship with the skipper had been ruined and this unhappiness has stayed with him long after his recovery. Just as kinship go into a fishing realm, such as Sanny's renaming of the creel boat, so too does fishing into a kinship realm.

Gender and Generation

Fishing and sea-faring are – both traditionally and in contemporary village life – perceived as exclusively male activities. Gutting and cleaning the fish was traditionally the female role in fishing. The reality now is that this correct behaviour is adapted to fit any given context. For instance, three young men were bringing in a good catch one particularly memorable Sunday, which followed a particularly intoxicated Saturday night. All three were highly hungover and when his turn came to gut and clean the fish, Andy was physically sick.⁵ I received a pleading call at about 7am asking me to take over, which I did. Andy was mocked by the others for failing his attempt at 'women's work'.

I have never met a woman who works a boat or is a skipper. According to other fishing ethnographies, such as that by Nadel-Klein on the east-coast of Scotland (2003), Carsten on Malaysia (1997) and Busby on South India (2000), this is common practice. One enjoyable aspect of Caithness life is the extent to which women go to sea sailing or fishing as a pastime. My field diary reveals that:

When I asked Elsie why so many women enjoy the sea but none do it professionally, she explained it's because they're 'water babies'. Said you can't keep a Coaster on land too long. I can understand that myself. But she added it's a dangerous game to be out at sea, it's not like women are scared or men say they can't do it. It just doesn't happen. She told me she'd never really thought about it like that before, that it just comes through your family as something almost passed from father to son, or nephew. A sort of passive gendering through generation?

For other Scottish fishing communities, Nadel-Klein is correct to point out that women have always been crucial to the fishing industry: for running households while men are away at sea, for their role as 'herring lassies', gutting and cleaning the fish, and historically for carrying men out of the boats and onto the shore (2003: 55-

⁵ Processes of gutting and cleaning happen rarely at Lybster now as it is mainly used for creel fishing which does not involve gutting.

58). Simultaneously though, women do not go to sea due to much superstition, stemming mainly from the menstrual taboo (ibid.: 55): this superstition remains in Lybster also. Intriguingly, though, historically in Lybster it was true that old (or post-menopausal) women were consulted to bring luck to the catch, or to control the wind direction. While these particular women were perceived to be a good omen, they were still not allowed on board. In further afield ethnographies of fishing, Busby found that South Indian women do not go to sea. In a neat analogy, Busby summarizes that if women are indoors and men are outdoors, then this is similar to the sea-shore and the sea (2000: 44). My experience and Nadel-Klein's ethnography are in agreement with this sea-shore located importance of women. Women in Lybster are a fundamental part of the fishing from the relatively safe location of the quay. Women do not spend most of their time in houses, as is in the case in Carsten's ethnography of a Malay fishing village where women occupied themselves while men were in the outside world (see Carsten 1997). While the sea-shore/sea distinction is absolutely accurate for Scottish examples, women do, however, go out to catch fish in a recreational way.

One day, a few female friends and I decided to go deep-sea fishing for mackerel off the coast of Wick. This perceived by some as odd: some of the older men in the village were terribly concerned that we would have to man aboard to help us, but the younger men assured them that we could 'manage'. The woman with the knowledge and ability to sail the boat was an incomer from further south on the east coast, and the boat was borrowed from a friend in Wick. The opportunity to learn fishing skills and take out boats is not open to local women, only as passengers do they experience the sea. Women do have a place in the life of a fishing, seashore community, that involves gutting and cleaning, rather than catching, fish.

In this place where gender apparently does not matter much, there is much blurring along gendered lines. I realized that when men go away to fish, women replace the 'missing' stereotypical male attributes, particularly using much sexual innuendo, risqué jokes, and flirtatious mannerisms, women appear particularly prone to this kind of behaviour. Sex, in general, is very much a female domain here. Men, particularly skippers at sea, become 'mothers' and are talked of as such: cooking for each other, supporting each other, Sanny was fondly called 'Mither Swanson'.

Returning home, men do not cease this behaviour, and women do not hide their playfulness: it is not a reversal of gender roles that is reset when men and women come together again, it is more of a ‘filling in’ of what is missing from the place-without-men and the boat-without-women. Amongst non-fishing Lybsterians, the female playfulness remains while the male domesticity is far less evident. Males who are not from fishing families tend to tease the fishers about their ‘womanly’ behaviour but in the same breath claim that they are joking and somewhat envious of the solid root fishermen have in family life. Tam, a Lybsterian in his forties from a non-fishing family, was preparing salmon for some of the villagers. The cooking of fish is men’s work here. But Tam had also made a pudding. So Angy said something like “Ooh, Mither Swanson! Where’s your floo’ery [floral] apron?” and yet watched every step of the meal preparation in awe, asking questions, and passing ingredients to Tam, later announcing that ‘wifie Swanson’s salmon is bonny and good!’ – *wifie* Sinclair being Tam. Alison, Tam’s wife, told them all a particularly risqué joke. Angy said something like “Yer man here’s a limmer!” Since ‘limmer’ means flirtatious and mischevious woman and refers exclusively to females, to call Alison ‘man’ was to suggest that she – more than Tam – was the man of the house, but by adopting this risqué nature was the behaviour of a somewhat uncouth woman. A non-fisher woman is less likely to make such a joke, or be termed a limmer. For some months of the year, this is a village without some of its men, and a boat is forever without its women. In the height of the fishing industry, the male absence was due to fishing trips to Norway. Today, it is due to the fact that the fishermen often work offshore in the oil industry to supplement their creel boat income. By playing out each other’s gendered roles while the other is absent, Lybster men and women reinforce gender differences in a way that is not seen in other aspects of village life. It is at the harbour and at the fishing that men and women are most explicitly categorized.

One gendered perspective is that women from even the most successful fishing families do not want their sons going to the sea. The danger, inconsistency, and uncertainty of the activity and its economy make mothers in particular very cautious. While Acheson claims that ‘a boy socialized in a fishing family has successful role models and this presumably reduces anxiety’ (1981: 295), I disagree,

for these same boys will also have lost relatives at sea and have a heightened awareness of risk: mothers, who themselves are daughters, sisters, and wives of fishers, remain anxious about their children going to sea. As Nadel-Klein found: ‘the older women I spoke to talked about the uncertainties of life on shore...They never dramatized their fears but...they had to face the ever-present threat of losing their husbands, brothers, and sons to the menacing sea.’ (2003: 62). Fathers do not admit this fear: to them (outwardly at least) fishing in this place is ‘in the blood’ and expected. While a young man will wait until the age of sixteen to actually work at sea, the expectation that he will and the preparation begins long before. Cecilia Busby has found for her South Indian fishing village that ‘the call of the sea is said to be strong, and their sense of identity is said to be bound up with their relation to it’ (2000: 28). Would this imply that Lybster women do not create a sense of identity from the fishing? Far from it. Although never *at sea*, women have always had a crucial role in the gutting and filleting of fish, transporting it to the fish market in Wick, and preparing it for lunch in the café. Furthermore, in genealogical terms, they are daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers to fishermen. To belong here takes more than hauling in the catch.

I often found myself called to the harbour to help, or to make crab sandwiches when unexpected tourists arrived, or to babysit small children by taking them for a walk there: typically ‘female’ ways of being at the harbour. The link between Lybster harbour and Lybster relationships is important to villagers, which – as I have shown – became particularly evident in their discussions of family trees.

Villagers often assumed that ‘being an anthropologist’ was synonymous with ‘being a genealogist’. I spent countless, fascinating evenings helping a couple of local families without a genealogical record to find their genealogy online, scouring the 1841 Census, and spotting links between current family trees.⁶ The latter was the part people best enjoyed. Here, I look behind the genealogical links to the fishing story that imbues them:

Hugh and I are looking at his family tree. The first entry is in 1805, at Langwell near Berriedale. The advent of the fishing industry saw the family move

⁶ On one occasion, a village man and I found that we have a female Sutherland relative in common. This further helped my incorporation and provided us with a relationship, which we playfully declared ‘makes us cousins’.

from Berriedale to Dunbeath and finally settling at Lybster Harbour where Hugh's father was a curer. Hugh, now in his early seventies, cannot remember a time when he was not at sea. Aged two he was taken on board his father's boat, and aged five he eagerly watched from his bed as boats sailed into Lybster. At 15, he left school and joined his brothers on their boat. But the everyday familiarity of the fishing did not take away his enchantment. Hugh grew up in the 'main house' at the harbour. I call it the main house because while there are two family homes (both Victorian) there, this particular one has housed the predominant Lybster fishing family and has been passed down from skipper father to skipper son for a few generations. Hugh remembers waking up each morning as a child and looking out of his bedroom window to the harbour: 'If the boats were in, I was out of that bed like a shot, gazing out of the window and just shouting out of me "mum, get my clothes on, I'm wanting to see the boaties!"'. It was a trouble ever getting me away from the harbour.'

This story from a man of seventy-two is remarkably similar to the narratives of people fifty years his junior. Hugh continued to tell me: 'So I went to the sea myself as soon as I left school. Went to Leith to get my papers and never looked back'. Through his adult life, Hugh became a renowned skipper of seine-netters and became a central character in the Caithness fishing. Overly-modest and shy, Hugh talks down his successes. He is a very quiet person and the change in him whenever the harbour is mentioned is incredible, his face lights up and he talks for hours, eager to take people out on his boat and share his stories. The harbour is his way of opening up, his main focus of socialising. This shy character finds a self-confidence in his harbour story. He is quick to point out why we must not look simply at the result: the journey to his success was an arduous one. Like Hugh, fishermen in Lybster tend to have a positive attitude towards their occupation. This is something that Acheson finds to be true, although when he suggests that most fishermen around the world enjoy their jobs because of 'independence', 'the outdoors', 'income', and 'the challenge' (1981: 296), I do not recognize this for Lybster. In Lybster, a man enjoys the fishing because 'it's who we *are*'.

‘Never told’: on being a fisher

I was constantly intrigued during my fieldwork to find that nearly all of the skippers – at sea for more than forty years, and usually from a fisher family with even more experience – are unable to swim. This worried me greatly whenever they went to sea, I could not equate a factor like inability to swim with working in unpredictable water. Sanny – a non-swimmer – pointed out my mistake. To understand the water ‘like it’s part of you’ means to know it, if you are skilled and prepared, falling into the water will not be an issue. I suggested that, while talent would be in his favour, Sanny was still open to unpredictable elements. He laughed off my worries, he goes ‘to sea, not in the sea’. To him, being a non-swimmer skipper simply showcases his true Lybster ways: it is part of him that swimming lessons could never quite teach.

On boats, Hugh tells me, ‘things are never “told” to you, just learned by copying the older generation’. Such transmitted knowledge includes the superstitions surrounding fishing. Ritual and magic have long been coping mechanisms in situations of risk, as Acheson reminds us of Malinowski’s work (ibid.) As mentioned above, women are not to board the boat, the superstition which arises from the menstrual taboo. It is believed to bring bad luck to whistle on board a boat. One should not mention salmon, women, the devil, ministers, or the Sabbath. Rabbits must be referred to as ‘clever feet’. Elsewhere I have heard it called bad luck for a minister to stand on the quay between boat and sea. Boats are never counted before they go to sea in case one never comes back. No skipper likes to go to sea with clean-faced sailors, as beardless men are feared to be chicken-hearted. Death aboard is seen as bad luck for the living crew. The relationship between man and the sea, Hugh tells me, is one in constant flux, it is a ‘love-hate relationship’. The water can provide your life and livelihood and simultaneously, that water you know so well can put your life at risk. Hugh is particularly renowned for some large catches with his seine-netter, but he is extremely modest. When we first spoke together, he would shrug off his success and look at the general Lybster success. As we got to know each other, he confided the concerns he had had for many years. ‘People only look at the result, they never actually look at how the hell you came to your current situation’. I asked what he meant.

Well, people talk about me as “successful”, they know I made a lot of money, that there was a bit of local fame with it. But do they stop to think? We had it really hard as bairns. My mother was absolutely incredible. Father was at sea and almost single-handed, she raised nine bairns. She was having bairns over 30 years of her life, she had the hardest life. Honestly, people need to realise, I barely had an arse on my breeks growing up, we really had tough times. And that’s what makes the whole thing so important: family and learning from them, especially with the fishing, is the most important thing you’ll ever do. Set yourself up like that and you can turn everything around. That’s what we did. Learned from each other.

While in local literature, attention is paid to the decline in the fishing industry, Hugh is keen to put it into perspective for me. It did not have to ‘completely finish you’ economically – the fishing had created a community, a way of life that remained stable. The problem, he felt, was with the Common Fisheries Policy (which instituted a quota for fishing the kinds of fish caught around the Caithness coast) and the Government (‘not fish, fishermen, or fishing communities’) was responsible for the fishing dilemma. This was seen clearly around 1991 when the industry which had not disappeared, transformed from herring fishing to white fish fishing. In winter, cod and plaice are caught, in summer, haddock: this requires larger boats. For this reason, fishermen went part-time. Some took jobs at Dounreay, which enabled them to keep small creel boats, while others took work off-shore for six months, returning to the creel for the rest of the year.

The care afforded to fishermen and their families by the local community filters easily into everyday life. For instance, in the pub where I occasionally worked there are collection tins for the Fishermen’s Mission (which helps distressed families of those at sea, or bereaved families of those lost at sea) and for the upkeep of the Wick lifeboat. It is simply a given that the change you are given after buying your drink goes straight into one of these. The first time I visited the pub, I noticed a look of surprise and a moment’s silence when I put my change back into my purse. I asked what I had done wrong. Someone shook the Lifeboat tin at me. ‘What if you need it more than you need a gin one day?’ It made perfect sense to me.

Children and the harbour

The link between the arrival of children and the harbour is one that stays with villagers throughout their lives. Much as Adam laughed at the very thought of me

becoming a Coaster, and as Hugh recalls being an eager little boy growing up in the harbour house, children are accustomed to the harbour by virtue of its centrality to their lives. They play on the beach, get taken out for day trips on boats, and participate in fishing activity from a very early age. Colin, now in his forties, told me that he first ‘went til e creels’ (the generic way of explaining accompanying one’s father and helping drag in the creel boxes) at the age of five. By the age of 7 he was allowed out on his father’s large seine-netter boat during school holidays. He remembered finding it very difficult to sleep on the boat because he was ‘so excited’ to be there. At 14, he left school and soon enough had his own creel boat. Today, he is a part-time fisherman – for six months each year he ‘goes til e creels’ and the other six months he works offshore as a project coordinator on an oil rig.

It is not only fisher children or those helping on the boats who spend their time at the harbour. All village children seek it out as a place of fun, entertainment, a safe haven for them.

Looking after Ellie [an incomer child, aged 5] all day. Said to her we could go anywhere (in Caithness) she wanted. She choose the harbour: she wanted crab sandwiches, cake, and to paint pictures. We sat at the beach then and painted pictures of the lighthouse. Took her up to look at the boat-building. She’s obsessed. Even the kids are obsessed with the harbour (Fieldnotes).

‘There’s pearls at the bottom of the harbour. Tell the kids.’ Mary told me. Whenever I’m babysitting, I take them there, tell them the story of the ‘pearls’. Being able to tell that tale to children makes me feel very at home. It’s a story their parents and grandparents heard before them. They love drawing treasure maps of the harbour and making me follow them. (Fieldnotes)

The harbour is both a place for children to learn the life of the sea and a place of recreation. While the water itself is not often used recreationally, this is clearly a function of the harbour. It is a place in which they feel both free and safe. The participation of children normally comes in the form of lining up the creels and ropes to prepare for a trip to sea. This is an important part of the trip, and one safe enough for small bodies to handle. It acquaints them with the water and with each other: groups of children create little games together as they organise the task. It is similar to Rita Astuti’s experience of the Madagascan Vezo: ‘this half play, half serious activity keeps the children busy for hours...this kind of play can be productive’

(1995: 27). In Lybster, they are helping with an essential fishing preparation while enjoying their day with fellow villagers. Sometimes the children will play with the creels, arranging them into small dens, or play skipping games with ropes. However, as soon as an adult asks them to ‘do the creels’, they intrinsically know – through watching and copying, through learning by example – exactly what needs to be done. This stays with the Lybster child and can become a kind of identity marker of Lybster belonging in adulthood.

‘Knowing’ the water and the fishing remains a constitutive part of childhood outwith the harbour setting. One evening, at a birthday party, children were offered chocolate shaped like seashells, seafood, and fish. The shell shapes were taken away and in a party-game style, the young ones were told they could only eat a chocolate if they could correctly name the fish or seafood its shape resembled. The children reeled off names - John Dory, langoustine, salmon – until very gleeful, cocoa-smearing faces had consumed each sweet. It was an impressive and entertaining sight, particularly as they insisted that I join in (unsuccessfully) only when ‘difficult’ shapes were left. Even at a tea party like this, when games and chocolate are apparently all on children’s minds, the tacit knowledge between each of them is central.

Creating memories such as these as children becomes an important part of one’s autobiography in later life. One of my closest friends in the village, David, explained to me that: ‘a right [proper] Lybster boyagie can climb the Reisgill waterfall’. Playful times such as eating chocolate, mischievous times like scaling the side of a waterfall, are not just nostalgic anecdotes, but telling about the creation of a ‘Lybster childhood’ which is a marker of ‘Lybster being’. Without the essential part – *growing up in* Lybster – an adult’s belonging to the village is fundamentally partial and scrutinized. For instance, listening to someone’s autobiography which *does not* include childhood tales of the harbour, a ‘born and bred’ villager will automatically impart their own knowledge and experience of that place. In this sense, Lybster harbour is often used as an identity marker.

As a thirteen year old schoolgirl, Elsie (now 60) was asked to write a story about her favourite place. She chose Lybster harbour. Her story is insightful; it

reveals a typical Lybster scenario in which personal relationships are created and captured at the harbour.

When I'm on my way home from school, I go a look down the harbour. I just sit by the water and I think. I like it because it is quiet and I can be me there. But I like it too because I can feel the way it must have been so busy. There's a young man who works a boat there. He is very clever and good at his work. He explains the fishing to me, but I know it already, we all do...

Elsie explained to me how the story panned out: the man was Sanny, and five years after she wrote this tale, they were married. Elsie's narrative is about her sense of self – she is 'me' at the harbour. She finds it a reassuring place, but her imagination delights in its bustling past. She falls in love there. All that she could be told, she already knows.

When Elsie and Sanny married, their honeymoon began by sailing out of Lybster Bay. Decades later, I have found myself attending countless weddings which have culminated in a photograph session at the harbour. Young people often gather there on occasions such as birthdays or come home and celebrate their graduations with a party at the harbour. This pull to the harbour is felt regardless of one's physical location: on a reunion website, Jamie, a villager in his twenties who is now based in Edinburgh has a photograph album entitled 'Home'. The interesting thing about the every one of the 60 photographs is that they all feature the harbour, some including family and friends, but each importantly situated at the harbour. This relationship starts young: very young babies are taken for short trips on creel boats as their parents and grandparents before them had been.

Sadly, the harbour can also be the scene of life at risk. One much-loved young man, who was central to the harbour, drowned there over a decade ago. Today, villagers visit the harbour to remember him on the anniversary of the day they lost him. For, not only did the water take his life, it had also formed it, as he was the fish curer and a member of the core fishing family. Villagers talk of an emptiness without him. The risk of the sea is all too evident in Lybster narratives. One very close friend of mine, now an exile in London, clearly remembers the day when, as a five year old child, he attempted to throw a fish box into the harbour, became tangled in the rope, and almost drowned. An elderly man jumped in and

saved the boy's life. I include this memory because – forty years later – it is the key story he repeats about himself to any audience. Sadly, during fieldwork I have seen days where attempted suicides have occurred at the harbour. While these have not resulted in death, they have certainly served to shake up – re-ignite – the often complex relationship of Lybster life and its harbour.

Be they moments of the life cycle, or reaffirmations of one's sense of home, or simply catching up with friends, Lybster harbour is not only the scene of life but its very essence. Men and women, young and old alike, are drawn almost magnetically to Lybster harbour.

The World Knotty Championship

Tonight, we were at our annual midnight picnic at the Inver of Lybster. Waiting for Knotty day to arrive, a large group of us gathered beside the Reisgill. The men passed around amazing seafood platters and bottles of wine while the women lit candles and started some wonderful story-telling about the harbour. Tonight saw everyone in tremendous spirits, the fun-loving nature of the villagers is at its height waiting for tomorrow. I'm told that tomorrow, I'll see what this place is really all about... (Fieldnotes, August 2007)

Early morning in mid-August each year, Lybster is alive with excitement and preparation. From sunrise, men and women prepare vast pots of soup, bowls of herring, and hot mackerel sandwiches together. Then a convoy of cars spends hours travelling up and down the harbour road to ensure a staggering amount of food is provided. Young people spend hours with friends, getting ready, and making sure their bottles of beer and wine are chilled. Returning exiles are gleefully collected from 'e top o' 'e rod by their relatives. At the Inver of Lybster, the goals are set up, the pointed wooden sticks distributed, and the players slip into their team shirts. Spectators gather on the grass, many already intoxicated by 11am; today this is perfectly acceptable. This is the Lybster World Knotty Championship.



Fig. 4: The Lybster World Knotty Championship 2007 (Kim Masson)

To describe this game, or figure out any rules for it, is difficult. Mainly resembling shinty, the Knotty uses moves from hockey, football, netball, and, frankly, wrestling. The teams are not mixed but both men's and women's teams play six-a-side. Each member uses a Knotty stick – a wooden stick which resembles a hockey stick with a pointed end – to hit a solid (and remarkably hard) ball into the goal. The goal-keeper is armed with a Knotty stick. The sticks are made from the wood of fish boxes, and the balls are actually corks from fishing nets. The referee throws the cork high in the air and two opponents stretch to hit it, the Knotty sticks reaching about 6ft into the air. This sends the cork flying at a rapid speed. The players keep up this speed: the game is fast, aggressive, and loud. Injuries are frequent, so frequent that an ambulance is always in attendance at the match. Spectators enjoy the high drama and unpredictability of the match, for there are no rules. Players and spectators alike get extremely fired-up, the shouting is louder than one might imagine, but the atmosphere remains friendly. The ritual of Knotty turns everyday Lybster life on its head: in a place where general egalitarianism rules, men and women are suddenly divided, young and old separate too as only young people play. Female games are without exception more raucous and violent than male games: a gentle player may be teased that she should be on the male team and *vice versa*. A hierarchy suddenly appears in the village: the men's trophy is bigger and better than the women's, and the record of Knotty triumph includes only male, not female, teams. It is only in the current generation of twenty somethings that women have even been able to participate, despite being the rumoured founders of, this particular version of the Knotty.

The Knotty was played in the 19th century by the entire village. People tell me that it was originally played 150-a-side. Its history and ritualization, the involvement of the entire village, bears resemblance to the Kirkwall Ba' played in Orkney (see Robertson 2004). It is also claimed that the Knotty was conceived by fishwives who wanted to keep their husbands out of the pub when they returned from sea: by locating a game at the harbour, played immediately after coming off the boat, and using fishing gear as equipment was the ideal solution. For some decades, the Knotty was not played due to a lack of players. In years when the village lacked a young male population – such as during the world wars - the game could not proceed. Today, teams pay to be entered in the competition and spectators pay entry. All proceeds go to the Wick Lifeboat fund. Interestingly, in terms of Caithness identity, the Knotty apparently only re-emerged in 1992 when the proprietor of a village hotel claimed to have found the rules of Knotty in the pages of a Gaelic Bible. This is widely dismissed because ‘the Knotty doesn’t have rules, and we don’t speak Gaelic!’ Today, the Knotty is understood as the one day of the year that will without doubt bring the whole village – locals and exiles alike – together. As Isabelle, a returning exile in her twenties, explained:

It’s the one day a year that you get the whole village together again. It’s like the heart of us. You spend the whole day, hugging and shaking hands, and getting the crack⁷ and drinking and everyone gets excited about the game, then we all go up to the pub and it keeps going. And it’s just brilliant. When I come home from uni, I don’t recognise many faces in the village. That’s weird. Then the Knotty comes around and it’s the same faces in the same place again. To me, that’s Lybster, and it feels like home again. It’s funny, at the start of a new year, the first thing people talk about is going to the Gala and the Knotty that year. Definitely the best day of the year.

From my own experience, Lybster life is indeed navigated by plans for this event. While the sport itself is an excellent experience to both participate in and observe, the focus is definitely placed on the individuals who attend. It is guaranteed amongst locals and exiles alike that Lybster will feel ‘like home again’. This is an important point. In the past 30 years – a rough estimate, agreed amongst villagers – Lybster’s population has changed so much that it now appears to be ‘mainly incomer’. This is

⁷ Humour, entertainment, goings-on. Similar to the Irish *craic*.

why the World Knotty Championship is so significant. It is not just an intoxicated Saturday afternoon spent seemingly attacking one another with pointed sticks. It is the one constant that gives villagers confidence and reinvigorated belief in their notions of togetherness and belonging. The harbour is the epitome of 'home': it houses relationships, memories, selves, and hopes. Essentially, Lybster harbour reminds Lybsterians who they are.

By beginning at the harbour in this exploration into kinship and belonging, we have come to the heart of Lybster life. This place created Lybster village and maintains it today. The main aspects of community life - growing up together, sharing narratives of the selves, working together, and gathering – are situated here. By understanding the significance of this place we go some way in understanding how Lybsterians situate themselves at the centre of their world. Next, I consider the other centres of the everyday world: the home and the public house.

2. Homes and public houses: the centrality of intimate space

The relationships, memories, identities, and hopes that are manifested at the harbour are also shaped and nurtured inside homes. Intriguingly, the harbour and the personal home are as open as each other: these are strikingly communal spaces in which both the everyday and ritual scenarios of being Lybsterian are played out. In this chapter, attention is paid to homes and their uses, the ways in which their fluid and crystallized boundaries create community and reinforce boundaries of selves and others. Following this is an exploration of the public house, which is in ways a very private space. The seemingly paradoxical use of space is included here to demonstrate how inclusion and exclusion and notions of selves and others are acted-out and conceptualized in intimate spaces. I follow Webb Keane (1995) in suggesting that the house can provide the key to a culture, and be read as the dictionary of that culture.

There is only one entrance to Lybster houses (cf. Carsten 1997). Physically, the structure has two doors, sometimes three. But in terms of community, kinship, and closeness, there is only one way in: the back door. Further, there is only one way to enter: not by knocking, but by simply feeling ‘at home’ enough to walk straight in. The back door in traditional Lybster fisher houses takes you nearest the kitchen. The way you enter a Lybster house is a mark of your belonging. Houses here illuminate debates on locals and incomers, closeness and separation, and they form the epitome of my argument: community and kinship in Lybster are one and the same.

Every private house on the Main Street in Lybster, and some at the Southend area, have a name rather than a number.⁸ Houses – as much of the anthropology of kinship has shown – are not just the scene of relationships and identities (see Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). This recalls Cohen’s study of Whalsay relatedness whereby a man ‘identified each house, croft, and township in terms of their genealogical and social referents’ (1989: 2). Houses have identities of their own. This was evident

⁸ Rented council housing goes by number, although as soon as a resident buys a council house, they replace that numbered address with a name. In Lybster, 67.9% of houses are privately owned, according to the 2001 Census. Source: www.highland.gov.uk

the first time Dora handed me a heaped dinner plate wrapped in tin foil. ‘Take that down to Ben Aird, lass’. ‘Who?’ I wondered. She began to laugh. ‘It’s no’ a mannie, it’s a hoosie!’ Dora laughed at my question. She elaborated no further. So I wandered down the street until I found it and its inhabitants; the names of both houses and faces had not yet been learned. It is interesting to note that in *The Book of Lybster* there is a genealogical record. Rather than list family names and individual details, the record focuses on house names. It provides surnames, first names, and years of residency for each family that ever lived in each house (Young 1998). The notion that houses are in us as much as we are in them (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 1) is pertinent in this case.

Linking village families to houses this way intimately links families together. It also demonstrates the stability and longevity of Lybster households: normally houses have a history of just two or three families - passed down, generation after generation - living in them since the 1860s. The literal openness of these homes demonstrates that one’s interaction with friends, neighbours, and relatives, is particularly easy, relaxed, and without invitation. Personal homes are remarkably accessible by villagers in general. As my fieldnotes reveal:

This morning I was in the house alone – everyone else at work. A few bangs of cupboard doors and the sound of the kettle later, I went downstairs to see what was going on. Ian [friend, neighbour, and distant relative of my village family] was standing there, pouring himself a drink. ‘Ye wantin’ a cuppie, Kimmie?’ he asked, as though this was natural; enter someone else’s home without invitation and make yourself at home. I have to remember that here it crucially is.

Enter the courtyard of my Lybster home. Tight and compact, the small square connects three houses. My house is the perpendicular part that creates this communal sense of living. Our back doors huddle together. The every coming-and-going of three households pass one another, merge, and socialise on a daily basis. When I appear, out to collect the local newspaper, Neil is hanging out the washing and offers to hang mine. When Alison is preparing lunch and she notices me pottering around, she opens my back door and appears with a plate of food. This is all very convivial, but it comes with its own obligations and intrusions: when Maggie unexpectedly has to go out and needs childcare, she opens her window and hollers

my name. I find myself canceling two important meetings at the harbour to care for three children under four. At once, this closeness is revitalizing and suffocating. The constant togetherness and the never-ending interaction are simultaneously the best and the worst aspects of Lybster.

Enter through this almost communal back door, directly into the kitchen. In the intimate warmth of this room, take a seat on the large sofa. Friends and family will soon arrive and gather around the 'island' kitchen. Coffee is brewing, and an abundance of snacks – or a full meal, depending on the time – will be offered even when the hosts were not expecting you. There is little difference between relatives and neighbours in this domain: people are treated with similar conviviality. Through the door is the formal dining room. An extremely cold room, here dinner services, exquisite family crystal and old framed photographs are kept. It is rarely entered. The connecting door which takes us to the parlour is absolutely never used: in fact, it will not easily open. This formal room, connected so intimately with death, is undisturbed. Next is the living room, another formal – and cold – room. Opposite this is the conservatory where the piano is kept, the scene of many entertaining evenings. It is fair to suggest that downstairs in the house has two sides: the very formal untouched rooms and the warm heart of the house. A large spiral staircase takes us to the nursery, master bedroom, bathroom and spare bedroom. Up a short ladder are two large attic bedrooms. 'Upstairs' the general term perhaps connotes the private side of the house. Downstairs – both the formal rooms and the intimate kitchen – space is largely public. This is the space that people are invited into, or the space that people feel free to casually wander into. Watching this happen, having it happen in my own home, and doing it myself, I came to wonder about the fluidity of domestic boundaries in the village. This type of house will seem large to the reader: on the Main Street at least, this is the typical format. Four such houses on the street function as bed and breakfasts, two houses have been divided as flats, two take lodgers, and the others are simply large family homes.

Physically, as structures, Lybster houses on the whole huddle together. Any distinction between 'the house' and 'outside the house' seems almost superfluous. This resembles a distinction between knowing and not knowing: to be able to use houses correctly is part of fitting into the village. When this fluidity is broken, it is

attributed to a ‘stranger’, by which I mean that it is a kind of tacit knowledge that characterizes these processes:

I’m standing at the front door in thick snow and a Caithness cross-wind howling gale. Try knocking a few times, and hear a laugh that seems to be coming from the back garden. It’s Eric. He wonders why I’ve been trying that door. ‘Aye ‘e back door, mind! And dinna be daft, knockin’. Come away ben!’. (Fieldnotes)

The effects of a stranger coming into the village are documented through the ensuing changes in the way the house is used. The formal living room of the house was ‘given’ to me as a space to work from – despite my desire simply to join in everyday life - until that point when I became the family’s ‘other daughter’ and its door was firmly shut once more. This demonstrates that the house is not simply a generic *site* of kinship. Rather, it is an ever-changing, dynamic space of not just everyday ‘domestic’ kinship but also of wider notions of village belonging. When I suggest that people are ‘all’ treated with conviviality, that they enter people’s homes without invitation and are offered food, it is important to bear in mind that this behaviour is learned, it is part of village belonging, and fundamentally, it is based on pre-existing relationships: it not something an incomer would be inclined to do or necessarily made welcome of doing. I discuss incomers and the use of space below.

From the outside looking in: houses as structures

‘Walk into one of the villages poised along the eastern coast of Scotland and see how the houses cluster close together’ writes Jane Nadel-Klein of a north-east fishing village (2003: 21). In the wide, Main Street of Lybster, we encounter one such traditional fishing village structure. By this, I mean stone-built, flat-fronted houses. These buildings look almost two-dimensional. Strikingly wide but rather low buildings, semi-detached (or attached in threes) but built so close together that the entire street looks like one remarkably long terrace. There are no fences or front gardens; walking down the street means walking right past doors and windows of people’s homes. But this is no invasion of privacy: it is not very Lybster to lock your door or shut your curtains. These distinctive houses date back to around 1840, and the New Statistical Account suggests that Latheron parish was notable in the county

because (unlike the rest of Caithness), ‘the old hovels are fast disappearing, and neat substantial houses are occupying their places’ (Smith 1988). Lybster architecture – when we consider that it was almost purpose-built for the evicted Sutherland families – documents its history.



Fig. 5: Main Street houses (Marshall Bowman)

These houses were purpose-built because Lybster harbour could provide new lives for those Clearance refugees who came from inland to fish on the coast. In this respect, Lybster houses represent much of Caithness identity: notions of ‘who we are’ and ‘where we come from’ can be traced in the histories of these houses. These very structures brought a group of people who were similar to yet distinctive from Caithnessians. By living together and diluting the small differences, by sharing a story and descendants, those moments in time are recorded by the houses that constitute Lybster. Nowhere else in Caithness are houses so identical to one another, built so close together, or with the purpose of saving a neighbouring population. In its houses, Lybster’s colourful history is living.

To alter the structure of a Lybster house is almost impossible – the regulations surrounding Highland Council planning permission mean that very few

changes are allowed. Knocking down walls and adding extensions are forbidden. The installation of satellite television – whereby a dish is secured to the roof exterior to one’s home – is also forbidden. To get around this, householders have the dishes installed at the back of houses, where chimney stacks and the courtyard shape hide the prohibited object. Current plans to encourage renewable energy in coastal Caithness have inspired householders to install solar panels on roofs, and in some cases, to have mini wind turbines attached to the roofs. Both of these things were voted against in the Highland Council planning section. Restrictions like these go deeply against the perception and uses of the Lybster house. Interestingly, the feeling that houses are lived in, not owned, but looked after, passed down and passed on, means that the Council’s hold over the development of the house results in the house being stuck in time.

Of unlocked doors, un-drawn curtains, and unlimited feeding: feeling at home in the Lybster house

Domestic and village boundaries – what I call internal boundaries – are fluid. Neighbouring households and their relationships are literally and figuratively close together. This recalls Bahloul’s study of a Jewish-Muslim household in Algeria in which:

The boundaries of the domestic group are not simply genealogical; the group also includes relationships of neighbourhood, friendship, and personal affinity which have been incorporated into it simply because they evolve in the domestic world. (Bahloul 1996:51)

One aspect of life inside the Caithness house that I found quite difficult to get used to was the openness. Processes – such as the responsibilities of childcare and feeding people, or even conversations – which are happening in and about houses spill over into wider village life. By this I mean that caring for other people’s children, providing food for elderly neighbours, or gossip going from one house to the next are examples of domestic life played out in a community sphere. The fact that doors are always left unlocked is a mark of this, as too are the curtains which are never drawn.⁹

⁹ Nadel-Klein's informants in Buckie (a fisher town on the same coast though 142 miles south of Lybster) recall not locking their doors in 1931. Now, they face burglaries and fear vandalism

One can constantly enter the house and look inside. This everyday fluidity only changes when the house takes on a more ritual status. For example, when someone dies, often villagers will draw their own curtains and light a candle in the window as a mark of respect.

The fluidity surrounding houses is similar to the fluidity of social interactions. For Dutch households, Van der Horst and Messing (2006) found that 'locals' kept their curtains open to display class, lifestyle choices, tidiness and gender, but began shutting the curtains when the neighbourhood became multicultural: that very material which had opened their identity to the world now shielded them from their fear of the 'other'. Neither of these attitudes would ring true in Lybster: people do not 'show off' by having their homes on display this way. In fact, on the Main Street for instance, there are no front gardens and one walks right next to the inhabitant's windows: there are never ornaments or personal knickknacks on show. Rather the opposite is true: they have a compulsive need to watch the coming and going of the village, do not like the fact that being shut inside houses might mean missing out on village news, and hope that other villagers will be encouraged to visit. If a villager locks a door or shuts the curtains, it is very bad practice, they are perceived to be in 'bad fettle', a bad mood or in some way at odds with the rest of the villagers. With reference to incomers, Lybsterians do not shut themselves away: the very act of curtain-shutting is perceived as a self-exclusive, 'incomer' type of activity. Thus when the ways a Lybster house is used change, it suggests that something in the village is changing. Not always as significant as a death, this can be – for instance – the locked doors of an incomer's house who has not yet learned Lybster ways. It can also mark a more localized, ritualized use of space.

'I can't believe that's me locking the lassagie out ...' Alan shut the door and clicked the yale lock into place. Marriage, that intimate relationship, transforms the intimacy of Lybster houses. Alan's story comes from the night of his niece's wedding. Having 'given her away' at the ceremony, Alan comes home and enters his house – where his niece lived with him and his wife - through the front door and locks it. When someone leaves for good – a family member creating their own

particularly at the weekends (2003: 49). The sense of community in 'fisher' areas is not always the same.

household, like the niece – or when someone dies, the moment is marked by locking the doors. When morning comes and doors are re-opened, it is the mark of the house's transformation.

Notions of hot and cold characterise these houses. As a whole, the Lybster house is perceived as hot in the cosy, comforting, familial sense of warmth. Its individual rooms are different. The living room is never particularly warm because it is rarely used – it has an inbetweenness and does not figure much in everyday lives. The kitchen is always hot: constantly full of people, the scene of never-ending cooking and baking by women, and kettles being boiled. The parlour is necessarily freezing cold. This is traditionally the room where the dead lie in the coffin while villagers pay their last respects before burial. The parlour is a solemn, grey, unused room: death lingers there long. Bedrooms and bathrooms are not spoken of in terms of how hot or cold they are, perhaps owing to their more private nature. Dining rooms do exist in village houses but mainly function as rarely used, very cold office space. Eating is – in everyday life – certainly done in the kitchen. My arrival in Lybster was marked by this warmth, this significance of the kitchen, and with a connection between house and kinship. It is quite normal to accept meals in other people's homes, and quite expected that all kitchens should be so accessible. The Lybster house is in many ways similar to the Polish Highland house experienced by Frances Pine: there, the 'black room' is for everyday use while the 'white' room 'represents formality, ritual, and time-out-of-time' (1996: 447). This division of informal and formal, hot and cold, everyday time and ritual time is central to the workings of the Lybster house. To cross the line is not acceptable: I remember witnessing a man so desperate to watch a football game when guests were arriving, that he simply disappeared. His wife hunted high and low, and failed to find him. Where she failed to look, of course, was the ritual room that is the parlour: it would not have crossed her mind to check in that out-of-time room. There he sat, with a portable television set, the volume at mute. Caught exiting said room later that evening, the man was admonished by his wife and invited to sleep in the parlour from then on. His wife was particularly disgruntled that their visitors might have thought they used the parlour for daily life.

In Lybster, it is said that you do not pass a house without popping in, and you

‘should be’ immediately offered tea and food. This aspect of togetherness and commensality is beginning to die out, and this is negatively attributed to incomers. As Cathie exclaimed, ‘well, Lybster fowk wid do ‘at, and hid’s startin’ til go lek they are’. The majority of houses in the village are not locked, unless one is going far, such as to Wick. Cathie elaborated ‘ye’d never be stranded or sittin’ on a doorstep here. But incomers mightna ken ‘at.’ This is crucial: the acknowledgment *by locals* that incomers do not understand the ritualistic happenings of everyday life is not the same as *acceptance* by locals. They are irked when people creating stumbling blocks to this collective graceful dance through life. The notion that the ‘house is the prime agent of socialization’ (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 2) fits well here. However, we must extend that notion to involve *desocialization*: to use houses incorrectly - by locking your door, knocking on someone else’s, or showing offence if villagers wander in unannounced – is to refuse or at least seriously complicate village relationships.

The daily routine: learning Lybster ways

Morning in Lybster. I wake to the sound of incessant chatter, kettles boiling, children playing zealously. Mainly, this is a warm welcome to the day, but occasionally a fraught one considering we all retired to bed at just three o’ clock earlier that morning. Life runs late into the night in Lybster. Enticed downstairs by a strong coffee aroma, I gulp down a mug of black coffee and head off out to visit villagers, work in the pub, or study in the archives. Before I get out the door, my village mother would haul me back inside for a heavy, hearty breakfast. Returning home at least twelve hours later, I find my home filled to the brim with neighbours and friends popping in at various times, be it to socialise or for more practical reasons. My home functions as a social heart: living with the captain of the golf club, who is also chairman of the harbour trust, means that constant meetings occurred there too.

Within the house is where most eating happens. As with many societies – and particularly in fishing communities – processes of preparing food and its consumption are tied up in notions of gender, kinship, and community. This is a place – and this is no exaggeration - where refusing food is akin to refusing a relationship. Copious amounts of tea and cake are served throughout the day,

particularly when visiting villagers' homes. Lunch is mainly fish-based and cooked by my village father, eaten late, around 3pm. A hot snack is offered at 6pm. Supper, again fish, prepared at 10pm by my village father. I wondered why my village father seemed to do much of the cooking because, in homes I visited here - and in neighbouring Sutherland – food preparation is perceived to be a female domain. I figured that my village mother was very busy running her own business outwith the village, and my retired village father simply had more time at home to cook. This was not the case at all. 'Wifies canna cook fish, Kim!' my village father laughed. 'Even when I was aboot nine year auld, I had to cook fish for Mither. Wifies and fish dinna go!' Transported from boat to kitchen, the gendered processes are not so much about cooking *per se* but – as explored in chapter one – about wider Lybster belonging: fish, fishing, and associated ability or knowledge.

The arrival of unexpected guests necessitates more tea and cake breaks and to politely refuse a cake is unheard of. The difference between being offered a snack or a meal does not equate with the difference between being a visitor and a relative. The meal process is more complex than that. If anyone visits the house during mealtimes (whether aware of that mealtimes or not), a plate is prepared for them: there is an unspoken invitation. Be they a local, an incomer, a relative, a friend, or a neighbour the pattern is the same. The offerings are slightly more elaborate if the guest is, for instance, the minister or the doctor. Also, if the guest is a close relative, it is understood that they will help themselves to the food and drink. If someone arrives in the morning, they will be offered coffee and shortbread. In the afternoon, a sandwich will be offered. In the evening, this would be a hot snack such as a meat pie or a toasted sandwich. After supper, a dram (of whisky) will be offered without food. All of this food, at all times of day, is consumed standing up. I was constantly aware that only families and specifically invited-for-dinner guests sit at a table. The visitor who is eating remains a transient presence within the home and as such does not sit to eat. This creates a distinction, and puts a time limit on the ritual. This elaborate and constant supply of food is common local villagers' homes. Incomers tend not to do this, and when offered, try to decline.

Visiting and feeding

Nothing of close family life is 'lost' by visiting and eating with other people. In the domestic world of kinship and eating, the image of the family sitting down to dinner, privately, together is an impression that would sit awkwardly with Lybsterians. Relationships created in the house and those which flow through the house are closed linked. Carsten has found in a Malay fishing community that 'eating...meals in other houses has negative implications, and children are strongly discouraged from doing so. Eating meals in other houses implies a dispersal of intimate substance to other houses' (1995b: 234). In Lybster, this is not the case. Eating in other houses has a positive impact on wider notions of togetherness, the boundaries of which are fluid with a concept of relatedness. 'Dispersal of intimate substance' is not a problematic issue. Here, the point is freedom to explore the village relationships that are open to you, all perceived as extended forms of kinship. Naturally, there are times when families want private time together. This is normally signaled by the absence of life in the kitchen: entering the house and realizing the family is together in the living room, visitors are aware of the private use of the space at the given time.

It is evident that men tend to visit friends, family, neighbours and acquaintances more than women. When, for instance, my house in the village was filled with guests, the majority were male. I asked my village sister why she thinks this occurs, and she reckoned it happens because the women are busy in their own homes, seeing to the visitors there. In short, women stay put and men move around. This, as will be discussed below, is the same as newly wed or cohabiting household patterns: women tend to stay in their parental homes or village while men move to them. I could understand this pattern in terms of specific fisher families: men pop in to houses on their way home from the harbour, gifting fish and seafood. This is a constant activity of friendship and reciprocity which spills over into more casual visiting: each time a man delivers the fish, he will invariably be invited up for his supper the following evening, or for a dram that night. Meanwhile, their own partners and children are at home receiving the same kind of guest. If a young child is visiting a house around mealtime, he or she will be asked to 'sit up at the table' while a plate is brought to them (older visitors, as I have said tend to stand around and casually eat). There is no discussion as to whether the child is 'allowed', no

phonecall to inform the parents that their child has eaten. When the little one goes home, he or she will be asked if they have eaten. The favour is returned along the way.

Young people are expected to visit older relatives or friends without being prompted. If, for instance, I went into Wick for the day, it was an absolute given that I would – on returning – pop in for a cup of tea with my village ‘aunt’. This is not just politesse – I knew a number of individuals in their twenties who had fractured relationships with older villagers through neglecting to visit them. ‘Sitting with’ is another type of visiting. Traditionally, a young unmarried girl will visit a grieving widow in the days after a spouse’s death for a fortnight, and keep company. Nowadays this still happens, but has more practical connotations: ‘sitting with’ means visiting, cooking, and generally ‘helping out’ in the evenings during the days between death and burial. The ease with which people enter other homes is not simply a laid-back, cosy way of life: it comes with its own responsibilities and obligations that are often intense to fulfill. Naturally, it is not always possible to visit: villagers manage this by opening their car windows when they enter Lybster, allowing them to slow right down and speak to passing villagers, or neighbours standing in doorways. Furthermore, if you are doing this and someone *else* is out visiting, it is customary to give them a lift to whichever house they are visiting. The persistence and obligation of this visiting demand can be the bane of a villager’s life and there are constant squabbles about visiting patterns. It is the mark of a real argument if someone falls out with a villager and arrives at the house without being offered food. When Alison and her cousin Alistair had an argument over money, Alison promptly told her husband, Tam, to lock the back door before Alistair could enter. Exasperated at the thought, Tam refused to do this. When Alistair entered the house, Alison sat in the kitchen with no intention of offering Alistair any of the snacks that lay on the counter. When he reached for a sausage roll, Alison took it straight out of his hand. ‘Alright, I’m going!’ Alistair laughed, leaving his cousin’s house. When the ritual of eating and feeding goes awry, it is the signal that the relationship needs some space. In a different context, but also a signifier of space, a visit to the home of an incomer is often without food. Not knowing this ritual, or choosing not to participate, is a sign of distance from Lybster belonging in itself.

The house inside villagers: placing homes in Lybster belonging

Out and about visiting with Alice, a villager in her eighties, we bumped into a young woman. Alice told me: ‘I don’t know who she is. She’s that incomer that lives in Dan Gunn’s place’. I figured that Dan Gunn was a well-known local who had once lived in the incomer’s house. I asked Alice who he was. ‘Oh I don’t know, I arrived here 40 years ago and Dan Gunn was dead and gone by then’. Herself an incomer, Alice placed a more recent incomer by a reference that she had clearly *learned* through her own incorporation: this is perhaps the reason why she does not refer to the house by name, instead referring to the story she has been told about it. This is a vivid example of what Murray Watson would term ‘structural invisibility’ (2000). The story of Dan Gunn placed her as local yet the striking subtlety of the reference concealed her own process of arrival. Did Alice fit in as local after 40 years? Here, the house as a constant becomes a metaphor – both literal and figurative – of local and incomer degrees of belonging. The house, having been home to various Lybster families as well as new families as they moved around the village, links the personal family stories of villagers and relates them.

Hence, there are kinship stories shared by different families by virtue of their residence in the same house. Take for example the house called Morven. Generations ago, this house was owned by the Sinclairs. Helen – now in her seventies – told me that her mother Johannie Sinclair grew up in Morven. Only when Johannie married William Gunn did she move out of this house and into her own. Later, Morven became the home of the Sutherland family. Alan, the eldest son, would learn to ride his bicycle by its front door as his friend Helen practiced her skipping nearby. As adults, Helen Gunn and Alan Sutherland married each other. ‘Morven was an important house to us. It was my granny’s and my mother married my father out of there. Then long after they died, Alan married me out of there’. Such stories are common here (and in neighbouring Sutherland) but this should not give house processes a twee air. Morven was bought and sold a few times after Alan’s parents died. Alan himself died a few years ago. Soon though, it was abandoned and now lies cold and empty, its windows boarded up. Helen’s feelings are strong. ‘I feel guilty that we can’t fix it. I think of my wee granny by the fire, or

playing round at Alan's when we were wee. They're all dead now. I wish I could do something about that house'. As individuals die and the space that created their kinship follows suit, it is extremely difficult for the villagers left behind. Their memories of houses and kinship linger long.

Not only a mark of family identity, houses display local identity. Cathie's house in particular is the epitome of this. Perhaps it was a mark of my naivety that – in the early days of research – I imagined that exiles would be more likely to 'display' their Caithnessian identity in photographs and on walls. In reality, the extent to which Lybster locals display their local identity in intimate spaces is astounding. Entering the vestibule of Cathie's house, we encounter this collection of Lybster harbour paraphernalia: one cross-stitch of Lybster lighthouse, seven recent photographs of the harbour, one 'original' photograph, two pencil sketches, and one painting. Twelve displays adorn one wall and all communicate one sentiment: this woman's closeness to the harbour. Intriguing, particularly since Cathie can view that very harbour from her kitchen window. In fact, her exterior wall of the kitchen space has been almost completely replaced with three exceedingly large windows and two sets of French doors. Her house, high on the hill, looks over Lybster bay and its harbour. I asked Cathie about the windows: 'I just wanted to feel closer to the harbour. It's the only thing that doesn't change'. Her processes of displayed identity and her opinions of change are reflected in Lybster narratives. Often, this is a generational divide, as the younger villagers attempt to display their identities in very different ways.

House-warming tonight. Jo & Gill rented old Chaimig's place. Helping paint,...Chaimig would be fair pleased. You coming? (Text message received from John, a Lybster local in his forties, November 2006).

Jo and Gill are young women from Wick who decided to rent a cottage at Upper Lybster together. While in a town or city the notion of flat-sharing is quite usual, here the concept is something of a novelty. Jo works for the Highland Council in Wick and Gill works for a local publishing house. Two decent wages make it easier for them to rent expensive local property. More significant than this, though, is the sheer regeneration and revitalization that these two women bring to a lifeless cottage

up a solemn dirt track. I found the house to be a marvelous insight into Caithness togetherness and commensality. Removing traces of the decades that Chaimig – an elderly bachelor who had lived here alone for forty years and recently died – had inhabited the house was difficult for villagers. However, as we splashed colour around this Caithness vernacular building it felt both like revitalization and prostitution. As vivid purple and a rather lucid yellow began to characterize this place, a poster of Che Guevara blu-tacked to the kitchen door, and hip-hop music filled the air, it resembled a student flat. From the outside, this small cottage connoted peat smoke, family life on a croft, and something out of Kailyard.¹⁰ Inside, it reflected Jo and Gill far more than its Caithness location. Different to other Caithness homes I spent time in, this house – given new life – seems to underline how Caithness houses are changing. In the very spaces where Chaimig just recently lit his fire with peat and had no electricity for years, these young women light their cigarettes and argue over who spent too long in the shower. Where more ‘traditional’ village homes are used in more traditional ways – such as the formality of the parlour – a wider sense of the outside world seems to have filtered into this house. This type of neolocality is quite unlike the one to which Lybster is accustomed.

Children and houses: the epitome of genealogy and intimacy

The traditional Lybster household is comprised of a couple – married or cohabiting – and children. I have been told by my village sister, Mary, that when a couple - married or unmarried - live together, it is not inevitable that they will immediately form a household of their own. Often they live with parents (normally the woman's) for more than a year. The arrival of children creates an unspoken shift and the neolocal residence is then created. In Lybster residence has permanence. For all the fluid boundaries of identity, between houses, and the openness of the village, people rarely move house. I have been asked about this living with parents idea: what happens when more than one child of a sibling set lives in Lybster? Much of the time the age difference between siblings is so large that this problem does not arise,

¹⁰ Kailyard is a school of Scottish literature founded in the 19th century. Its style is to overly-romanticize rural life and present it devoid of the real struggle and hardship rural communities face.

by the time a second sibling is in a relationship, the elder sibling may have moved to their own home. Male adult children are also more likely to leave the family home because married/cohabiting couples tend to live with the woman's parents. In cases where siblings are close in age, all in relationships, and needing somewhere to live, this simply spurs on neolocality and they begin to move elsewhere. Married siblings do not live together with their spouses, this is something I did not once record in Caithness. Unmarried siblings who are elderly very often live together: this is a generational aspect of Caithness life that seems to be dying out. For the most part, though, the sibling age gap accounts for residence being a relatively unproblematic matter.

Betty has lived in the same house all her life: it has been in her family since 1840. Now retired, Betty worries that her children (now in Glasgow) will not want to move back to Lybster and, in her words, 'e hoosie'll die wi' me'. When her eldest son brought home his girlfriend this woman 'let her stay in the nursery. Because I thought she'd use it for her own bairns some day'. The couple never had children. Twenty years later and now a married couple, when they return to Lybster they are still never given a double bedroom: the son sleeps in his childhood bedroom, the daughter-in-law in the nursery. While life cycle changes such as marriage and migration have changed the dynamics of these relationships, two things are happening: the house recreates a time where the mother perceived her family as solid and forward-looking. However, the house does this only by being utterly stuck in time.

The 'newness' of a neolocality when newlyweds move out of parental homes is relative. Commonly, local adults live with their parents - i.e. not alone - before cohabiting with a partner or spouse and having children. There is rarely a gap between being the child of the house and being the cohabiting partner/spouse. Living alone - or with friends - in one's twenties, for instance, is extremely rare in this particular village. Further, when neolocality occurs, it is normally a few doors away from the parents, at most the other end of the village, in rare cases couples move to Wick. In this sense - when newborns are the catalyst for moving house - children really do create families and households. Simultaneously, though, they also give a revitalised sense of self to pre-existing houses: grandparents often keep

nurseries (once home to their children) for their grandchildren and are completely central to their upbringing. Even if – as in the case of the woman above - those grandchildren are never conceived, the nursery is kept. Children - whether present or not - are often represented by such nurseries, as if suggesting that a 'complete' house has children.

Death and the inheritance of houses

While house creation and kinship creation go hand in hand here, death is constantly present by virtue of its permanent, structured place in the Caithness house: the parlour is the room associated mainly with coldness, illness, and death. It is ordinarily avoided for these reasons. Upon death, the body (in its coffin) is normally taken back to the house and placed - the coffin closed - in the parlour. Friends and family take it in turns to enter and pay their respects. Following burial, the parlour door is shut and rarely opened again until another person's passing. Sometimes, though, a parlour will be used for practical reasons during illness. For example, elderly Anna had become so ill that death was imminent. Journeying upstairs to bed was impossible. By creating a makeshift, fold-down bed for Anna in the parlour - complete with a portable gas heater, soft lighting, and many blankets - the family completely inverted the normal use of space. The light and warmth gave a sense of life, but a desperate sadness remained - Anna's daughter knew, she told me, that her mother would soon be back in this room for the funeral.

The relationship between death and houses is not only linked to this type of ritual. Passing on and genealogy is significant in terms of passing on houses to future generations. Andy (an only child) lives in a council flat in the village: for him, this is the only way he can afford to live in Lybster. However, every day without fail, he gets a lift eight miles south to an area near Achow, to check on property and land that belongs solely to him. On a few acres of Andy's land is the ruin of a large croft. This was owned by his auntie Jessie and inherited by Andy as her only living relative. The land is kept in good shape, but it is not fertile ground to farm and Andy cannot earn a living from it. The shell of the croft is large but in need of serious renovation: Andy is encouraged to sell, an idea that horrifies him. Although renovation would allow him to live there, he cannot afford to set this in motion.

Selling it would make him an impressive sum. Standing in the field, Andy told me how his grandparents had made a success of their croft, his mother had grown up there, much of his childhood was spent there. Selling it 'when my folk were married out of there, and born there, and died there' is an idea that strikes Andy as 'disgusting'. He is happy to have his rented home in the main village and to watch over his family home, if only from afar.

Inheritance is not a straightforward matter in Caithness. Various patterns exist, and often depend on the geographic location of offspring. For instance when my friend George died in his nineties, his children – all out-migrants living elsewhere in Scotland – did not want to return to Lybster to live. The house is sold, in this case to incomers, and the money divided equally three ways between his offspring. Often, I noted that houses were left to the eldest offspring, male or female. Interestingly, between say two siblings where one is in a couple and has offspring of their own while the other sibling is with/without a partner and no children, the latter is often left the house on the basis that they are not yet 'settled'. Certainly this is the case if the latter has not bought their own house, but even with property, they are likely to be first to inherit from the parents: in this respect, the child without children is treated as a dependent. Another pattern is rather more controversial: this is when a person has no offspring and leaves the property to a named member of the extended kin. I have seen this example explode in fierce rows over the relationship with the dead person, claims to closeness and unfairness. This is resolved either by selling the house and sharing the money, or by feuds that can last for decades. More common now than in previous generations, I am told, is the practice of offspring buying the house from the parent while the parent is still living. This seems to be an easier transition than one marked by death and grief, and siblings appear to dispute less over the inheritance of the house.

Sometimes, the inheritance of a family home can have wider community implications. In the village, Hill Cottage belonged to the Wares family. When the grandmother died, the cottage was sold to another local family. The Wares family still live in the neighbouring street. Today, whenever the new owners change Hill Cottage - recently, they fitted new windows and a new kitchen - they consult the Wares family first. This is not for 'permission' but out of respect for their pre-

existing relationship, and their new relationship based on (at different times) living in the same house. The Wares family appreciate this, telling me 'we'd have lost the cottage if incomers bought it'. Keeping it 'in the village' is as close as keeping it in the family. The close link between houses as buildings and houses as relationships is epitomized by stories such as these.

'Settling down': household patterns and intimate relationships

There is a very evident, common notion that 'staying power' is important in personal relationships and is linked to settling down within the village. Undertaking a marriage survey in the village gave an insight into how Lybsterians think about 'settling down'. This term is ultimately tied up with notions of house-buying as a couple (whether married or cohabiting) or reflectively about relationships (such as divorce or widowhood). The census covers 50 households, which in turn covers 10% of the 500-household village. These were selected on my behalf by Dora on the basis that the occupants would be happy to talk to me: they are located on Main Street, at Southend, and Portland Place. I asked about marital status, length of residence, and where people they come from. An overview of village household by marital status looks like this:

Status	No. of households	Percentage
Single	8	16%
Cohabiting	8	16%
Married	17	34%
Divorced	5	10%
Widowed	10	20%
Total	50	100%

The results show that 10% of participants have been divorced - but instances of remarriage are rare. Sadly, widowhood accounts for 20% of the households in the survey. Cohabitation is gaining weight and - at 16% - accounts for the same amount as 'single' households in the village. Marriage in Lybster - at 34% - is still the norm. Cohabitation is considered in real, everyday life exactly the same as legal marriage here, although occasionally older villagers and particularly religious villagers will equate marriage and God. When notion of making 'common law' wives and

husbands legal came up in conversation, villagers supported this. Wives and husbands, rather than being tied by wedding certificates, are considered to be created by their acted-out commitments and staying power. Marion and Billy - together twenty years and parents to four sons - are a good example of this. Marion refuses to marry her partner. Marriage is something he wants 'to show everybody that we didn't just stumble into living together, didn't just happen to get pregnant, we meant it'. His partner simply refutes this: 'we bought the house, we put in all the hard work together, we have the boys. That shows everybody, doesn't it?' The commitment of creating a home and creating children are put in the same sentence. Houses are clearly not just the scene of kinship and relatedness, but also a significant marker of them. This couple are talked about by other couples and by young, unmarried villagers as the epitome of a good relationship. Another couple - married 38 years and together for 43 - are another partnership that young people aspire to follow. When a young woman of 25 told me she felt villagers should marry young, I asked why. She told me: 'So that you have time, a long time, together. Sanny and Elsie had their house built as a wedding present. All the good times we've had in there. Sanny and Elsie make us all want to be married forever'. This communal sense of staying power - documented in the creation of a house - rubs off on younger people. Those who act in promiscuous ways are chided because they are 'wasting settling-down time'.

Houses, relationships, and business: blurring domestic boundaries

Dora is a particular advocate of young villagers forming relationships and cohabiting before, or instead of, marriage. A very traditional, very religious woman, Dora often surprises her community by defending the lifestyle choices of young people. She explained to me that, when she was first married, she was thrown into life as a wife, mother, and businesswoman immediately, and all roles under one roof. Although she is happy, it has been a hard life. Here, attention turns to how business and domesticity find a balance in the same house.

Let's pop into 'e café. So-called because years earlier it had been a general store and cafe, the cafe is now a general store in which all groceries are kept behind the counter. There is no self-service here. The owners, husband and wife, Angy and

Dora, serve the customers from the counter. Large jars of sweets - soor plooms, jelly babies, and lemon sherbets among them - glisten on the shelves, waiting to be weighed into quarters for eager children. Loaves of bread, freshly delivered from the Wick bakery, await the men who make their sandwiches for the bus journey to Dounreay. This is perhaps the most communal, most intimate space in Lybster. It is here that people stop and chat, catching up with each other on a certain, daily basis. All the local news - particularly of birth, death, and marriage - are heard here first, and notices recording such are placed in the shop window. The cafe is normally the first and last stop of a villager's day, particularly because it is open from 7am until 10pm with no breaks. This is impressive considering Dora is 64 and Angy is 67. However, we must look closer at this space. It is not simply a twee, old-fashioned shop where community spirit reigns. This space is also the epitome of blurred boundaries between business and domestic life.



Fig. 6: The blurred boundaries of business and domesticity

When she is not serving in the shop, Dora busies herself with cooking. The house and the shop are separated/connected by a single door which is rarely shut. This means that at any time, she can be called through to help. At about 6pm each evening, Dora sets the kitchen table. She shouts through to Angy that his soup is ready. Angy appears in the doorway and stands to eat his soup and bread on this threshold. He has little choice - the shop door rings to announce the entrance of a

customer every couple of minutes. It takes a few attempts before his soup is completely consumed. Onto main courses, and Dora eats her fish and potatoes at the table. Angy sits - this dish is not easily tackled in the doorway. Customers remain relentless. Dora puts Angy's plate in the oven ready to heat later. Around 10.30 at night, Angy settles down to finish his dinner at the table. At about 11pm, the couple relax on the kitchen sofa to eat dessert together and watch the news on television.

The evening meal ritual is interesting and baffling. Being new to their routine, I wondered if eating separately - or waiting until after work - might be easier. I did not suggest this, because Dora and Angy carry out this ritual like a graceful dance. Every moment, every step so well-rehearsed that a slight change would problematize this work-life balance. I asked Dora if life has always been this sort of dance:

We inherited the house forty years ago from my parents. Of course, the shop came with that. Our boys were just wee and it was important for us to sit down together. This was the only way to manage that. So after forty years, we're used to it. And if we changed it, it would be worse because we'd never see each other. We just work around life. Or live around work. You know what I mean...

This conversation took place late one night, about 2am. Suddenly the telephone rang. Dora shook her head and laughed knowingly: 'it's Elsie'. Sure enough, Elsie (my village mother) was calling because she forgot to buy eggs, milk, and cereal for breakfast. Dora told her to come round and Elsie did her shopping in the middle of the night. This is exactly how life works in this place: life doesn't stop for closing hours, so the shop ultimately becomes an intimate constant in the lives of villagers.

One evening on the way back from Wick, Mira and I were planning to go home and watch a film. We stopped off at the Café just before closing time for a bottle of wine. My diary reads:

We popped into the café on the way home. Angy was giving Mira cheek again. She was giving as good as she got, when he came out with 'aye, ye can choose yer friends but no' yer relations'. These two individuals are not related in the 'traditional' sense (by blood or marriage). They are friends. But their relationship and obligations to each other are familial. It's really reassuring. It's a feeling of closeness and safety when friends are family. It's not fictive, it's not 'friends are like family'. They just *are*.

There are separate tills for separate functions in the Café. One deals with custom from people who are unknown, both incomers and those from outside the village. The other, more interestingly, is worked out on a calculator for villagers who get discounts. Those receiving discount are, without exception, all relatives consanguineal and affinal, and relatives created by friendship, like Mira. Friends who are ‘just’ friends as opposed to having the closeness of relatives are served on the regular till. This is sometimes commented upon by disgruntled full-paying customers but Angy and Dora maintain that they are simply not *femly* (which describes this friendship-as-relatedness). Still, those full-paying customers are not entirely left out, often receiving an extra handful of sweets in their paper bag, or a bottle of wine on a special occasion. Naturally, in a place as closely-knit and intrarelated as Lybster, these discounts are common, which in turn can make profit low. Ironically, with the constant influx of incomers and out-migration of locals, this business has in recent years seen an increase in profit. More than economics though, the way the shop is used points to closeness and distance, domesticity and community life. It is one of the best examples of how fluid Lybster boundaries are.

The shortbread book: community organisation and the ties that bind houses

I find myself being told to kick off my shoes and lie on the sofa in the warmth of the kitchen. I want to assist with the grand production happening before my eyes, but am given a strong black coffee and told to relax. On the work surfaces are laid out 16 trays of freshly-baked shortbread. The sweet, heavy scent envelops me. This is a sweet with a reputation that precedes it: I knew about its delights long before I moved to Lybster. Sixteen rather old, though clean, plastic tubs await the shortbread. Beside the confectionary I notice a small notebook bound in scarlet red leather. It looks very old and Dora is concentrating hard on what she writes inside. I ask her what or who the shortbread is for: 'Everybody'. When I wonder what that could possibly mean, Dora explains that she makes shortbread constantly for every household in the village. Each is given their own plastic tub with 'Dora' written on the lid. Each time they return the tub, she fills it with fresh shortbread: if someone

fails to return their tub, they simply get no shortbread. In the notebook is a weekly update of addresses, tubs returned, fresh shortbread sent out. Tubs are returned and fresh shortbread distributed in the cafe, attached to Dora's house. This is no profit-making venture, it is something that Dora adores. Villagers love her shortbread, and she loves being at the heart of the village. She also provides an abundance of shortbread for a nearby restaurant, where it is served with tea and coffee: for this, Dora takes no money. Her shortbread connects houses and this restaurant and ties them all to her.

The shortbread has become something of a symbol: Dora is viewed by some as the 'mother' and general 'organizer' of the village. From house to house and back again, the journey marked in the shortbread book, this sweetmeat is village kinship in action. By preparing and supplying this sweetmeat, Dora does more than demonstrate care and close relationships. Commensality is closely linked with the creation of identity. Dora reminded me of Carsten's Malay example whereby feeding is a 'vital component in ...participating fullt in social relations (1995b: 223). Dora creates herself here as principal feeder for the community as a whole: she is a popular character who (like in many rural villages) has a central role in all villages decisions, projects, and plans. She is a kind of *de facto* village leader, which other villagers seem to both accept and respect, and by supplying this shortbread she is at once acting in her role as both mother to the village *and* leader. This is also a strategy to maintain her central role in community life. By enabling the sharing of the same food in almost every village household, her capacity to create and control village kinship is crystallized. This depends, though, on the Lybster-ness of the houses, and does not extend to those homes bought by incomers.

Being Lybsterian, owning Lybster houses

The difference between owning one's home and renting it, and the identity issues surrounding the history of one's home (whether it is a new build or has been in the family for centuries) often works as a metaphor for one's Lybster-ness. In very real terms, though, the economics of mortgages and rental create a discrepancy in belonging within the village. For instance, Main Street dwellings tend to have three levels - ground floor, first floor, and an attic floor. These houses typically have four

bedrooms. To rent one of these can hit figures similar to city rentals. For example, my own experience was that I privately rented a Lybster house for a few months with a researcher friend and we paid £350 each. Young villagers are able to rent a room in a house like this rather than an entire dwelling. To buy a house in Lybster is entirely different. One house near the top of the village is on three full levels with five bedrooms, two bathrooms, three reception rooms, a kitchen, a large garden, and an outbuilding - all in immaculate condition. It recently sold for £71,000.

Why discuss house *prices* when considering intimate space? They are absolutely central. Current economics surrounding village homes directly affect notions of belonging. For instance, incomers arriving from an English housing market find it easier to afford a large Victorian house for £71,000 than locals on local incomes do. The average weekly income in Caithness is £304 while the Scottish average is £347. The average house price in Caithness £69,250 while the Scottish average is £89,000.¹¹ Further, locals can find themselves in an economic situation that necessitates local (rather expensive) rental. And it is through this very particular example that villagers explain the massive influx of incomers: they, put simply, are 'e only ones fa can afford til bide here'. When a local man - a successful contractor - built ten houses on the outskirts of the village, some villagers were outraged. In the café one morning, Johannie very audibly exclaimed in front of him: 'What's he doing to us? I mean, he'll just sell for prices our young folk canna afford. So that's ten more English families. It's not that we don't like them. But he's just making it too hard. You shouldn't do that to your own'.

Later, I asked Johannie if this man had ever responded to local concerns. She told me he had a 'business is business' approach. As Johannie told me: 'No wonder we're all English in Caithness now. It's cheaper to be English here than to be a local'. However, looking after one's own wallet before one's community - particularly in terms of the houses in which that community could live - is not very Lybster. Thinking of this notion – putting one's community before own's own economic interest – has been demonstrated in the Café. The epitome of community consciousness, however, occurs in the public house, particularly in a recent event.

¹¹ Caithness and Sutherland HIE Economic Update April 2007

The public house as private space

Alison and Mira, Lybster mother and daughter in their fifties and twenties, own a pub and restaurant outside the village, The Strath. They put it up for sale in early 2008 for £145,000 and received no expressions of interest. An Englishman, who planned to move into the area upon buying a licensed premises, offered them £120,000 which they refused. A ‘white settler’ who has lived in the village for five years wanted to buy The Strath for £115,000 – again, the women refused. When local man Neil told Alison he would be interested but could only afford £100,000 the women accepted immediately. Here, I explore how intimate a space the local pub is, and how being local is crucial (though of course not exclusively so) to using this space.

I am sitting in The Strath one evening, enjoying the atmosphere of singing, playful dancing, and general gaiety. Old and young alike, male and female, all there to ‘get ‘e crack’.¹² Tam is teaching me the words of a song he wrote about Jock, another villager. The door opens and a face none of us recognizes appears. ‘Oh sorry,’ says the stranger ‘I didn’t realize there was a private function on’ and instantly leaves. A few villagers laugh as Tam shouts after him ‘It’s like this every night, man!’ and does not bother to invite the man back inside. This is the crucial point about the pub: the intimate atmosphere, gaiety and crack, the desire to stay private and not truly open up to outsiders. If houses – normally thought of as private domains – are open and inclusive, then paradoxically the Caithness pub – literally public, though in Caithness anything but - is where localism, togetherness, and self-exclusion truly come into play.

I am standing behind the bar one dark, winter afternoon, with villagers shouting out their drinks’ orders faster than I can pour them. Suddenly, the jukebox stops, the lights flicker to a halt. A regular Caithness power cut. As I light candles, villagers revert to their power-cut story-telling ways. After an hour, Dora drives in from Lybster with four platters of sandwiches and snacks. She tells us that the water is also off. Soon, we are informed that the electricity problem will be resolved, but that the area will be without water for three whole days. During this period of time,

¹² ‘Crack’ here is the Highland and far-north equivalent of the Irish ‘craic’ meaning humour, entertainment or more generally the goings-on: ‘what’s the crack?’ means ‘what’s happening?’

nearly every family spends entire days and evenings at The Strath. Bottled water for both drinking and washing - three two-litre bottles per household per day – is allocated and placed on the main road of each affected village. Meanwhile, The Strath supplies bottled water, juices, and hot food for every villager who appears. For three days, this is free of charge. Villagers are doing their cooking and general everyday activities in this space. Babies taking afternoon naps curled up beside the log fire in the lounge, older children fighting furiously over a game of ‘Monopoly’, old men teaching us old fisher songs. In moments like this, the intimacy of the local pub was crystallized.

Pubs in small places not only create a social hub, they provide a constant in the everyday lives of villagers. In Lybster, The Bayview, The Comm, and Portland’s were established in the 19th century and while owners have come and gone, these structures, their names, and the relationships they create, have moved gradually closer to the heart of what it means to be a villager.

On not ‘putting out the sign’

The link between the pub and village identity is particularly evident not just in the use of space and the prominence of gathering there, but significantly in the running of the establishment. Alison and Mira – the mother-daughter partnership of The Strath – have a huge sign to place at the roadside of the main A9 road to attract business. On her shifts, Mira never puts the sign out. The Strath is framed by bright green lighting which is switched on at night for the same purpose. Neither women are keen to switch them on. When I asked Mira why this is the case, she told me that ‘you don’t want people you don’t know’. Pointing out that this was her livelihood and that it made economic sense to attract custom, I asked Mira if they could afford to remain so close-knit. ‘We do it for the folk’ she responded. Here, the pub is not a business venture, it is part of village life that needs to be maintained. Certainly though, the women suffered serious financial losses and were extremely local-minded when they accepted an offer £45,000 below the asking price when they sold The Strath simply because other interested parties ‘weren’t local’. As much as Caithnessians have longer been used to incomers moving to the area, there are some spaces – homes and public houses in particular – where strangers fit extremely

awkwardly into the social setting. This is clear from the use of the menu where more is concealed from the reader than is revealed. Omitted information, for instance, includes food left off the menu but actually available, the extent to which prices differ depending on the customer, and the locations where food is served.

I am working a shift at The Strath one morning when Eric comes in as soon as we open. He asks for ‘the usual’ which I know comprises a full Scottish breakfast. I ask Kirsty, our cook, to prepare ‘the usual for Eric’ and she sets to work. This meal does not feature on the menu. Yet, Eric has it five times a week. Further, he pays just £2 for each meal. He eats it – complete with gluten-free ingredients, especially stocked for him – on the same seat each day. The significance of this example, and many more, highlight the unspoken distance between local and incomer: a meal not advertised, with special ingredients, for next to no price daily, on the same seat is not a service the Strath would ever offer an ‘outsider’ customer. Here in a public house, more than in any other Caithness space, we witness an unspoken tension between locals and incomers.

Jamie is nineteen. He is a labourer, working around Caithness, and living at home with his parents in Latheronwheel. Also living with them is Jamie’s grandmother, Meg. Meg is 94 and unable to leave the house unaided. Jamie provides a lot of her care. Three nights a week, he will take his grandmother out for a drive. He parks outside The Strath and leaves Meg with the engine running, to keep her warm. He orders her a soup, breaded haddock and boiled potatoes, plus some cheesecake. Kirsty tells him she has to serve ‘visitors’ (meaning customers who are not from Caithness) and the food will be ready in twenty-five minutes, so Jamie takes his grandmother for a drive to the harbour. Kirsty calls Jamie’s mobile when the food is prepared. She has packaged it in polystyrene boxes akin to those you find in a takeaway. Jamie hands Kirsty a £10 note. According to the Strath menu, takeaways are strictly not available and this meal should cost £13.90. The reason for this off-menu ordering and discount is simple to the villagers: Meg is an old villager, a core villager. Feeding her is like feeding your own grandmother. Business people in Caithness, although they always take some amount of cash from every customer, tend to look after their own even when it economically

disadvantages the business. Ultimately though, it is true that incomers are excluded from such service and that it may be economically damaging for the business itself.

Tourists we have never before met come into the Strath and we welcome them with tales of Caithness, questions about themselves, and good service. As one of them goes to take a seat, however, there is a general, loud exclamation. Tam rises to his feet: ‘Nah, man! Ye canna sit in Jock’s sey!’ Locals have their own seating positions in the Strath and – even when Jock has not been in for days – unfamiliar individuals are discouraged from using them. As with the knowledge of how to ‘use’ houses, locals have a tacit knowledge of when to arrive and leave, what to say, and where to sit in this ironically private public house.

More than this explicit local-incomer scenario, the pub’s main role is as a setting for the nurturing, maintenance, break-down, and general analysis of familial relationships. In my time working there and in my time socializing there, I witnessed constant situations of villagers arriving to discuss their marital problems, or parenting dilemmas, or celebrating family news. This is the intimate space where family, domestic life spills over into community relationships in very similar ways to the ‘open’ house style in Lybster. Crucial, however, it is clearly also the scene of exclusion and subversive practices to portray this space as cosy and intimate – which it *is* for locals in their particular clique of claiming ‘core’ Lybster belonging and most identity markers – while explicitly shutting people out from what is technically a public space. This is the scene of both togetherness (for locals) and difference (for anyone else). There is something particularly ironic about such exclusion happening in a Dunbeath pub owned by someone from rival village Lybster. The next chapter will explore exactly how this kind of togetherness happens amidst difference and *vice versa* by focusing on that particular Lybster-Dunbeath relationship before widening to discuss intra-regional and inter-regional relationships. From the intricate and oscillating uses of public and private space, we move to the intricate and oscillating constructions of selves and others.

3.
Togetherness and difference:
Relationships between communities, villages, and regions

‘We’re aa’ da same here – but different too’
(Cohen 1989: 449)

‘Are you crazy, man? It was 3-2 to us!’ Angy exclaimed.
‘And I’m tellin’ you, man! That last one was offside!’ Jock laughed.

Walking into the pub one Saturday evening, I guessed the friends were debating today’s football results. I brought their pints to them and joined in the chat, asking ‘was Wick playing?’ and assuming these Highland League aficionados were referring to the Caithness team. ‘No, lass, it’s the Mackay Cup final – Jock thinks Dunbeath won!’ Angy shouts. I realise the men are animatedly discussing a football match that occurred in 1921. The words ‘Mackay Cup’ are shorthand whenever anyone questions the Lybster-Dunbeath rivalry. Events that crystallize the problematic inter-village relationship are useful tools; without them, no one can pinpoint the roots of this rivalry or the direction of its future. To situate it in decades-old football stories like this is to cement it in the minds and behaviour of the respective villagers. The narrative does not depend on time and the passage of time does not affect its power.

§

‘And look who’s arrived on our beautiful beach ...
...Those rascals and thieves from far-off Dunbeath!’

This rhyme was part of the Lybster Children’s Pirate Show on Silver Darlings Day in June 2006.¹³ The children – acting out Lybster’s historical relationship with the sea – were playfully pointing out the relationship between Lybster and Dunbeath. By

¹³ Silver Darlings Day at Lybster Harbour is an annual celebration of Lybster’s herring heritage. Set against a backdrop of Neil Gunn’s famed local novel *The Silver Darlings*, it is a day of plays, performances, and demonstrations in the art of fishing.

referring to the rival village as ‘far-off’ they are underlining not geography (for it is just eight miles south) but identity distance. By creating the theatrical ‘baddie’ and calling it Dunbeath, the Lybsterians are employing their closest, most prominent other, without whom they would have to tell an altogether different story about their own senses of self.

§

‘Kim! Write this doon!’ my Lybster father, Sanny, cries out in the pub.

‘Dunbeath born, Dunbeath bred, strong in the arm, weak in the head!’

I write and wonder why Sanny is laughing loudly, like everyone else in the room.

‘Kim, it’s no’ really that at all!’ Sanny cries with laughter. ‘It’s no’ Dunbeath ye say, it’s Lybster. It’s about us. Mind you, it should be about them!’

I feel embarrassed at falling for his trick, but realise that in teasing me, Sanny has revealed much about the process of telling about each other. The rhyme is popular in Dunbeath, and I have heard villagers in their eighties recount it from their own childhoods decades earlier. No one remembers who made it up, but it has been passed down the generations. In attempting to make me record the incorrect/opposite version of the rhyme, Sanny has tried to transform the power of the statement of otherness and to claim it as his own.

David McCrone has argued that ‘the other is more about similarity than about difference’ (2001). Furthermore, Jonathan Hearn suggests that identities are ‘often constructed in opposition to a particularly significant other’ (2000: 3). McCrone and Hearn are both referring to the English as the predominant ‘other’ to the Scottish self. Here, I deal with these notions on the level of localized identity to demonstrate that these are appropriate, applicable concepts and to illuminate Bourdieu’s claim that to understand national identity we must first focus on the small perceptions of everyday life (1984). Before dealing with the national, we must tackle individual, village, inter-village, and inter-regional relationships and self-making. Such intensity of feeling between neighbouring and/or rival villages is not new to anthropology: Pitt-Rivers pointed out for the people of the Sierra in Andalucia that, while outsiders view geographically-close neighbours as pairs simply because of that geography, villagers themselves actually loathed those close-by more than anyone

else. Villages are ‘commonly linked in pairs, each one, supposedly, hating its rival above all others.’ (1971: 11) Meanwhile, Evans-Pritchard noted of the Nuer that the segmentary structure of society brought with it an intensity of feeling, a strong solidarity against other villages (1972: 34). Moreover, as an aside, what we encounter here is very similar to Freud’s notion of the ‘narcissicism of minor difference’, whereby one rejects someone close and similar as being strange and hostile ([1918], cited in Gay 1995). This he terms a ‘taboo of personal isolation’, a fight against solidarity and similarity in order to promote one’s own distinctive identity. Caithness, as is being explored, epitomizes this notions. In all of these examples, processes of othering and notions of similarity in that other, are crucial.

In Caithness, otherness is the backbone of selfhood, and intensely localized identities reign supreme, this could not be more apt. This chapter explores how different kinds of Caithnessians relate to one another, how accents, characteristics, and relationships show similarities and identity-building difference. While in much Scottish sociological research the ‘significant other’ takes the form of ‘the English’, in this rural community the ‘significant other’ is the neighbouring village, town, and region. Intraregional competitiveness, conflict, dependence, intermarriage, and binding ties feature here. By considering village-village, town-town, village-town, and regional neighbour interactions, I highlight how minor difference has a major impact on the way villagers present themselves, navigate their social worlds, and find a reassurance in their sense of rootedness. This chapter provides close ethnographic material on the ways in which small (village) difference can create concepts of identity and relatedness more abiding and deep than those large (national) notions of belonging which receive most attention in Scottish identity research.

The complexities of closeness

The rivalry that exists between these two Caithness villages comes from two things: the problem of closeness in small places, and an imagined hierarchy: Lybsterians are often dismayed that ‘Dunbeathers try to be better than us’, while Dunbeathers claim ‘the Lybster lot wish they were like us’. With just eight miles and two smaller hamlets (Latheron and Latheronwheel) between them, Lybster and Dunbeath often rely on playful rhymes and joking passed down the generations: Dunbeathers tease

with ‘Lybster born, Lybster bred, strong in the arm, weak in the head’ while Lybsterians insist in a sing-song manner that ‘Dunbeath men only fancy Lybster lassagies...they’re so neat, so dainty’. This banter is so constant that any real rivalry or basis for their seemingly opposed relationship is almost irrelevant.

In both its towns and its villages, Caithness consists of individuals and communities identifying themselves through others who are very much ‘nearly we’, others who are intimately close. In this chapter, I explore how difference is as much to do with similarity as with otherness. Overall, I use ethnographic vignettes and archives to demonstrate how oft-used terms of dualism like ‘local’ and ‘incomer’, ‘self’ and ‘other’ entirely miss the point of Caithness belonging.

Crucially, it is important to understand the symbolism behind this creation of ‘otherness’. While individuals suggest generic mockery such as Lybsterians are ‘weak in the head’ or that Dunbeathers ‘don’t know soap’, the significance lies in knowing how to respond to the signal. While this seems like a straightforward case of us/them (implying ‘we are strong in the head’, ‘we wash’), the human world is ‘an intersubjective world, lying out there between the “you-ness” of you and the “me-ness” of me’ (Richardson 2003: 75). In short, the relationships, knowledge, closeness, and difference that such exclamations communicate have to be understood by both sides in order to have the desired effect. That desired effect is to bound one’s identity and space, but such exclamations are loaded with historical closeness and encounters and thus reveal relationships rather than rivals. This language is ritualistic in its use: each time the words are the same; they would never be directed at other communities, and there is a given response. This is a game with rules that Lybsterians and Dunbeathers stick to. As such, potential for offence is ideally removed, and the words actually indicate a bond between the villages that they do not share with other parts of Caithness.

This relationship – a pendulum of co-dependency and separation – is crystallized in traceable moments, especially ritual moments of village life. The most enduring ritual between Lybster and Dunbeath is a legendary football match, the Mackay Cup. The Mackay Cup was founded in 1921 for Latheron Parish, and played amongst village teams between Bruan and Berriedale. The first game was played in April 1921 at the Black Park in Lybster between Lybster and Dunbeath.

Lybster won 3-2. The game was so animated, the win so significantly celebrated, that the Mackay Cup was soon only played for by these two teams. This event is no longer played but has become so memorable because it finally gave the two villages a definite focus, a reference point for their everyday rivalry. As the opening conversation of this chapter demonstrates – 85 years after the fact – Dunbeathers were still at pains to convince me that this particular winning goal was offside.

While such separations – football matches and children’s rhymes – may seem playful, they are the most significant ways of communicating what is a complex relationship. To explore reasons why Dunbeathers and Lybsterians feel this way about each other, it is useful to consider the structures of the villages. As we have already journeyed through Lybster, an introduction to Dunbeath is fitting here.

Understanding distinctions: why Lybster is not Dunbeath

Dunbeath is an estate village, structured and maintained around Dunbeath Castle, which has a laird in permanent residence. The main road north, the A9, technically cuts through Dunbeath, but the village itself is far lower, below the old bridge, accessed by two small roads that branch off this busy road. It is important to note the sense of separation and factions that this busy, fast, cross-cutting road creates with its shockingly high bridge shadowing the main body of the village. Dunbeath is also in a strath (a wide river valley that is quite shallow), which gives it many smaller fragments and a clearer Gaelic history than the common Norse experience. It seemed whenever I went searching for a particular Dunbeather, they would be miles along the strath in Tutnaguil or Cnoc na Maranaich. Here we find our first distinction: Gaelic. While Caithness’s difference from Gaelic culture is explored in chapter 8, here it is important to stress that historically Dunbeath had definite Gaelic traces and inhabitants while Lybster was on the boundary line of Gaelic culture and experienced only rare instances of Gaelic use. As home to the novelist Neil M. Gunn whose every work deals with migration, a push-pull relationship to Caithness, the *lad o’ pairts* and the anxious mother, Dunbeath is closer to the imagination of a Kailyard or *Gaidhealtachd* myth than other parts of Caithness, particularly Lybster. Significantly different to Lybster, the village does not have a centre *per se*. It has a shop on the other side of the A9, but this is not the gathering place that the Lybster

shop has become. This lack of a centre is responsible for the role of the pub, the Strath, which is perched right on the A9. To come here, villagers face a long walk, and the majority of them do this daily. This is where village life happens. Villagers create their togetherness here. Dunbeathers themselves told me that this togetherness and community spirit had nowhere to develop until Lybsterians opened the pub. Once more, difference is a key facet of community togetherness.

The village housing has its own fragmented structure: villagers either live in the Portormin, Knockglass, or Achorn areas of Dunbeath: these are on opposite sides of the main road, one uphill, the other down. This kind of structural separation makes for certain 'groupings' of Dunbeathers: young families tend to live at Knockglass while older people, or those working at the harbour live at Portormin. The harbour is 'removed' from the village, less constitutive of everyday kinship and belonging than its neighbour in Lybster. Achorn (and also cottages on the Dunbeath estate) is mainly home to those villagers who work at the castle.

One aspect of village life that is often marked out as accentuating the Lybster-Dunbeath distance is the fact that Dunbeath has an estate and a laird, it has an evident hierarchy. I know of at least eight Dunbeathers who live and/or work on the estate with their families, creating another community within the Dunbeath community itself. The sense of camaraderie, of sticking together when the work is extremely tough and the pay very low through the desire of an incoming laird, creates a feeling in the village that they are harder done by than Lybsterians, that they show more signs of community and hard work. One Dunbeath local, an estate worker in his thirties called Mack was very sceptical about my research: 'so, you don't have a real job? You just hang around here, and you write stuff? No wonder you live in Lybster, they're work-shy too.' Later, we became good friends and Mack told me:

Dunbeath's not the same these days. It's easy for the Lybster lot, I know the fishing's gone, but they've still got their wee boaties and their money. They're still in control. But we have to jump to every whim of this arrogant mannie. He's loaded so he just strides about, shouting orders at us. It's just not the same anymore.

Lybster – by virtue of its planned village construction – has a centre to it, the wide main street that leads directly to the heart (the harbour). Certainly, Lybster has divisions too: Norland, ‘The Bronx’, Southend, Hillhead, Top o’ the Road are all residential areas with different populations and characteristics. Importantly though, they are physically close which creates encounters and relationships that are distanced in Dunbeath. Spaces like the school and the church create significant differences between these communities – Lybster primary has 109 pupils while Dunbeath has 11. Lybster has two churches, at one time four, while Dunbeath has none. Dunbeath does have the central focus of the Castle estate, but this is almost negative as no villager enjoys the restraints of working or living on the estate. Lybster, with its fishing industry so radically different since the 1960s, does not have this ‘security’, but enjoys a sense of freedom. These small differences are crucial in understanding how the two groups of villagers deal with each other. While Lybster claims that Dunbeath has no sense of community, it retorts that Lybster has too much crime. Sixteen year old Laila – a Dunbeather - runs excitedly into the hall to tell me her news. She is dating an older teenager from Lybster. Known only by his nickname, this boy has a reputation for criminal activity, fighting, and possessing weapons. The fact that Laila’s mother is worried is not surprising. The surprising thing is that ‘she doesn’t want me seeing a boygie fae Lybster. Says they’re a bad lot’. This kind of generalised judgment is frequent in such small places: it does not take much, or long, to gain a reputation on behalf of your village and keep it forever.

Jock: an example of inter-village cooperation

Dunbeathers in return have always been perceived as violent by Lybsterians. According to Angy, many a Mackay Cup game escalated into physical fighting. The most memorable example of this is perhaps the time a Dunbeath goalkeeper was so incensed by a Lybster goal that he punched the referee in the face. Years later, his grandsons are plagued by Lybsterians claiming they are from rough *aishan* (stock, family, see chapter four). Characters from neighbouring places are not perceived merely as individuals: they are representations of, and indeed embodiments of, the ‘other’ village.

One of the most popular characters I met in Latheron parish was Jock. Aged 65, he has a complicated relationship with villagers in both Lybster and Dunbeath. On the one hand, they protect him and care for him: he is illiterate and has slight learning difficulties. He is warm-hearted, funny, and vibrant. On the other, he is a 'raging' alcoholic who spends his benefits money before he receives it, pesters villagers for food and money, and causes disruption to any room he enters. One of Jock's most infuriating habits is to travel from Dunbeath to Lybster by bus. Bored of the Dunbeath pub and highly intoxicated, he tries his luck in the Lybster hotel bars. With enough loose change in his pocket, he buys a single ticket to Lybster and props himself up at the Comm bar. From there, he instructs other villagers to buy him drinks. No one complains, everyone knows that Jock can't afford his own alcohol. By the end of the night, everyone in Lybster has gone home and Jock is in the middle of the village with no money and no way of getting home. He staggers around, falling into things, singing loudly. Johannie opens her door, and although reluctant, offers Jock a bed for the night. Soon, though, he is shouting and cursing at her and the whole village. He starts off to stagger the eight miles to Dunbeath before someone gives him a lift. This is draining for the villagers, as expensive and disruptive nights are in store whenever Jock appears.

After a long period of time, Jock has been issued with an anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) which means he is not allowed entry to Lybster. No one is entirely sure of its rules or who is responsible for monitoring Jock's movements, but he now simply stays in Dunbeath every day and causes the same disruption there. The complexity arises when we realise that Jock is actually from Lybster and moved to Dunbeath thirty years ago when he was allocated a council house there. Neither village claims him as its own: 'He's fae Lybster!', 'he's fae Dunbeath!' respectively. Both have to deal with caring for him and being disturbed by him. Ironically enough, Jock is a glue that holds these two places together.

'My whole life, I thought it existed' : imagined rivalries and real togetherness

Recently, Alison bought a business in Dunbeath and also ran as Dunbeath councillor. The notion of a Lybsterian offering to represent the rival village was completely unheard of, and Dunbeathers were initially suspicious:

I opened a pub and ran for e coouncil in wur "rival" village. They were, lek, "who e hell div ye think ye are?". But they got past "Lybster" and got til ken me, and e welcome wis chuist amazan, lek. I didna expect hid wi wur history, but hid's grand. Hid's lek I got in a'tween e Lybster-Dunbeath stuff. Fan I got in, I saw that none o' wur rivalry actually exists. My whole life, I thought hid existed. And noo? Couldna find hid. They work right hard and ken how til hev a laugh.

In a way, her new encounters with this different kind of Caithness village bring her closer to a place she thought of as impenetrable. On not finding the rivalry she always 'thought' existed, this woman demonstrates how separate two villages just eight miles apart can actually be: 'I never kent any Dunbeathers til I worked there. Chuist knew e faces, lek'.

The loss and remembrance of local young people has recently had an impact on these two communities. During my fieldwork, three locals in their early twenties were killed in road accidents. As a memorial, Dunbeath and Lybster come together to raise funds for the hospitals which tried to save these lives, for the bereaved families, and for the wider community. One of the most recent events I attended was a fancy-dress fun day and badminton tournament. Badminton is an extremely popular sport in Caithness and in tournaments Dunbeathers and Lybsterians rarely compete against each other: rather, they form teams. The hall was filled with men of all ages all dressed as pink fairies and women in fancy dress creations while local characters took a turn on stage to serenade the crowd with songs they had written themselves. The lyrics were either humorous, in memory of the young people who died, or about people and events from nearby. This served to get everyone smiling and, as the competition heated up, it was one of the most energetic and atmospheric days I spent in Caithness. Caught in a moment like this, it is clear how close these people are, and how their mockery and struggle over each other is a way simply of defining very fine-tuned identity differences between them. Behind this is a community spirit

which – mostly, but not always – ensures that Dunbeathers and Lybsterians are always there for one another. As Angy put it:

Say there's a fight, right? And it's Lybster against Dunbeath. I'm like, get to hell, we'll beat you Dunbeathers, no bother! And say there's a fight and it's Wick against Dunbeath. I'll go up and help out the Dunbeather. Obviously.

To outsiders, there is nothing 'obvious' about this complex relationship. However, the heart of the Dunbeath-Lybster relationship is exactly that: ever-changing, contradictory, and contextual. All the villagers enjoy the playfulness of this rivalry.

Four kinds of Caithness

The Lybster-Dunbeath relationship is the best example of the 'narcissism of minor difference': villagers are at such pains to distinguish their identity that they find other Caithness places more problematic to their senses of self and belonging than they find, say, English incomers. When identities are so close and so similar, individuals depend on the flaws of the other and the distinctiveness of the self to figure out their place in the world. In Caithness as a whole, the region is split into four very distinctive areas with their own accents, behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions. These areas resemble villages writ large in local understandings. Marelle, a Lybsterian in her twenties, described them to me in terms of dialect:

Thurso: 'an anglicised accent, and a culture to match'.

North East: 'a staccato accent, the area most wary of incomers'.

Wick: 'a harsher accent, with less expectations of people but with an air of superiority, an air of being "most" local'.

South East: 'Softer accent, where you see Caithness belonging most clearly'.

While it would be inaccurate to simply equate accent with identity, the former are nevertheless used by so-called 'locals' and 'incomers' to navigate their way around Caithness life. Ali associates difference – as others do – with dialect:

The various dialects aren't just because of the area, they sort of point out characteristics too. So you've got Thurso – it's quite an anglicised accent,

something not quite Caithness about it. And in a way, the culture there's the same. There's something you can't quite penetrate in Thurso. Guess that's Dounreay. Then there's the North East. I always think of that as serious Caithness, it's a staccato accent they have, more like an Island accent, it's the hardest one to understand when you move here. And it's the hardest place to be an incomer. They – like up in John O'Groats – they don't really have incomers, and out of all Caithness, they seem the most wary of new people. The next one I can think of is Wick. It's quite a sharp accent, it really sets them apart, you recognise a Wicker immediately by their dialect. They have less expectations of people, they are kinder, but they have a slight air of superiority. The South East has a softer accent. I think you'll really see the Caithness community at its closest there. When I moved from London to Thurso, it wasn't the huge change I thought it would be. When I moved from Thurso to Lybster, it was the biggest culture shock of my life.

Listening to her ideas, I appreciated her point, but felt concerned that so much weight was placed on accent as an identity marker. What I am interested in, however, is the way individuals attribute characteristics to certain dialects. The differences within Caithness itself are often shaped by the encounters with others. For instance, this woman is an incomer. In navigating her way around her new region, she depended on dialects to help her figure out the different ways of being Caithnessian. Sander, a Wicker in his twenties, explained the differences like this:

Caithness doesna work as one word. We hev loads o' communities up here and we were brought up til ken what wis what. Fowk in Groats are stuck in a time warp and chuiest fecht wi' themsels. In Keiss they think they're far mair modern than the rest o' us. Fowk in Papigoe are chuiest tink. E bonniest lassies are in Lybster, but they're a bittie feel [daft] doon there. Aye, and e Weekers are chuiest magic...write that! Ye ken yersel, chuiest wee things like that, ye ken e pleices til bother wi', and which fowk to steer clear o'. Hid willna work til try and chuiest talk about 'Caithness', hid's loads o' wee different communities.

Thinking of the ways in which Caithnessians differentiate themselves from others, I was always aware of the specific terminology employed by locals:

Caithnessian: this is used to identify all locals in and from Caithness. It is often employed in self-identifying conversation when side-stepping national identity. Normally, people will use a more localised term (e.g. 'Dunbeather').

Gollach: The term Caithnessians prefer to use for themselves as individuals and as a collective.

Cattach: The Sutherland native, the Gollach's opposite number. I both self-identify and am categorized by Caithnessians as a Cattach.

Weeker: native of Wick, normally preceded by 'Dirty' – from dirty meaning hard-working, as opposed to unclean.

Teanabowlie: native of Thurso. Coined by Weekers, this term is derogatory. It is said that the old traveller folk of Caithness were too poor to own cups and instead drank tea from clay bowls (Tea-in-a-Bowl). The implicit message here is that Weekers see Thursonians as poverty-stricken travellers in a most negative sense.

Atomic: An incomer who specifically arrived to work at Dounreay

Back-Sider/Pulteneytooner: native of Upper Pulteneytown. Part of Wick since 1902, the area maintains its distinction: a Pulteneytooner is anything but a Weeker.

Groatser: this is the Caithness equivalent of calling someone a 'teuchter'. It implies an insular mind-set, a rural, stuck-in-time lifestyle. Anyone from near John O'Groats is referred to this way.

The notion that Caithness is made up of lots of different communities may not seem surprising. The focus in Caithness on that difference is however constitutive of belonging: knowing the 'characteristics' of other parts of the region, knowing how to handle the 'natives' despite the fact they are all still Caithnessian, is an essential part of fitting it to Caithness life.

When I first arrived in Caithness, Cathie estimated that 'within a month' I would know the difference between Lybster, Latheronwheel, Latheron, and

Dunbeath accents. Considering that all four places have a total of eight miles between them, I was not so sure. ‘Dunbeathers say “fit” and we say “what”, and they’ve got this lilt that’s different to ours’ she explained. People from Latheronwheel pronounce it ‘Leythranfeel’, and those in Latheron have ‘less of a Caithness twang’, more of a generic Highland dialect. While I trusted Cathie’s judgment, I was more certain that I – as an outsider – would never notice these precise markers of localized identity. However, in everyday life, they soon became evident, and I could guess a villager’s location in a sentence or two. The reasons behind the differences might be explained by the fact that Latheron parish (of which all of these places are part) was cross-cut by a boundary line of Gaelic. Significantly, in Dunbeath especially, the Caithness accent on the word ‘to’ (*til*) is almost non-existent. *Til* comes directly from the Old Norse word for ‘to’: its absence in Dunbeath hints at a Gaelic past. The further north one goes – i.e. in most of Caithness - the less Gaelic is apparent. From Lybster where, for instance, ‘the harbour’ is ‘e harbour’, to Wick where it becomes ‘ai herbour’, and to Thurso where it becomes ‘the harbour’. This is not just a story of how language is shaped by migration processes, but of identity perception: if a Wicker pronounces ‘the’ as ‘e’ as opposed to ‘ai’, he will likely be teased for talking ‘like a Coaster’.

Playing identity games: Caithness and Sutherland

I became part of the naming and placing negotiation myself when I moved to Lybster. Initially I was a researcher from Edinburgh, and people were exceptionally warm and welcoming. There was an awareness on both sides, however, that I was being held at arm’s length. When villagers realised that I was closer to them in terms of identity and belonging than they initially thought, the dynamics of my relationships radically changed. I am from their neighbouring rival/ally region, Sutherland, and the dynamics of our similarity and difference taught me much about memory and forgetting in this place.

In everyday life, I was already accustomed to the local dialect (which can be difficult to comprehend for outsiders), kinship patterns, and community life. I constantly, unwittingly, flagged up both my similarity and difference. For example, the word ‘trosk’ is used in both places to mean ‘fool’. Further, the term ‘bonnie and

...’ meaning ‘very’ (‘bonnie and good’, ‘bonnie and stupid’, ‘bonnie and tasty’) is customary in both places. Close similarities exist but differences are important: ‘boy’ in Caithness is pronounced as ‘boyagie’ and in Sutherland as ‘boyanie’. ‘Girl’ is ‘lassagie’ in Caithness, and ‘laskie’ in Sutherland. I was forever pronouncing these words in Sutherland fashion. So near and yet so far. I was at once an insider and an outsider, and this notion of togetherness in difference rang true on a personal level, as well as part of my research. The following sums up the neighbourly, dependent, similar, different, playful, competitive, awkward relationship between these two regions.

It’s a Saturday night, a couple of weeks after I moved here. Tommy offers to buy me a drink at the Bayview. George comes in and asks the Highland League scores. I reply nonchalantly ‘we lost to Clach’. Tommy almost leaps off his seat laughing: “‘We?’” Brora Rangers, you mean? Kim, are you a Cattach?’ I am in the land of the Scorries, the fervent supporters of Wick Academy, Brora Rangers’ nemesis in Highland League football. More than that, a ‘Cattach’ represents both/either a Brora Rangers supporter and a native of Caithness’ neighbouring region/joking rival, Sutherland. I am both. So in one fell swoop, I’ve revealed two reasons for them not to like me.

This jovial fieldnote is from my early days of research. To contextualise, Brora Rangers (The Cattachs) and Wick Academy (The Scorries) are the only two far-north football teams in the Highland League: your allegiance tells much about you and can be an abbreviated way of navigating your way around Caithness and Sutherland life.¹⁴ A good Lybster friend of mine was a key player in both Wick Academy and Brora Rangers, and claimed that in his day, Brora was the better team: points and goals aside, though, they remained ‘the Cattachs’, and after he returned to Wick Academy, the same friend revealed that there was never a sweeter goal scored than his winner against Brora. This kind of analogy is actually concealing a historical relationship of closeness and rivalry between the two places.

¹⁴ Highland League legends, the late John Sutherland (my uncle), the late Donald Mackay (my cousin), and my dear friend Alec Thompson (Wick Academy) deserve special mention for their roles in this relationship, and their notable skills on the pitch.

‘Are ye a Mackay?’ Ramsay asks me in the pub as I pour his pint.

‘No! Why?’ I laugh.

‘If you’re from Sutherland, we call you a Mackay’.

‘Even if it’s not my name? My family’s Sutherland!’

‘Aye, but the Mackays from Sutherland came to Wick in 1316, I think. Razed Wick to the ground. Bad buggers. So you’re all Mackays, it’s no’ really your name, you’re just from Sutherland and you’re bad buggers’.

‘Sorry, Ramsay’ I mutter, as though I had been there, torch in hand, in 1316.

I had never heard the people of my homeland referred to as ‘Mackays’ and was staggered to realize that ‘our’ reputation in the north went deeper in the collective Caithness psyche than Highland League football. Conveniently enough, this 14th Century event has been forgotten by Sutherland people. Lingering long in Caithness, it is employed still. After my chat with Ramsay, I was finally aware that a Caithnessian jokingly referring to a ‘Mackay trosk’ was talking about someone foolish from Sutherland as opposed to a Mackay family member. Only once did I witness a physical fight on the basis of a man’s Mackay-ness, but it changed my perception of the regional relationship for good. More than this, it made me realize that while Sutherland people have, since the Clearances, long been engaged in a process of collective forgetting (see Masson 2007), Caithnessian memory trickles and lingers through the generations.

Collective memory and the fight to forget: the lingering Gaelic myth

One group who have particularly been othered by virtue of Caithness collective memory are those who arrived long ago and never settled, who changed the landscape but never belonged, and who linger in the memory still, once a part of Caithness society and yet wholly transient. They are the Gaels. Currently embroiled in a heated fight for their identity, Caithnessians struggle to shake off the memory of this problematic in-migration, tension, and difference.¹⁵ For centuries in Caithness, Gaelic has been regarded as the language and identity of *others*.

¹⁵ The contemporary Gaelic problem in Caithness is fully explored in chapter 8.

Certainly, Gaelic has had some presence in Caithness: the hinterland place names, some coastal influences, some surnames remain. It would be myopic to ignore its place in the region, but to overemphasize its importance is to miss exactly what Gaelic means to Caithnessians. It is an encounter of their past: it was the language of incomers, brought by Clearance refugees, and it was never incorporated as in any way indigenous. I was informed by Caithnessians that Gaelic communities, those refugees from places like Melvich on the north coast, were very quickly transformed into English-speaking ones. Elsie explained that this was mainly facilitated by marriage: Gaelic-speaking young women were married to Caithnessian men and were required to learn English, as was the case with Elsie's great-grandmother. Children from the *Gaidhealtachd* were taught English at school, and had a decreasing amount of Gaelic in the household. Gaelic, in Caithness, mainly died with the generation which brought it. Furthermore, Caithnessians have a particularly bitter memory surrounding their encounters with the Gaelic community. The contemporary struggle with Gaelic is discussed in chapter 8.

The most significant acted-upon divide between Gaelic and non-Gaelic – the War of the Orange- occurred in Wick in 1859. It remains a potent collective 'memory' in Caithness today. As Conner points out:

This has nothing to do with King Billy or any Order, but simply refers to the fruit itself. It was a manifestation of the tensions that quite inevitably blew up between the locals of Wick and Pulteneytown and the greatly more numerous temporary immigrants who crowded into town during the fishing season.¹⁶ (n.d.: 2)

In the Wick herring industry, it was customary for the skipper and one crew member to be local, and the rest Gaelic-speaking men who travelled from the west to work. The sheer number of seasonal arrivals is explained by the Clearances, which were at their height at the time of the War of the Orange. During the herring season, from June through the summer months, the population of Wick rose overnight from 6,000 to 15,000. Each Saturday night, the visitors would gather in their hundreds to stroll through the streets of Wick.

¹⁶ Conner, D (n.d.) *Wick including Pulteneytown*. Unpublished pamphlet, private collection of a Lybster villager.

The outstanding feature of the Saturday night stroll by the Highlanders¹⁷ was the complete absence of trouble from one year to the next and their relationship with the local population was of the highest order (Sutherland, n.d.: 6).

However, August 27, 1859 changed this relationship. It created a moment that marked Caithness non-Gaelic identity so strongly as to remain an identity marker today. That night, during the customary stroll, a young Lewis man bought an orange in Market Square. He fell and the orange rolled to the feet of a local Pulteneytown¹⁸ man who refused to return it. The Highlander attacked the Pulteneytownner then cried out in Gaelic for help. His drunken friend punched the Pulteneytownner and within minutes, fighting had exploded between three hundred men. The police arrested the Lewis man who threw the first punch. Seeing this as an injustice to their group, his friends took the trouble as far as Broadhaven, two miles outside Wick. The violence continued for days, becoming serious when stabbings occurred.

After a week, a council of war was held in Pulteneytown. Representatives of the Caithness newspapers the *John O’Groat Journal* and the *Northern Ensign* were banned. The newspapers were blamed for keeping the upset alive. Long after the Highlanders and locals had forgotten the tension, the War of the Orange was debated by the *Groat* and the *Ensign*. The *Groat* argued that showing any tolerance of Highlanders demonstrated Caithness weakness because greater severity in the handling of visitors had long been needed. The *Ensign* insisted that tolerance should be paramount because the visitors had never caused trouble. Following the lengthy trial, it was found that the locals clearly paid attention to the *Groat*: ‘as events turned out, *none* of those who were stabbed had in any way been involved in any fighting. They were attacked just because they were speaking Gaelic’ (Sutherland, n.d.)

It is important to note here that Caithness has had an awkward history with the Gaelic people and their language. In the 18th Century by virtue of the Sutherland Clearances, a massive influx of incomers arrived on the Caithness coast to seek refuge in the fishing ports having been evicted from their crofting lifestyles. Though these Gaelic Highlanders lived in Caithness, married Caithnessians, and had

¹⁷ Note here that ‘Highlanders’ refers to the visitors: Caithnessians do not customarily identify themselves as ‘Highland’

¹⁸ At this point it is important to note that Wick and Pulteneytown were not united until 1902.

Caithness offspring, the language and culture was always exclusive to them. Gaelic language and culture first died with the first generation migrants, and disappeared when its remaining population migrated elsewhere. Census statistics show Gaelic at its height in Caithness around the time of Clearance migration, dropping steadily through the decades:¹⁹

Year	Population	Gaelic speakers (age 3+)
1881	38,868	3,422
1891	37,177	4,144
1901	33,870	2,893
1911	32,010	1,685
1921	28,285	1,003
1931	25,056	633
1951	22,710	270
1961	27,370	233

This demonstrates a generational factor in the Gaelic-speaking population, as its decline matches their lifespan. There were, of course, local Caithness individuals caught on the cusp of this: take for instance, the little boy aged four in the 1901 Census who can speak some Gaelic and who, aged 14 in 1911, speaks exclusively English. A Lybster friend explained to me that, decades later, she undertook the 1981 Census and found just two Gaelic speakers: one, a man in his nineties originally from Sutherland, and a woman in her sixties who was an incomer from Skye. I have selected 1961 as the last entry to highlight that when Caithness population saw a post-Dounreay increase, it was in no way matched by an increase in Gaelic. Regardless of the population's fluctuation, Gaelic has steadily decreased. These transient instances of Gaelic are at the forefront of Caithnessian narratives which claim absolute identity difference from the Gaelic culture.

Latheron Parish's situation as a language border is perhaps most evident in place names: locations around Lybster give the appearance of being as Gaelic as they are Norse. In fact, some place names look like a combination of the two. For instance, 'Latheron' comes from 'Latharan', 'Lybster' from 'Leobost', and 'Dunbeath' from 'Dun Beithe': all supposedly Gaelic, but with more historic Norse

¹⁹ Census results taken from Duwe's 2005 analysis of Gaelic in Caithness and Sutherland

origin than people from outside the region might realise.²⁰ Crucially, Caithness in the 18th Century was explicitly divided from the Highlands through its non-Gaelic speaking patterns. Although these regions have always been separate and different, the Gaelic appearance in Caithness reminded locals that they were certainly not Highland, as Hugh was quick to remind me. Albeit in the Highland-Lowland Gaelic context, Chapman's analysis is apt, pointing out 'the polarization of metaphorical dualities along an axis between the two societies as represented by their languages' (1978: 98).

The Parish embodies this dichotomy as it formed the dividing line between areas of Caithness with hints of Gaelic and areas of Caithness without. In parts of the Parish that were mainly populated by Gaelic-speaking incomers, the language was one with connotations of shame and difference. Rev. Andrew Sutherland wrote in the 18th Century that:

They [the Gaelic speakers] are of the lower classes. The educated classes of Latheron call these Gaels 'the Irish' and they are said to have Catholic sympathies. It is spoken only in the household. (cited in Smith 1988: page 58)

The exclusive household use demonstrates that to speak Gaelic was not in keeping with Caithness life. At school, the Gaelic children were taught in English, and they were taught – in order to preserve the family's reputation and avoid being classed as lowly – to leave their roots at home.

Half in, half out

Another group who were always historically present in Caithness in a transient way are the once-travelling families, known commonly in the region as 'Tinklers'. Historically, these were others who stayed without incorporation, who left and then returned, who partially claimed Caithnessian identity and yet felt excluded from much of Caithness social life. In terms of 'local' and 'incomer', of 'self' and 'other', it is easy to fall into the trap of binary opposition. Who belongs and how? When we see, in the examples above, that even simply being 'Caithnessian' or 'local' is a notion of multiple parts, we must read further between the lines. What then of those

²⁰ *The Book of Lybster* is particularly helpful in pointing out that so-called 'Gaelic' names are arguably bastardization forms of original Norse terminology.

Caithnessians born and bred whose identity is in flux by virtue of their historical familial movement? To understand the blurred boundaries of Caithness, we should take note of those who are half in and half out of the population.

In a 1972 volume, *The Book of Caithness*, the editor Donald Omand (Lybster born and bred) highlights that:

One must not, in any account of this county, omit reference to one class of its people: the tinklers. Believed by some to be descendants of the oldest of all Caithness races, their history is curious and tragic. Until about the 1930s, they had a definite place in our economy: they were the tinsmiths. They used to live in caves around the shore, or in tents, and travelled the countryside in summer. They sold odds and ends and bought clothes and rags. They were recognised as “characters” of the countryside. But the arrival of some shops killed their trade and they became unemployed. They are not travellers anymore. Caithness long ago housed them in council houses, but assimilation among the ordinary population has been slow, although there are some successful cases. Most of them are, at the time of writing, a serious problem (Omand 1972: 130).

The terms used in this description are note worthy in tracing the development of contradictory attitudes towards this group of people. ‘Curious, tragic history’, ‘characters’: the vocabulary is one of sympathy, of pity. The ‘definite place’ in the economy deemed the Tinklers as members of the Caithness community by virtue of their economic role. ‘Killed trade’ and ‘unemployed’ hints at the helplessness faced by the tinklers. Yet, the ‘slow assimilation’ into the ‘ordinary population’ and the ‘serious problem’ apparently posed by Tinklers gives way to them being cast out and blamed. Their relationship to the rest of Caithness is perhaps the most awkward one I encountered during fieldwork.

After reading Omand’s analysis, I found an article in the Wick archives, written by an Alice Calder in 1993. As a teacher, Calder recalled her past encounter with some tinkler children, who had only recently been assimilated into education:

Perhaps they were aboriginal, or descendants of the outcasts of Scottish clans. Their disinclination to work and educate themselves amongst wider Caithness owes to some primeval feeling of superiority, of owing no allegiance. They certainly have, over the generations, kept to themselves, intermarrying and in-breeding. It is a controversy that can never be settled.

Whenever Tinklers are discussed by people in Caithness, Calder's article is mentioned. Her questioning of the origins of this group in such discriminatory terms is met by outrage in Caithness. Due to the fact that 'Tinkler' is an identity more often negatively attributed by other people rather than a self-identification, and these particular migration patterns and tinsmith work has ceased, I did not discuss 'being tinkler' with any individual or family. General discussions about this identity have, however, occurred both amongst groups of people in village and town, and on the community website. I include ethnographic snippets from such debates to illuminate what 'being tinkler' means in Caithness society.

First, consider this recent discussion on the community forum.²¹:

User1: You know, it appears to me there's a bit of a fascination with picking on, or at least drawing attention to, tinks on here. It's really pretty classless. Remember how small Caithness is. The tinks may not be as unrelated to you as you may hope.

User2: Watch what you're saying, hiding behind a username on the Org. People like you would reckon my surname is a tink name. My bairns never get invited to parties because of their name. You don't want to be a bigot, but don't want to be related to me? Careful now.

User3: Mind that African proverb, 'it takes a whole village to raise a child'. We're like that. Is it any wonder that bigotry and prejudice are alive and kicking in Caithness? Reflect back to the conversations about tinklers you heard in our villages when you were growing up. They were 'out' of the village. No offence, User2.

User4: It's all very well to shout 'bigot'. He without sin, no? Whether you like it or not, the village mentality is as it is. It's an integral part of our society. It's who we are. The sooner we admit that we do think like that, the sooner we can do something about it. It's hellish that still bairns aren't going to parties and stuff for this reason. The problem is...you can change the language we're using – let's face it, 'tink' can't be said nicely – and you can put a politically-correct face on things. But that's rubbish. In the deep, dark recesses of the unconscious, the 'village' has left an indelible mark on us, and that's our true self. We don't like tinklers and we're scared that we're bigots. But it's just like that

User5: The deep, dark recesses? Aye, to label everything? We rank everything, place value in belonging to one group over another. Labour v. Tory, Protestant v. Catholic, tall v. short, Thurso v. Wick, and Lybster v. just about everywhere. That's just life. If it's not one thing you're discriminated for, it's definitely another.

²¹ 'Caithness Vernacular' thread on www.caithness.org accessed 05.09.07

The community website forum is a fascinating space in which debates like this rage for weeks. In face-to-face conversations, people mainly shy away from providing any opinion, but still reveal a deep-rooted sense of who is 'in' and who is 'out' of Caithness society. Angus Bancroft has noted – for Scotland and other parts of Europe – that travellers have become a 'convenient other' for the settled community 'who can be used to throw the values of the dominant settled community into sharp relief' (2005: 45). This is certainly the case in Caithness, whereby any wrongdoing in the community is attributed to the 'tinklers'. During fieldwork, I often witnessed a police car draw up in front of a council property where travellers have been settled, the police guided here by a community imagining danger and disorder. Bancroft is correct to note that 'it is easy to point to the extreme examples ...and to ignore the way in which exclusions operate on a more mundane, everyday level' (ibid.: 150). For Caithness, this is significant. I know of a traveller family now settled in council housing whose children are never invited to parties, another whose windows are often smashed, and still another who are the source of village gossip and fictional tales. This never-ending, constant identification and exclusion is not based on individuals but an imagined other which for generations has had connotations of danger and disorder. Immediately when the Tinklers come up in conversation, individuals list surnames without hesitation or need for elaboration. Here, it is something of a given that one should recognise the connotations of – for instance – 'being a McPhee'. Having grown up in Sutherland, I have always been aware of this, and I am acquainted with the connotations. From experience of both Caithness and Sutherland life, I maintain that local people understand 'tinklers' as part of the community. There is much evidence to suggest that the terminology used is bigoted. However, I have been told by locals that the separation of tinklers from wider society is something that tinklers themselves do: in claiming the distinction to be self-exclusion, Caithnessians side-step any accusation of discrimination. Negative comments about the physical appearance of Tinklers, mocking about in-breeding, and 'fiddlan e broo' (illegitimately claiming housing and employment benefits) are often part of the imagined 'tinkler' lifestyle. However, this is rarely said in front of people believed to be tinklers, and is said about them.

Certain areas of town and village are said to house these families: when I moved to the village, I was warned not to live on one particular street because ‘it’s the bad bit, full of tinkers, it’s the Bronx’. Recently, when a young man was murdered in Wick, I was told by Sander, a Wicker in his twenties, that: ‘there’s e tinklers fightan amongst themsels again, in their wee gangs. And that’s them killan each other noo. There’ll soon be none left’. This woman’s angst at the fighting is clear. The fact that she seems genuinely concerned that a social group is disappearing (through marrying-out, leaving Caithness, or killing each other) almost surprised me. This is perhaps related to the notion of the convenient other mentioned above: Caithnessians are largely negative about tinklers yet without them would have no-one for blame attribution. In their difference and exclusion, tinklers are as much a part of Caithness society as any other group to whom Caithnessians apply the ‘who we are *not*’ principle.

‘But it doesn’t matter...’: Caithnessians’ analyses of identity

When people spoke of ‘tinklers’ (referred to by alternative terms such as ‘buck’, ‘broonball’, ‘mackatoot’, and the short-hand, ‘tink’) they often defended the terminology – which is of course negative in its connotations – by claiming it’s ‘just a word’ that ‘you use without thinking’. From my own personal experience of far-north life, I recognise how the term is used in such an everyday way, for example, someone looking dishevelled might be told ‘ye look right like a tink the day’. Those using it almost claim that the term is devoid of meaning because it is applied so constantly to a variety of scenarios. People do not stop to think of its connotations, and they use it in so many wide-ranging contexts that it goes beyond a group classification. This brings its own problems: the community is so accustomed to using the term playfully that there is a certain forgetting of the origins of the term and the group it offends. People, of course, are quick to see themselves as being outside the realm of discrimination.

Ach ah didna mean hid, hid chuist came oot lek that. If ah say til ye, Kim, what a tink ye look...Ah dinna mean that ye’re a traveller or that ye dinna hev a hoose or that. Ah chuist mean what a state ye are. Ah widna dream o’ go-an up til a tinkler and sayan, what a tink ye are’.

This example came after Tam had called me ‘a tink’ when he found me cleaning the kitchen in an old pair of jeans and a man’s shirt, with my hair messily clipped in place. This kind of narrative occurs frequently and is contradictory and intriguing. In trying to explain his throwaway use of the word, this man reveals his own definition: tinks, to him, are travellers and people without houses. In claiming that there are ‘tinklers’ who he would not call a ‘tink’, he inevitably admits his own contradiction: he recognises there is something offensive and hierarchical about this. I have witnessed locals using terms like ‘tink’ as joking banter between friends. It is used in any context where one wishes to show distaste, mocking, or superiority. Whenever I questioned anyone on their use of the word, it quickly became apparent that the term was thought of as meaningless. The term is so over-used that individuals have apparently forgotten that its use reproduces a hierarchy. It has been used over so many generations, filtered through every part of the north, that individuals (such as in the forum discussion above) call it ‘just a village mentality of labelling’. They are unwilling to think further about the complexities of the connotations. To those attributing the term, it is irreverent: ‘he’s a tink, but it doesn’t matter’.

‘It doesn’t matter’ becomes a defensive tagline after statements of otherness. It should, by now, be clear that difference matters very much. Angy put it like this:

We’re a group o’ fowk that bides in e same pleice, we div e same things. That’s no enough til mak ye a community, though. Ye need til hev a heart til e pleice, time and effort, ye need til mak hid. Movan here must be hellish hard – we divna hev aal e class difference, fowk think we’re aal clans an’ that. We’re no. E banker’s bairns, e meenister’s bairns, e tinkler bairns, e Cattach bairns lek yersel, aal grew up e same, knew wur aishan. So they can be thegither easy ...really, we’re a’ chuist fowk.

The ‘tinkler’, the Gael, and the English incomer (discussed below) are unlikely to feel the same. This quotation – claiming ‘we’re all the same, we can be together easily’ – suggests serious defensiveness and a total lack of understanding about difference. The most significant thing to take from this comment is ‘knew wur *aishan*’ – *aishan* means one’s stock, type, or genealogy. Those with such roots and knowledge of said roots are protected by it, and can claim ‘we’re all the same’ and ‘difference doesn’t matter’ only because they *do* fit in. Outside this realm of

genealogical belonging – for all the talk of incorporation and sameness by locals – incomers find it increasingly difficult to find a place here. This will be discussed later in the thesis. Now, attention must turn to that subject which has made Caithnessians feel sure of themselves and somewhat blind to the identity feelings of others: genealogical rootedness.

4.

Knowing your *aishan*: the close family and family-friends

The aim of this chapter is to look at what are deemed in Lybster to be the closest relationships: parents, children, siblings – but also grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. I then place these relationships in their wider context to explore the significance of genealogy and the written family tree. ‘Knowing where you come from’ (see Carsten 2000b) is important in the formation of relationships and identities in many societies. While there are ways of creating community and belonging that are not kinship-based, and ways of creating kinship that are not based on descent or alliance, kin-based rootedness does give locals a security that incomers cannot attain. As Edwards puts it: ‘to be disconnected is to be without roots and to be without roots is to be unprotected’ (2000: 229). Caithnessians, for all their focus on community ‘togetherness’ and acted-out relationships, place genealogical relatedness, its tracings, and ancestry high in their scheme of things. What, though, *is* this genealogical relatedness? Cohen sums it up brilliantly for a Shetland community where: ‘the importance of genealogy to Whalsay people [is first] as a means of mapping their social knowledge; and second a demographic fact which later and more systematic research would confirm, the remarkable intensity of kinship in the island.’ (1989: 2). This is a place where there are many, ever-increasing and evermore creative, means of relatedness-mapping.

Genealogical memory

One’s *aishan* is genealogy, kin group, or biological relatives. It includes, however, more than that. One’s ‘type’, ‘stock’, or ‘kind’ reveals ‘good’ or ‘bad’ *aishan*. This has a more fluid meaning and can bring together more or less the whole community. I witnessed *Aishan*-as-genealogy can be traced back at least six generations in twenty families in their family trees. On a methodological note, while the genealogical diagram has been a ‘standard piece of graphic shorthand...in fieldwork jottings’ (Bouquet 2000: 172), the very precise and detailed family trees kept by the whole village meant that I did not need to compile my own – villagers had photocopied these documents on my behalf without my request. Sometimes these were set out in the tree-like style of traditional diagrams, at other times they constituted sheets of A4

paper with the same information in list format. In every case, the same information: names, dates of birth and death, place of birth, and occupation. Putting these documents together, one could create an almost seamless village genealogy. There is certainly no space for the genealogical amnesia that the Geertzes found in Bali (1964: 91). Intriguingly, the Geertzes attributed such amnesia to processes of teknonymy, where for instance 'John Gunn' has a son called George and is no longer known as 'John Gunn' but as 'George's father'. This practice is very common in Lybster, but in no way does it create a limitation over kinship information.

Being an individual and being of a genealogy are conflated: the person *is* the *aishan*. Furthermore, the *aishan* provides a traceable sense of one's rootedness and role. If Sanny Sinclair in 1700 was a fisherman in Lybster and so too were all the sons that followed, the 'version' of the Sinclair Lybster fisherman of 2006 has a path mapped out. Where does space for creativity, individual desire, and aspiration to gain something else or be someone else fit into this context? I pointed out to Elsie that two of the Sinclairs had emigrated to South Africa: 'aye,' replied Elsie, 'we don't know them'. Is geographical distance the reason for this disjointed kinship? In this case, it is their move away from the *aishan* pattern of transmitted names, places, and occupations that demonstrates a kind of cutting of ties. Significantly though, while the doing of kinship has ceased and feelings of relatedness no longer exist, these migrants' place on the written genealogy is still crucial: unlike the adding and truncating of English kinship whereby consanguineal or affinal links can be fractured or abandoned and 'fictive' kinship such as friendship comes to be as real as genealogical relatedness (Edwards and Strathern 2000), in Caithness your *aishan* is a given. The space between those relatives acknowledged though without active ties and those *with* active ties is filled by friends and neighbours who those we might term 'fictive' kin. Elsewhere, I have explored genealogical forgetting (Masson 2006) in the Scottish Highlands. In Caithness, the scenario is different. Crucially, though, we must remember that ties of community, or 'cousinship' amongst non-blood-related people, and so-called 'fictive' kinship relations are as important in Caithness as genealogy. Genealogy has the upper hand in terms of Caithness belonging, while a more acted-out everyday kinship counts for much in real

relatedness terms. Both of these styles of being related and doing kinship are explored here.

Surnames remain of huge significance for belonging in Caithness: they represent genealogical stories and origins. They assist in competitive games of belonging between young people: 'I'm a Gunn, you don't get more local than me' versus 'The Sutherlands were here first!' are common phrases batted between friends. Simultaneously, however, they are about tracing horizontal links: being 'cousins' is a fundamental relationship between the children of Caithness, and the tie binds long into adulthood. Close friendships can be short-handed to 'cousins': people often explained a relationship to me as 'cousin'. A common comment might be 'not my aunt or uncle's child, more like a family friend, or a distant cousin. But cousin here means your close to them'. Thus it can take a long time to figure out the multiple layers of relatedness between, for instance, the Gunns and the Mowats. I was always impressed by the local kinship knowledge children as young as ten were able to impart: they can trace exactly and precisely how other villagers are related. Knowing kinship information of the entire village creates/is created by trust and closeness between the children and adults. Genealogy is significant in Caithness not only for rooting families and seeing the same characteristics repeated through generations. As Marilyn Strathern writes:

Genealogy combines discourses of possessive individualism and maps of relationality. Acquiring genealogical knowledge is used to confirm personal identity yet the family tree also locates the individual in complex networks of kinship and affiliation. It is entangled in highly personal senses of self and collective versions of ethnicity and nationhood. (1998: 129).

Families tend to be very close in Caithness, whether or not individuals have harmonious relations with each other. Furthermore, friends are family. I use no metaphor here: friends are not *like* family, they carry out the same responsibilities and obligations, and have the same closeness. There are of course limitations to this: they do not, for instance inherit the family home, and do not have the same marriage restrictions that consanguineal kin face. To illuminate this, one should note the terms *aishan* and *femly*. The former includes only consanguineal kin, not affinal or fictive. *Aishan* is particularly genealogical and refers to both relationships and

characteristics: an individual's grandfather is *aishan*, and an individual's personality is said to come from the *aishan*. Meanwhile, *femly* is more fluid. It can refer to those also classed as *aishan*, but is mainly used for affinal and fictive kin: those who are less than blood kin, but with whom one has an active and normally very close relationship. Furthermore, *aishan* can sometimes be a dormant term: talking about long-passed ancestors, for instance, is an example of the abstract nature *aishan* talk. *Femly* is more of an acted-out relationship, one that is important to normal daily life. This is why it can encapsulate consanguineal, affinal, and fictive kin at once. My use of 'fictive kin' here is in keeping with the anthropological term for describing relatives who are neither consanguineal or affinal kin. It is an awkward term, and Caithnessians would find it too similar to 'fictional' in describing these important relationships. As village family trees show, friends can find that at some point in history their families were related by marriage. Importantly, *aishan* and community are not the same thing: being a Gunn is never conflated with being Lybster stock. The two are complementary. In part, this illuminates villagers' close proximity and dependency on one another. In Lybster, and Caithness as a whole, I was struck by the dedication and commitment families are expected to show to their kinship obligations. Here, kinship is forever being created, links explored and realized.

Kin keepers tend to be women: a woman will keep track of her own genealogy and that of her husband, and is responsible for updating them. Genealogical records tend to be hand written on an A3 piece of paper. There are some cases in which families have paid a company to trace their genealogy and digitally create the diagram, but this is rare. Genealogies are not seen as something one should need help with, for they are part of the individual's identity story. These pieces of paper themselves are not handed down – the information itself trickles down through stories, names, and identities – and each generation is free to make their own tree or not. I am aware of a few families where it is customary to keep the family tree recorded in the pages of the family bible and this is certainly passed down through the generations.

There are two reasonings for such records. On one level, this is about rootedness and tracing ancestry, which is important in local notions of both individual identity and community. On a wider level, these document the ways in

which families are joined together: when Lybsterians claim ‘we’re all related here!’, they have the genealogical record to demonstrate this. An example is the Sinclair family tree. In the middle, on the left is an outward pointing arrow that reads ‘Wares (see George)’. The same on the right reads ‘Gunn (see Cathie)’. George Wares’ and Cathie Gunn’s family trees grow roots in the Sinclair tree. They are two close friends of Elsie and Sanny Sinclair, and simultaneously trace cross-over genealogies. It is important to realize that such cross-cutting results in a sharing of *aishan* between these people who, although not blood-related, have a very diluted affinal connection. Sanny might say of Cathie, ‘she’s wur *aishan*’ to explain that they come from the same stock. Cathie acts as something of a kin keeper for the entire village: she has photocopies of her own genealogy and those of other villagers. She enjoys spotting unrealized ties and linking people together: this is not so much about rootedness as about figuring out how the village in the present day is a collection of relatives.

These genealogies can go back as far as ten generations. The physical appearance of the family tree is patrilineal: a thick black marker pen is used on male details, a finer pen on female details, making the men of the family instantly stand out on this map. For each individual is listed – where appropriate and available – the full name, date of birth, place of birth, occupation, spouse, offspring, and date of death. The inclusion of occupation is illuminating: it hints that ‘doing’ identity is as important as given identity. This becomes fascinating when one considers the naming patterns and employment patterns of the place: being named after those before you, taking on the same work as them, means that a family tree might read: ‘Sanny Sinclair, born 1880, Lybster, fisherman’ and later ‘Sanny Sinclair, born 1945, Lybster, fisherman’. In the case of my village father, this was true – and all eight generations between these two characters had their own ‘Sanny Sinclair, Lybster fisherman’. ‘Look how many Sanny Sinclairs there are! All the way back – all ‘fisherman’, all Lybster! It’s the same person again and again for hundreds of years’ my village mother exclaims. This comment *the same person* is striking. There is an evident notion that the character, the personality, the self, is passed on as well as the name. While Marilyn Strathern comments that ‘names, like property, are passed on from one individual to another; they do not displace each other’ (1998: 69), it is a different case in Lybster. It is not tokenistic or random when names are passed

down: expectations of occupation, residence location, even mannerisms, mean that a character is being recreated. 'Each [identical] name was once attached to a *separate person*' (ibid., my emphasis) in Strathern's argument. While in Lybster these are different bodies, the person and their role in community life is passed on in the name. This community significance is interesting to some, who think of each genealogy as part of the village story.

Villagers tend not to pore over their genealogical records, nor have them displayed. They are often produced at a ritual moment, for instance if a couple become engaged and their respective families wish to figure out their links. The arrival of an anthropologist in the village was quite significant for these documents, as they were constantly passed to me, described and brought to life. In this sense, they are used to enhance villager's own understanding of themselves and their links, or to inform an outsider: importantly, there must be a level of trust before this information is shared. On the most mundane level, the genealogies are produced on occasions where, for instance, someone is telling a story and forgets a certain component, 'who's his father?' The genealogies appear to fill in the gaps of contemporary stories as much as they tell a story of the past.

Genealogies spend most of their time untouched. Elsie told me that she and her friends bring out the records when they need to update key ritual moments such as birth, marriage, divorce, and death. While birth means a straightforward addition of a line in the genealogy, marriage (if local) necessitates changing two genealogies. In divorce, the ex-spouse is crossed off even if children were born to the marriage, and in death, the date of death is added. Despite the prevalence of cohabitation in the village, unmarried partners are not added to the genealogy. If an unmarried couple have children together, said partner is added to enable the children to be inserted. Furthermore, in being that parent, the unmarried partner is recorded in exactly the same way (=) as a spouse. When I asked why, I was told that there is no symbol to represent that relationship and in keeping with the style of the genealogy, it makes sense to misrepresent the relationship. I asked further how people can trust the genealogy, and whether they read into the stories of the past. My village mother explained that 'you can trust what's on there, but definitely no' what they left off!'

elaborating the many affairs and secrets that make her ‘so interested in keeping them all alive’. In this respect, a genealogical record conceals as much as it reveals.

Finding yourself: roots tourism and dormant links

Paul Basu has undertaken comprehensive research in Scotland of those genealogical tourists who arrive from places including Canada, America, and New Zealand, in search of their kinship stories which were disrupted and ruptured by historical migration. By rooting themselves, these individuals find themselves. Basu writes of one particular instance of genealogical tourism to Dunbeath whereby individuals visit the old croft of Henry Macdonald at Upper Lappan. Here, Henry’s initials had been scratched into the stone before he emigrated to Australia in the 1920s. Basu explains ‘sites of memory become “sites of identity”’: ordinary places from which the identity of the self is perceived to derive, and to which the self, thirsting for identity, may resort for sustenance’ (2007: 158). For Caithnessians in contemporary Caithness, though, the genealogical tourist inhabits a problematic category. While Basu tells us that every week, the Dunbeath Heritage Centre was visited by some individual tracing their Caithness roots (ibid.: xii), this did not filter into everyday space. The Heritage Centre is perceived by locals not as a regular tourist location, but as a specialist site for archival and genealogical searches, and not somewhere that locals themselves visit. The Clan Gunn Museum, housed in the old Latheron church, is similarly used. I remember helping as a guide there one day when a male American tourist, large in stature and presence, approached me. With not a word, he rolled up his shirt sleeve, revealing a tattoo on his shoulder. He simply pointed to it and nodded proudly: it was the Clan Gunn crest. ‘Hello Mr Gunn’, I smiled in acknowledgment. He told me that while Gunn was his mother’s maiden name, his own surname was Ferrera. When I recounted this tale to a group of friends in Lybster, they scoffed at Mr Ferrera. Genealogical tourists, according to locals here, are the same as ‘regular’ tourists: they are looking for some authenticity, some reality, that is not there. Mr Ferrera has Gunn roots on his mother’s side: ‘his mother being a Gunn doesna mak’ Mr Ferrera a Gunn’. By displaying his genealogical identity like this, the locals perceive him as creating a false sense of himself: ‘a Gunn doesna need a tattoo!’

Being and knowing are tacit and develop in the relationships and actions of everyday life. They do not need to be proclaimed or displayed: this is perceived to be artificial. Genealogical tourists are a presence, and their presence is understood as a kind of story rather than a kind of belonging. While these tourists perceive themselves as locals elsewhere, locals perceive them as tourists. Dormant links are not enough to claim belonging, there has to be some kind of commitment: were these tourists to stay longer, give something back, or immerse in the local culture, they might be differently perceived. This shows that while the structure of one's *aishan* is a given, the link must be kept alive by updating roots and having connection. Coming back to Caithness for a look around and to stake a claim is not enough to keep a place in the *aishan*.

***Femly*: friends-as-family and their significance in everyday life**

In Lybster, and in Caithness more generally, acting out one's relationships and belonging is crucial. It is not enough to have been born in the area, or to have Caithness blood. It took a long time for me to figure out how kinship relationships work and who was – or was not – related. It seemed to me, when people referred to each other, that everyone was a cousin, or an aunt, or a sibling. When I asked people about this, they revealed that often friends are referred to by these kinship terms. I wondered if living close to each other intensified relationships and made them *look like* kinship. I was quickly corrected: being *femly* (literally, family) usually has roots in the past, even when one is unaware of any genealogical link. Elsie told me, for instance, that there's 'about six surnames' in Lybster: she is talking about what Strathern (1981) would call 'core families'. One knows true belonging if one is part of such a family. As mentioned above, such diluted links are often highlighted in the written genealogical diagram. However, knowing these links is not constitutive of the relationship. The closeness of people in everyday life, the kinship responsibilities and links they place on each other, creates the relatedness. The knowledge of interlinking genealogies normally follows this, or is presumed. This is one reason why incomers find fitting in to the village, and the region, problematic. It is akin to finding a place in someone else's family.

Newness and the weight of tradition

Went to see baby George – born in Wick yesterday. Gorgeous little one, blond hair and big blue eyes, we were joking that he looks ‘right Lybster’. When Kirsty [his mother] handed him to me, she said ‘go to auntie Kimmie for a cuddle, boy’. Named after his grandfather. John was jokingly calling him ‘baby Cheordag’ in his broad Caithness dialect, much to Kirsty’s dismay. To her, it makes him sound ‘old and teuchter’. No surprise his middle name’s John. George John Sutherland, little one with all that weight of tradition. (Fieldnotes)

In this vignette, we meet baby George who – like Sanny– can trace all sorts of *aishan* information and relationships from his own name. His name is particularly rooted in Caithness and Sutherland, perhaps the most common combination of names one could possess in this place. This traditional name immediately places him and comes with its own expectations. There are, however, ways in modern Caithness life to play around with this tradition:

Kate’s baby born today. She was meant to be calling her Johannie (after her great-grandmother), but she’s chosen Jahani as the spelling instead. The whole family is furious and refusing to spell it this way. Johannie is a very traditional, respected name here, especially because it’s her grandmother. (Fieldnotes)

First names are just as significant as surnames in Caithness, and the generational links become more central than genealogical ones. If surnames are about vertical (ancestors and descendants) *and* horizontal (cousins, siblings) links, then vertical first names (shared by grandfather, father, and son) point to significant parent-child relationships. Using the example from above, John had two sons, George and John. Subsequently, the son George has a child called John. The son John has a child called David John. For the majority of Caithness sons, if they are not called John, it is almost certainly chosen as the middle name. John explained that other naming practices occur when there are ‘too many Johns’:

My pal Roy is kent by his middle name, his first name is really John. Ian is Ian because it’s the Gaelic version o’ his real first name, John. As a bairn, I was pals wi’ two brothers called John, one gets called Geordie. And if a bairn manages to escape John, it’ll aye be his middle name!

This is significant. The fact that a baby is born 'John' but later develops a new version of that name, or becomes known by his middle name demonstrates the fluidity of individual identity in the solid stability of his wider genealogy. The prevalence of particular names derives from the fact that male babies tend to have their grandfather's name as a middle name – as George John Sutherland demonstrates – or their mother's maiden name – such as Ian Sinclair Gunn. Female babies take their grandmother's name, as Mary Ann Calder, shows. Traditionally in Caithness and Sutherland, the firstborn son was named after the paternal grandfather, the firstborn daughter after the maternal grandmother. A second son was named after the maternal grandfather, a second daughter after the paternal grandmother. This paternal/maternal pattern continued for as many children as were born, covering uncles and aunts names, and then the newborn's parent.

Little Jahani's birth was registered when she was three weeks old as 'Johannie'. Her parents' decision to modernize this traditional Caithness and Sutherland name was vetoed by relatives and wider family: it is a mark of disrespect and ignorance to alter a name like this. Had she chosen an name uncommon in Caithness for her daughter, the community would have been fine with it, though deemed it unusual: but to alter a pre-existing name is to affect pre-existing relationships. Kate relented to her familial pressure, but fought back by insisting that Johannie's nickname is Jaha. Nicknaming children like this does not happen frequently in Caithness families: it tends to be that the individual in the senior generation gets the diminutive of the name. So, a father and son combination of George would be 'Cheordag' and 'George'; Alexander would be 'Sanny' and 'Alexander'. Daughters tend not to be named after their mothers, and the affectionate form of the name is an '-ie' addition to the full name, as opposed to a nickname. So Diane because Dianie and Grace becomes Gracie. The handing-down of a male name includes both first and last names. Popular Caithness names such as 'John Gunn' or 'Sanny Mowat' become more than individuals, they become entire genealogical stories, 'places' in Caithness, so well-known and easily-located are they. In spite of the bilaterality of British kinship, patrilineal links supercede all in Caithness belonging. People are placed by fathers and sons, uncles, and male

cousins: ‘Who’s his father?’ is the absolute first question one asks of an unknown individual.

The links between new babies and old traditions, and the way this pattern is changing, are evident to anyone reading family announcements in the local newspaper, the *John O’Groat Journal*. Over a couple of weeks, births in Caithness included a ‘James’, ‘William’, ‘Stanley’, ‘Kirsty’, and ‘George’. Over the same weeks, births of five babies with exactly these names were announced. By this, I point out that there is not a wealth of first names in Caithness because of the traditional naming patterns described above. Names are transmitted through the generations and it is common that the very elderly Caithnessian and the newborn Caithnessian will have the same name. Changes, though, are easily spotted: the other, older tradition of creating a female name by simply adding an ‘-a’ to a male name is quite rare in the region now. When a little girl was named Colina recently, it stood out: people are no longer accustomed to the pattern, and its revitalized form caused surprise. More marked changes than this, though, are the very modern names outwith this pattern. Caithness parents with traditional Caithness names who name children this way tug at the genealogical, generational, gendered thread of Caithness kinship.

Creating the parent-child relationship

Reproductive decisions are important in Caithness, and villagers believe they should all have a say in other people’s procreative choices. For instance, it is deemed not very good practice to decide against having children. Georgina in particular told me that she had ‘never wanted’ children and that her husband, Gordon, had been keen to have a large family. When they had been married for thirteen years and no children were born, villagers began open speculation with awareness that Georgina did not want children: perhaps, they thought, she was hesitant, perhaps her husband could not ‘get through to her’. The situation was one of fertility problems and the woman – by now disappointed for her husband’s sake – agreed to consider adoption. I wondered how villagers would take to a baby that could not be traceable rooted to the village, whether their keenness to be involved in a new baby’s life would extend to one who was – genetically at least – a ‘stranger’. Would they treat the baby in the

way that they treat incomers, or automatically consider the baby to fully belong to its adoptive parents?

Georgina told me that initially villagers were skeptical about their decision: they imagined that a baby put up for adoption would come from a background of drug problems, broken relationships, and have an inherently ‘no-good’ character. Adoption (both giving up children and adopting) happens rarely in Caithness and its ‘unknown’ attribute made villagers wary. At the same time, though, to be an adult, married, and childless is wholly unlike the Caithness expectation of kinship. ‘The couple’, two people married or cohabiting, is perceived as incomplete, as awaiting children: the couple is the foundation for kinship, not its completion. As Georgina and Gordon went through this process, they were constantly ‘advised’, interrupted, and judged by villagers. When the baby girl arrived already aged six months, there was no romanticized about-turn from the village. No cards, no gifts, a smattering of visitors. This, again is very unlike the villagers. Intriguingly, when Georgina and Gordon gave their baby daughter a very traditional Caithness name – Donella Mackay Gunn – it was as if the child had been initiated. While by adopting their daughter Georgina and Gordon were creating links, the naming of her stems from and embodies *pre-existing* links. This gives Johannie a type of rootedness that can be traced. By exploring what it means to be a Caithness child, we delve into not only performative belonging and patterns of togetherness but also genealogical tracings and the significance of roots. Roots – surname, ancestry, places, and the inheritance of these – are a major resource of kinship here.

For this reason, grandparents are hugely significant in Caithness – be they consanguineal kin or ‘fictive’ grandparental figures in a grandchild’s life. Due to the composition of households mentioned in chapter two, young couples with children often live near to the grandparents. In today’s Lybster, this enables both mother and father to go out to work without the worry of expensive childcare: it is rare, for instance, to see a grandmother in the village without one of her grandchildren. The active, everyday parental roles are often carried out by grandparents here. Furthermore, the grandparental home – whether the grandchildren are nearby or far – is normally geared up with a nursery or child’s bedroom. This is not simply the female role: grandfathers also play a role but, as my friend Alison put it, ‘that’s more

like playin', doon 'e herbour an' takin' the bairnies til 'e park. Yer grannie is more like yer mither'. Such is the centrality of the grandparent that often, birth announcements in the local press demonstrate this. Take for instance this example from the *John O'Groat Journal* in summer 2006: 'Congratulations – Elsie Wares is a granny! Baby boy, William, born at Caithness General Hospital to Don and Eilidh.' The announcement was not so much that a baby had arrived, nor that parents were created, but that Elsie had become a grandparent. Bouquets of flowers arrived for Elsie and guests came to see her, she received almost as much attention as baby William and his parents. The reason for this is that grandparents – grandmothers especially - in Caithness are kin keepers, communicators of relationship knowledge, and a great source of familial strength and care. So central is the grandparental role that often a 'granny' is required even when the actual relative is not around or no longer living. My friend Marelle told me that when she and her sister, Arlene, were small they were out visiting friends on the north Caithness coast – a good hour's drive away from home. In one house, Marelle started crying for her granny, 'I was wee and fed up, I wanted home to granny'. Her mother simply moved on to the house of their next friend – who happened to be a woman in her eighties. 'Mum sat me on the wifie's knee, "go til yer granny, lassagie" she said. Me and Arlene were none the wiser, quite happy getting' cuddles off owld Mrs Swanson!' Grandparents are very often active, central characters – the parent-child relationship in Caithness certainly extends its boundaries to include grandparents and so-called fictive kin. When adults turn into mothers and fathers and then grandparents there is a wider sense of completion. On one hand, the production of children secures the future of the village, but more so, the attitude is that a 'proper' adult has a spouse and a child. To have more than one child is desired in this community particularly in keeping with its long history of sibling sets as large as fifteen children.

Siblings and cousin-siblings: age-gaps and cross-generational relationships

In much the same way as Edwards claims that roots are protection (2000: 229), in Caithness the sibling group (including cousins who have a sibling-like relationship) creates a safety net for each child. Although Caithness families are not as large as

they used to be, the concept of the only child is an unpopular one. The language of family in Lybster is very often plural. By this, I mean that parents of all-male children refer to them as ‘the boys’, while all-female siblings are ‘the lassies’, and mixed siblings are ‘the bairns’. The only child is not accounted for in this kind of terminology – which is the effect of a place where large families have been the pattern throughout history – and goes by his or her first name. Certainly, to have two siblings in Caithness nowadays is more the norm than the fifteen siblings found just one or two generations ago. As in many far-north communities, Lybster siblings often have a large age-gap: to have a brother or sister 30 years your junior is quite common, as is a sibling as close as a year younger. Such distance or closeness can be extreme: here, siblings are often best friends and also often in a feud with each other. It is a particularly dramatic and passionate relationship. The significance of cousins in this community is of course closely tied to this: the children of warring siblings find it difficult to be close. Although one or two generations ago this age pattern was the norm, it remains, and the cross-cutting effect on generations remains clear: in the village, there are nephews older than their uncles, and grandparents with grandchildren and great-grandchildren of the same age. This makes for very varied families, and quite complex relationships: those of the same age but with a generation between them often form very close friendships and focus on their friendship before their consanguineal ties.

In exploring this, I am reminded of my early days in Lybster when Elsie introduced Ian as her ‘wee brother’. It was a long time before I realized he was not actually her younger brother at all, but her cousin who was fifteen years Elsie’s junior. ‘Ian’s got nobody. He’s my cousin, my mother’s sister’s boy. So I’m his sister.’ To be without siblings is to have ‘nobody’. This is no cosy kinship connection. In 1998, Ian was involved in a serious accident at sea off Norway that left him paralyzed, brain-damaged, and unable to communicate for a year. Elsie flew to Norway immediately on hearing the news, and slept on the floor of Ian’s room for as long as possible. On his return to Caithness, Ian was unable to live alone. Of his extensive family list, his direction was clear. He did not have to ask Elsie, she did not ask him. Ian’s belongings were settled into his new room before his plane had landed at Wick. Reflecting on Elsie’s comment and these scenarios, it becomes

apparent that – in Lybster – one *needs* the sibling relationship and, if siblings do not exist, they are created.

A long-running feud has ensued between brothers Tom and Archie for almost a decade concerning a hypothetical argument about who will run the family business when their elderly parents are unfit or have died. Tom is angry that Archie should have any say in the matter because he left Caithness long ago, while Archie feels Tom only stayed for the inheritance. Consequently, if ever Archie visits home, he stays with an aunt in the village as Tom refuses to see him in the parental home. The stress this has caused to their mother, Ida, is cemented by her worry that her grandchildren will grow up not knowing each other. The faction this feud has caused within the family goes against Lybster notions of siblinghood: if siblings break a bond then the rootedness of the family tree has its branches broken: children of feuding siblings will have their kinship connections altered by this argument which, ironically, is centred around kinship economics.

Sisters tend to be exceptionally close here. Take Donella, Vivienne, and Anne. All now in their fifties, they have 12 children between them. These twelve cousins are the closest I met in Lybster. Donella, Vivienne, and Anne, their husbands, and children all live in new-build houses on the same ground, in old farmlands on the Lybster periphery. I was always struck by their conscious decisions to stick together so closely. Donella told me it is because she ‘can’t get rid of them!’, while Vivienne said ‘they’re my pals, I like seeing them and popping in, and they’re always there for me’. Anne was more cautious: ‘I think we maybe stick together too much’. The women work separately – Donella and Anne in Lybster, Vivienne in Wick. Wondering whether their set-up works, I met up with Ailie, Sarah, and Grace (three of the collective daughters). The young women were wearing items of clothing borrowed from one another and spent the whole time laughing at their own in-jokes. They enjoy the closeness their mothers have, but do not share this with their own siblings. For the girls, living next door to all the cousins is an advantage, diffusing any sibling arguments as the cousin-as-sibling relationship is their main relationship. In their case, cousin closeness saves them from sibling intensity. Living together and laughing together, cousins categorically do not work together, whereas this is often expected of siblings. The most positive

aspect of the cousin-as-sibling interaction is that it has none of the pressure put upon sibling relationships, it is freer and as a result, becomes organically closer than some sibling ties.

Living in close proximity to other people's children – even though they are one's close relatives – creates parental duties and responsibilities that are not always easy to manage. In wider Lybster life, the care of young children falls to certain villagers who take on roles as village aunts and uncles. In this respect, young children – not in sibling or cousin groups but as individuals – are at the centre of village life.

Breaking the *aishan*

One particularly shocking incident that damaged the 'vener of harmony' (Cohen 1986) of close-knit kinship happened during my fieldwork, when a village teenager broke into the home of a recently deceased village man, whose funeral was taking place at the time of the burglary. The shock was palpable and worse due to their life-long closeness: to each other, this man and this boy were *femly*. As a baby, the boy had been looked after by this man and his wife; this man had taken the boy out to sea on his boat; when the child started school, this same man regularly gave him 'pennies' to spend. Although not related by blood or marriage, this elderly man was this child's 'uncle'. Violating this close relationship made his theft all the more offensive. Overall, however, the area seems to have *retained* a positive sense of "togetherness": the community's dismay at this boy's actions has lingered long, and demonstrates the importance of togetherness as a kind of relatedness. To disrespect the dead man was to violate many relationships.

Villagers negotiate such problems into a semblance of cosy, seamless kinship. They do not deny the issues, but move quickly from them and provide an alternative narrative where we find that the teenage burglar 'will no' do it again, we'll see him right'. Instances are either excused or seen as a collective project of care and help. When *aishan* problems with 'your stock' or 'kind' occur, it is up to the wider *aishan* to fix it. This is as much about the reputation of genealogies and communities as it is about individual care.

Claims of care, kinship, and togetherness are not only found in moments of community solidarity. They are also very evident in the actual structure of Caithness relatedness. The strict patterns that family bonds follow mean that rootedness is literal: the ties that bind follow names and places. Senses of self and belonging for young people are traced in them and they take from this a very solid idea – even if later they will physically leave – of rootedness.

Crucially, we must turn our attention to the ways in which these ways of being, belonging, and identifying come to co-exist, complement, and be obliged to one other. Transmitted knowledge and kinship is placed in the hands of young people, who demonstrate an understanding of the multilayered relatedness at work. Importantly, these young people are often at the heart of notions of belonging. Essentially, children consciously take with them names, places, obligations, binding ties, roots and relationships. They take them into the future of Caithness.

5. The 'best place to be young'? : Young people, becoming, and belonging

It is 10.30 on a Wednesday night and I'm sitting in Shona's car. She's seventeen and from Lybster, she offered me a lift home at 7.30. Since then, we've driven around the streets of Wick, picking up younger people, listening to the same CD on repeat for three hours. We've stopped at the takeaway so someone could get pizza. We've gone 'a look' to the supermarket. I'm trying to make them laugh but everyone is beside themselves with boredom, everyone talks of being bored and waiting for something to happen. I suggest we go home. That, they tell me, is even worse. Besides, we can't go home in case something 'happens' they say, admitting that it never really does. So we go round the roundabout once more and do it all again. We get back to Lybster at midnight. (Fieldnotes)

Experiences of growing up in rural Scotland have been sociologically documented. Glendinning et al. discuss emergent themes: local opportunities, imagination of the future and staying on in that rural place, local amenities, and services all have an effect on the young population's experience. Furthermore, the authors describe how older teenagers spoke 'at length about their social lives, family and social networks, and their community, both as close-knit and caring, and as intrusive and controlling' (2003: 129). The authors could easily have been referring to Caithness young people. The dichotomy of being young in Caithness, as in the study by Glendinning et al., is age-graded. For very young children, Caithness is about freedom, independence, and a certain distance from ideas of danger or rules. Meanwhile, for teenagers, Caithness is a non-place in the same way as Edwards (2000) found for Bacup – 'nothing to do' is the characteristic of a place that – to the young mind – is not *real*. Real places – however imagined – for these people have everything that Caithness lacks. Yet, simultaneously, Caithness young people have a deep-rooted love of their homeland and talk passionately about it. Young Caithnessians are utterly confused by their region: they are bored and proud; experience longing and belonging. Caithness is both everything and nothing at all.

I focus on young people and no other specific age category for one significant reason. Young people in Caithness embody the themes of this thesis: they represent 'the point of transformation between two opposed images' (Carsten 1991: 440).

Young people belong and yet feel left out; they show a pride in their rootedness yet yearn to uproot; they know and yet do not know their place in the world. ‘The importance of how life in rural communities matters for young people’ is the focus for Glendinning et al. (2003: 129). In this chapter, I focus on exactly that concern amongst the young Caithness population. Meanwhile, Jamieson aptly points out that – in terms of migration and attachment to place – young people’s views are ‘contradictory and more complex than that of late modern migrants and traditional backwater stay-at-homes’ and furthermore they emerge from ‘cross-cutting ties to locality’ (2000: 203). A close ethnographic exploration of young people’s perceptions of place, aspirations, expectations, and social life is needed to illuminate all of this. The image of the rural idyll is questioned here: young people often feel detached and distanced *within* their community and from the rest of the world *because of* their community. Simultaneously, though, their fondness of, and attachment to Caithness as home remains at the heart of their experiences. Following on from the babies and young children of chapter 4, here attention is paid to children as they find their own way in the world: heading from village to town for secondary education, forming their own relationships, finding paths to their futures.

This chapter is about young people in specific moments, following them on a journey of relationship-building and self-identifying experiences. In terms of the broader argument of the thesis, I explain the push-pull dilemmas that characterize Caithness belonging. The troubles, delights, separation, togetherness, dismay, and hope of the young people featured here could be read as a microcosm of the Caithness population. Rural young people are the epitome of being in-between: the kinship and close-knit nurture they find in their rural ‘idyll’ is matched and often eclipsed by feelings of ‘suffocation’ and marginality in terms of both geography and age (see also Leyshon 2008). The notion that ‘children are always and necessarily “being and becoming”’ (Uprichard 2008: 304) fits particularly with the wider discussion of identity notions in this thesis.

Widening the world: when rural children become town pupils

Martin sits on the bar stool, staring into the bottom of an empty Coke glass. It is after lunch on a Monday, and his father is berating him. For the fifth time since his high school life began a fortnight ago, Martin has played truant. His father blames

this behaviour not on Martin's attitude or lack of interest, but in the fact that he is a *rural* boy. While every teenager might need, in the words of one Lybsterian, a 'gentle shove' when finding their way in the world, it appears to be received wisdom in Caithness that the more rural you are, the less gentle that shove can afford to be. In a place like Caithness, where around 43% of the population live in rural villages (as opposed to country towns), the transition to high school is a particularly marked one. This is especially true because there are only two: Thurso High School and Wick High School. Consequently, children from all over the region with different senses of local identity, different ways of life to each other, are put into a rather artificial setting of togetherness; as they put it, 'we're thrown thegither'. Hearing adults reflect upon their childhoods, it was clear that the child heading to a town high school from a lively fishing community like Lybster could have a different experience to a child arriving in town from an isolated croft in Auckengill. Similarly, both of these children's backgrounds will seem a world apart to the relatively cosmopolitan Wicker child. These worlds may all be part of Caithness, but they remain so distanced from one another that children do not recognize them. However often they have visited these places, there is no shared community feeling from which to work.

Cathie, who is a retired primary school teacher from Lybster, stressed to me that she remained surprised each year that Lybster children 'go into Wick to be educated, and come back smoking and talking with Wick accents'. Both country towns take on negative connotations in the rural versus more rural divide. Parents fear their children will be initiated into the ways of intoxication there. The imagination is that these country town high schools are populated by 'streetwise' teenagers with their cigarettes and alcohol. Furthermore, parents imagine the children will change their identity markers by losing the lilt of their Lybster accent for a rougher-round-the-edges tone. This is particularly interesting considering this is exactly the same transition these local parents made in their youth. Mothers are likely to say 'things are different now' (meaning the wider world is more dangerous, children more vulnerable) while fathers admit that they are worried for their children because they remember intense experiences of drinking and fighting in town. 'The bairns want to fit in, but they don't know what to, or why. Which is exactly the same

experience that every high school starter has. Just here, it's literally stepping into a new world'. Cathie herself attended Lybster Primary in the days when the first three years of secondary education were also provided in Lybster. As a pupil and later as a teacher, she preferred this method. Cathie insists that at fifteen years old, a rural child is far more secure in their own place in the world to cope with this move to Wick or Thurso. At twelve, it is nigh on impossible in Cathie's mind – 'because bairns stay bairns longer here'. This point is significant and is developed below.

To further complicate the transition, facilities, teachers, and opportunities are not always glaringly obvious to children or parents. At Wick High School, for instance, the building is in such a problematic state of disrepair that the First Minister has been asked to visit, pupils have held a 'strike' in protest, and the school is deemed unfit for teaching. A recent protest claimed that the Local Authority was taking too little action: when school inspectors were in Wick to discuss the school, for instance, they refused to walk around the school and view for themselves its dilapidation. When, at the end of September 2008, First Minister Alex Salmond was in Thurso for the Caithness Regeneration Conference, he declined an invitation to Wick High School, on the grounds that government cannot give orders to the Local Authority in such matters. Instead, the petition signed by more than 500 Wick High School pupils was presented to the First Minister, who called the petition 'praiseworthy' and agreed that the Highland Council should become more pro-active about this. The aims and attempts of the school are, however impressive, and the list of extracurricular activities long. These include football, rugby, badminton, shinty, swimming lessons, sign language lessons, guitar and drumming class, and drama. They are provided by a combination of teaching staff, the Teens' Activities and Leisure Club (TALK), and the Pulteney People's Project (PPP).

There is a stress on guidance support at Wick High School and each year group is divided into six categories, all designated a letter. This is common in many Scottish secondary schools. In Wick, I was particularly struck by the localization of these groups: 1F is Fergus, the patron saint of the town; 1M is Morven, the Caithness mountain; 1N is Noss, the well-known peak and lighthouse; 1R is Rumster, the community buy-out Caithness forest; 1S is Scaraben, the row of hills that separate Caithness from the neighbouring Highlands; 1Y is Yarrows, home to the standing

stones of southeast Caithness. Further, Wick's catchment area includes all the Wick primaries, Bower (11 miles), Canisbay (17 miles), Dunbeath (21 miles), Keiss (8 miles), Lybster (13 miles), Thrumster (4 miles), and Watten (8 miles). There is a strong sense of localism attached to the education at this secondary school.

Thurso High School focuses less on the local and claims to offer 'the best in traditional Scottish values'. With its own particular history of migration, and Dounreay's familiarity to Scotland, it is unsurprising that Thurso flags up the national in a way that Wick does not. Thurso High School has a narrower catchment area than Wick, accepting pupils from all Thurso primaries, Bowermadden (12 miles), Castletown (6 miles), Dunnet (10 miles), Halkirk (5 miles), and Reay (10 miles). Once again, the differences between life in Canisbay and life in Dunbeath are vast, and much further apart than their 38 miles distance. Putting these backgrounds together does not create a common ground: being educated for six years together barely strengthens these relationships because the children have little contact with one another outside school hours. Cliques of social background remain significant: at school, while they are friendly with other pupils, Lybsterians stick together.

Village children as an undivided group

Caithness children do not tend to separate or group themselves in cliques according to age or gender, mainly because there are too few children in the area to be so selective. For adolescents in particular, this is especially true. This can be somewhat problematic, as teenagers introduce younger children to activities and behaviour that are slightly too old for them, and younger children want to stay out socializing. That is not to say, however, that the interaction is negative. There is a huge amount of peer support and care amongst Caithness young people. The relationships between differently aged children means that transition periods are aided for younger ones: starting school, starting High School, beginning relationships, general socializing are mimicked by the younger children. Of course this relationship is not without its problems. Parents, knowing of this type of relationship, would insist that older siblings play with younger siblings and involve them in their social life. However close the sibling relationship is, this was never popular. Furthermore, often older

children quickly tire of having younger ones around: while older children can open up the world for their littler friends, the latter bring with them only restrictions. I lost count of the times teenagers would appear at my door with their younger acquaintances, and beg me to babysit them, all the while the younger children are begging to watch the teenagers live their lives. The younger children envy the teenagers, imagining that age gives these older teenagers additional pleasures and freedom. As Alison James as pointed out, however, the teenagers are completely liminal: ‘too young for this, too old for that’ (1995: 60). They are in-between in terms of legality and general socially-accepted patterns. James also notes that by the age of sixteen, the children can buy cigarettes: this they already do. By eighteen they can buy and drink alcohol in pubs: for this they are already practicing (ibid.). Caithnessian teenagers are at once perplexed and angry at the suffocatingly intense obligations, responsibilities, and lack of freedom that Caithness gives them. After younger childhood years of – as Glendinning et al. (2003) suggest – enjoying their rural surroundings, they possess a yearning to be a teenager elsewhere, in a ‘real’ place where the latest commodities and fashions are available and where the grass seems ever greener. Meanwhile, their location is always blamed for their pushing of boundaries and participation in adult activities like alcohol, sex, and cigarettes. It was ever-evident during my fieldwork that these teenagers were doing what teenagers all over the country are doing. The fact that they attribute it all to Caithness and that they vocalize this push-pull relationship to home gave a different depth to their experience. To them, the very fact of *being Caithnessian* – as opposed to the liminity of teenagerhood – creates a crisis of belonging for these children. For the teenagers, ultimately, elsewhere is all on their minds.

Waiting: young people, bus shelters, cigarettes and alcohol

In the dark of a winter’s afternoon, the glow of cigarettes is visible across the main road. Katie, Scott, and Lisa are sitting at the bus stop in torrential rain, soaked to the skin, and drinking from a lemonade bottle. I wander over to them to ask what they’re up to tonight. At 14 and 15 years of age, the answer is both illegal yet consistent for these teenagers. ‘Fags and vodka, Kimmie’ Katie says miserably, embracing me and sheltering under my umbrella, and asks ‘where are you going?’ I explained was on my way to work a shift at the pub, and I had good news for them.

‘Alison says you can come with me’. Alison, the pub’s owner, takes an active interest in the lives of Caithness youths, and does her utmost to keep Caithnessians in Caithness. ‘Can we no’ finish our fags first, like?’ Scott laughs as the rain saturates the under-age smoker’s cigarette.

Inside, Alison has piping hot mugs of tea waiting for these youngsters. One area of the pub - through an archway from the actual bar where the pool table, jukebox, and karaoke machine are set up - has been reserved for the kids to come in and socialise together. They sample the sociable aspects of being in a pub, laughing together and catching up. They can buy juice and snacks – though I was hesitant to believe that their serious cigarette and vodka preference would be easily replaced by a can of cola. Certainly, they would pop outside to smoke occasionally, at full risk of not being allowed back in. On the whole, they played raucous games of pool together, provided older villagers with scandalous gossip in the way that only young people can, and were genuinely grateful to be out of the rain.

Edward is swinging from the village flag-pole as his younger brother kicks a ball against the old dry-stane dyke. The squeak of the flag-pole and thud of the ball is an incessant and irritating combination, so Jock comes out and tells them to play elsewhere. ‘Ah, Jock, man! Ye canna say ye never did ‘is when ye wis wur age. Right here, same wall ‘n all. We’re bored, man! Gimme a fiver an’ we’ll get the bus intil Week!’.

This is an interesting insight into how young Caithnessians reflect on their situation: they are acutely aware that all the Caithness generations before them went through their boredom, their period of waiting, in exactly the same way. Jock, now in his sixties, can hardly disagree with Edward. Young people here use this as a handy device, playing on the memory of older villagers, they find a commonality in their awkward relationship with this place. The grass is greener south of Inverness according to the teenagers I met. In their hearts, they want to stay, in their heads they fear that ‘fags and vodka’ is the only future.

Above, I claimed that Caithness belonging itself was the central point of narratives about why teenagers do the things they do and why they feel a certain tension. How does this work? How can identity as Caithnessian shape what is essentially a liminal period of the life-cycle? Gill Jones suggests that this is an

essential consideration: an exploration into processes of belonging is necessary in tackling the question 'do the social divisions within communities lead to the exclusion of some young people from them and the inclusion of others? [The desire to be elsewhere] may, in part, be a response to these processes of exclusion and inclusion' (1999: 2). For Caithness, this is pertinent. The focus on selves and others, who fits where, and how belonging takes shape is not only a story of locals and incomers but an internal dilemma for the Caithness youth.

The migration motivation and desires of these young people are discussed in the next chapter. For now, though, it is important to note that Caithnessian adults are increasingly aware of how teenage experiences of waiting, boredom, and confusion lead to out-migrating adults. A recent drive to put young people right at the heart of Caithness community, and to give the Caithness youth their own decision-making opportunity, has been a top priority for the development groups in the locality.

'The intention is to get youths involved' : organizational structures

At a recent committee meeting of the South East Caithness Development Group (SECDG), nearly every item of the agenda was related to young people in and around Caithness. For young teenagers, the re-creation of the Lybster Youth Club was given a boon of £1050 for equipment and excursions. Importantly, this funding was donated by the Caithness Youth Bank (CYB). The CYB is a branch of Highland Voice, the government initiative to provide a sounding board for teenagers in the north. The CYB board is completely made up of Caithness young people who consider applications from teenagers in the region. Young people deciding for young people, the CYB has the power to fund thousands of pounds towards the recreational, educational, and social prospects of their peer group. This organization also gave £660 towards the Dunbeath playing fields to enable a new 7-a-side football tournament. The predominant discussion at the most recent SECDG meeting was housing for Caithnessians in their late teens and early twenties. The main difficulty is 'getting youth to register an interest in affordable housing when none is available and to project that interest to a time when housing will be available. In the last couple of months, a few young people have left due to the lack of affordable housing

in Southeast Caithness' (Minutes 15.01.08). Young people's housing experiences are explored below.

To widen the daily horizons of Caithness young people, the evening local bus service has been extended between Dunbeath, Lybster, Wick, and Thurso. This proves extremely popular, costing just £4 for a return for the hour-long trip, yet the difference between village and town is vast and it is a small price to pay for the facilities they can access. The golden ticket is always the one to Inverness. Unfortunately, although the 'Young Scot' pass provides a 20% reduction on the coach to Inverness, a day-return ticket (for a duration of four and a half hours each way) will cost a teenager £21. Paradoxically, the Highland Council still claims that:

The foundation of future Highland prosperity depends on investment in our communities, in our families, and in our children and young people. We shall ensure that Highland is widely recognised as the best place in Scotland to be young. (Foreword, *For Highland's Children* 2007)

One major priority is youth involvement in sport and outdoor activities. Funding of £3975 from Awards for All has provided a portable skittle alley for the entire region. For children who have never played team games like football, for instance, there are new opportunities. For instance, The Dounreay Fund has donated £300 and provided strips, coaching, and equipment for Lybster Junior F.C. This enables the team to reach the Scottish Football Association (SFA) quality mark. Meanwhile, older teenagers playing for Lybster Senior F.C. benefit from a £3,200 Local Action Fund grant to start an annual tournament.

The committee meeting ended with a declaration that 'we want to make our community wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safer, stronger, greener. These are the government's objectives for Scotland and we want to work with them'. These were unexpected words in a region that flags up its distinctiveness and separation from the nation. Prioritizing the greater good of Caithness young people before tension with the nation is just one way in which Caithnessians are having to change their ways. In chapter 8 below, the necessity for a closer relationship with the rest of Scotland is explored. In short, young people are the future of Caithness, and by this declaration, the SECDG is demonstrating that this particular future will be more allied with Scotland.

By giving attention and focus to what young people want, the community decision-making group has to realize what is important in the lives of its young people. While the SECDG initiatives are based around activities and sport, a more accurate picture of the experience of young Caithnessians is driving around town and chatting with friends on the internet. To miss this way of life and socializing is to misunderstand how young people in Caithness come to think of the rural place around them.

Finding freedom: rites of passage that open the world

While decision-making responsibilities and leisure facilities are encouraging for the youth of Caithness, there are certain teenage rituals that they await with greater anticipation. There is rarely a more exciting moment in a Caithness young person's social life than the day of his or her seventeenth birthday, when the first driving lesson takes place. While this might be a much-anticipated event for teenagers in many places, in Caithness the ability to drive and access to a car changes their experience of the world, alters the way they think of Caithness, and alters their relationships with parents. While for Caithnessian adults I met cars are a means of transport from A to B, and necessary in rural life, for young people the significance is two-fold. First, cars take you where you want to be, and second, social life happens in cars for young people. Cars both activate and symbolize young Caithness social life. The type of car is never important: model, price, and customizations do not figure in the desire to own one's own car. Ownership is vital – borrowing the family car is not reliable or free enough. Knowing the routes around Caithness that will produce most entertainment and in which car park to congregate is essential. Crucially, a young driver – whether male or female - should be able to perform all sorts of car maintenance and have knowledge of how a car works. In terms of keeping a car on the road, items such as insurance and petrol are almost always paid for by parents. Learning to drive and owning a car is a key rite of passage, yet those features which enable it to work, fuel and insurance, keep young people firmly dependent on their parents.

Youth social life happens in cars: if a young person is not driving a car, they must at least be a passenger in someone else's car if they plan to socialize with the

peer group. The kind of circular driving mentioned at the top of this chapter, always on the journey to no destination, is a key way in which young people occupy themselves. Picking up friends or rolling down the window to chat to those in passing cars is very much seen as 'gettan 'e crack'. Further, young drivers all congregate in certain parts of Wick and Thurso – and come from all over Caithness to do so – to such an extent that if one is not in a car, one is excluded from the majority of conversation, plans, and entertainment between young people. The cars are given names: one called Flodly (because its registration number sounded like this when read aloud) another D-GOW (when David Gow got his DG1 personalised plate) and another called Elsie (after the driver's mother). Text messages between young people will read: 'Flodly's visitan Elsie 'enight, you?' as drivers give agency to their automobiles. Young people want to be in that community of having a car and by naming the car, find a space for individuality at the same time. In finding a blend of 'the same but different' – a theme that underlines all of Caithness life – young people find a reassurance in their car ownership. Furthermore, as John Urry points out: 'The car's significance is that it reconfigures civic society involving distinct ways of dwelling, traveling, and socializing in, and through, an automobilised time-space' (2000: 59).

Reflecting on my time in Shona's car – an experience I had in four different cars – this sense of automobile time-space is a crucial reconfiguration for young people in this place. As much as they claim boredom whilst driving around for hours, those same hours of 'doing nothing, 'waiting', and 'being bored' (phrases attributed by young Caithnessians to rural life in general) are made to speed by more quickly when spent in a car.

Another popular way of spending time is on the internet, which is another means of opening the world up from any rural Caithness location. During my fieldwork, broadband connections were set up in the region. Older people tend to use the internet frequently for emailing and to order groceries to be delivered from the supermarket. It is young people who network and find each other through this connection. Daniel Miller discusses the internet's importance to Trinidadian identity:

A detailed focus on what Trinidadians find in the internet, what they make of it, how they can relate its possibilities to themselves and their futures will tell us a great deal about both the internet and about Trinidad...We are not simply asking about the 'use' or the 'effects' of a new medium. Rather, we are looking at how members of a specific culture attempt to make themselves a(t) home in a transforming communicative environment, how they can find themselves in this environment and at the same time try to mould it in their own image. (2000: 1)

It was always fascinating during fieldwork to encounter how young people negotiate space: how they figure out their place at 'home' while imaging 'elsewhere'. Furthermore, as Miller suggests of Trinidad, this localization of the internet, to 'mould it in their own image' is important to Caithness young people. In reaching out to another place, they present their own, and gain a more activated sense of community. Here, I focus on how young people in particular construct 'belonging' by exploring 'elsewhere' without leaving home.

The impact and significance of social networking internet sites on Caithness young people cannot be overemphasized. An obvious claim here is that the internet 'opens the world up' to rural communities. Crucially, this is *not* how young people in Caithness use the internet. My point is to highlight how the internet becomes a way of broadening and intensifying community communication and relationships. Although teenagers over the Ord would often dwell on boredom and talk about the 'escape' that would follow their journey to adulthood, they categorically emphasized their love of home on these sites. At once, they were escaping from, and staying at, home. In the personal information section where 'Hometown' is required, entries include 'On the best side of the Ord', 'Brite Lite City o Week' [Wick], 'I'm a bonnie Lybster lassie', 'Teanabowlie' [Thurso native]. Some have set up polls including 'Which one's the best Caithness village?' and a multitude of online photo albums are dedicated to community scenes like gala week, or well-known local characters. After leaving Lybster, I was cajoled by the young people there to set up an account on a social networking site so I could not only keep in touch with them but join cyber groups such as 'Kaitness History', 'Wick not Thurso' and 'Local Musicians from Caithness'. The dedication that is *displayed* by these young people strikes me as mature for their young years, they have a rootedness that often seems to come with

age. Everyday monotony and wonder about what the future hold often supercede this affiliation, but at the heart of it all is an explicit connection to Caithness.

The Inverness effect

Another way of finding freedom is to travel, not just electronically or physically around town in their beloved cars, across the boundaries of the Caithness region. Anywhere south of Caithness to Inverness is referred to as ‘doon ‘e line’ (referring to the train journey that terminates in Inverness) and when young people first take a trip there without parents, it is of huge significance. Travelling in and around Caithness is something young people do freely on buses, and the Ord is the boundary they are not meant to cross. Over the course of fieldwork I accompanied five Caithness youths on their first, separate journeys with friends rather than parents to Inverness. There, they experience awe, exhilaration, and a certain fear that I had naively not anticipated. The crowds, traffic, and speed of life are different to Caithness life, and teenagers yearn for brands and activities available outside their region. Once there though, their sheer separation from larger, more globally-connected places, is clear and they become quickly overwhelmed. On one single trip, the teenagers wanted to try McDonalds, Starbucks, the Odeon cinema, the Aquadome leisure centre, clothes shopping from Topshop, playfully select pieces of the tartan tourist iconography that is absent from Caithness, and food at Pizza Hut before heading back to Caithness. I asked them if they would like to have the same facilities in Caithness, expecting a resounding yes. Tom put it neatly: ‘aye, but then fit’s ‘ere til go til Inverness for?’



Fig. 7: A young Caithnessian in the city: trying 'Scottishness' for size (Suzie Taylor)

Inverness has been fetishized by Caithness young people. Here, I follow Barnard and Spencer's definition of fetishization: the 'process by which a culture or a social group irrationally overrates something (that which it fetishizes). In this sense, the object does not have to be material (1994: 605). In yearning for the allure, mystery, and imagined lifestyle of Inverness, the place is set apart and kept almost sacred. Would younger people want to move there? 'Nah, it's busy and you don't know anybody and you might get pushed into drugs and stuff' is a summary of the opinions I heard. The reality of encountering that which is fetishized, reveals that Caithnessians keep this separation from Inverness for negative as well as positive reasons. It is the case that some Caithnessians, particularly the elderly, have never actually traveled further afield than Inverness. When I took five Wick teenagers to Edinburgh in summer 2007, they were especially security-conscious: 'has everyone got mobile phones in case I get lost?', 'that guy's looking at me funny', and 'what do homeless people do if you don't give them money?' were among the concerns raised. The freedom that young people here crave and then gain is matched, sometimes raised by fear. While in the safe boundaries of Caithness, they 'talk the talk' of leaving for more cosmopolitan lands of brands and fashions. The fetishization and mimicry of elsewhere is common amongst these young people: after a trip to Inverness, they return to Wick talking a language that locals do not understand. They refer to their 'double tall latte' from Starbucks or their 'large Big Mac meal from McDonalds' to present themselves as more worldly-wise than their peers in the

community. Ever-concealed, though, is the fear and the lack of a safe boundary they experience when visiting for real that imagined elsewhere.

The shared employment path

Suzie is twenty and recently moved to Inverness to live with her cousin and work in a clothes shop. As for the teenagers discussed above, the allure of the Highland capital had always attracted Suzie and she imagined a world of possibility. When she moved in and began work, the reality of being away from her friends (as opposed to homesickness) and being in the city did not please her. Within just eight days, Suzie was back in Wick, working in the local warehouse with a group of her friends from school.

I quickly learnt the patterns of early employment in Caithness: young people tend to have part-time jobs while still at school then find work at one of a certain group of places. By 'group' I mean that Caithness has certain specific workplaces where every young person has had some experience of working. In terms of leaving school, statistics show that at Wick High School in 2007/8, 64% of pupils stayed on into fifth year, which amounted to 112 pupils. In terms of leaver destinations after S5, 34% went into employment, 25% of young people went into full-time further education, 25% into full-time higher education, 18% became unemployed and seeking employment, while 2% were unemployed without seeking a job, and 1% were in training. At Thurso High School in 2007/8, 70% of pupils stayed on to S5, which amounted to 143 pupils. On leaving, 31% went into employment, 27% went into full-time higher education, 27% went into full-time further education, 9% were unemployed seeking a job, 3% were unemployed without seeking employment, a further 3% was not known, and 0% went into training.²² This is the area I found to be most gendered in Caithness life. Teenage girls tend to stay on at school longer than boys, although my knowledge of this is from observation and not statistics. Leaver destinations are also gendered. I have observed that teenage girls start work by waitressing in the local hotel/pub restaurant areas, or serving customers in the village shop. It is no exaggeration to say that teenage boys do not take on this kind of work at all. Those teenage boys 'help out' with manual labourer, typically with

²² Scottish Schools Online statistics. Source: www.ltscotland.org/uk Accessed 24.04.09

the older male village ‘characters’ who earn a living doing odd-jobs. This can include gardening work on local estates, beating in grouse season, mowing the grass in villagers’ gardens, or helping to fix fishing nets at the harbour. Teenage girls do not take on this kind of work.

The gendered division continues upon leaving school. Young women take work in Wick or Thurso hotels, as cleaners in the local residential homes, or as childminders. Young men go to work at the decommissioning of Dounreay, to the fishing (be it harbour or sea work), or drive Steven’s of Wick fish lorries. None of this is about who is employable. These attitudes and preferences permeate Caithness life: some work is male, some female. The distinction of work-place is notable, since no other space is gendered this way. The one work-place that truly unites the genders in terms of where they choose to take a job is the BT call centre in Thurso. It must be stressed here that every twenty-something Caithnessian I know who did not move away for work or further education has, at some point, worked at BT Thurso.

Take my Caithness friends Dom, Rick, Alex, and Graham. These men are in their early twenties, all from Wick, and all locals who have rarely ventured over the Ord. These are familiar faces in the hotspots of Wick nightlife, and I know them well. One important thing these individuals have in common is their employment pattern. Dom explained it thus:

I left school at went straight into a job answering phones at BT in Thurso. That’s what we all wanted to do if we were stayin’ put. After a few months, I was finding it too expensive driving from Wick and back every day. In winter, it was hellish – up at 6am driving in thick snow. So I gave it up and took a job at the Creels, like making creel boxes, in Wick. Hellish, just hellish. Bed there about seven months, then I did my HGV license and got a job drivin’ with Stevens. Ask Alex, he did the same!

BT Thurso is actually the short-hand reference to Manpower at Thurso Business Park, which houses the call centre for British Telecom customers. Personal accounts are handled here: problems with landlines or internet connections are dealt with by the staff at Thurso. Manpower, like other businesses in Thurso, branched out to the area because of its closeness to Dounreay, which had already produced a local network of technical knowledge. I knew sixteen young people – from Lybster,

Wick, and Thurso – who had all at some point worked there, and all crossed paths. Between them, they seemed to know the whole young population of Wick and Thurso through working at BT.

‘You’re meant to hate working at BT!’ Rick told me, with a laugh. Apparently, it is customary to view Manpower as a necessary step, a *rite de passage* into the world of employment. Some workers enjoy it on a social level: the number of intimate relationships started by meeting at Manpower is vast. Others compared it positively to schooldays: working with friends, doing the same tasks day in, day out. When ‘everyone’ progresses naturally from school to Manpower, there is something relaxing and reassuring about it. Graham sees Manpower as somewhere he can build a lifelong career, it is no stepping stone for him. Within four years, he has become manager and is in charge of his old school-friends. Gordy finds this challenging, but enjoys the ‘one big happy family’ atmosphere. Occasionally, as for Donna, this atmosphere is too much like fun: she was fired for constantly causing disruption through her playfulness and for diverting her difficult calls to her friend, Dom’s, number. It was evident during fieldwork that co-workers who grew up together and went to school together, treat employment together as an opportunity for entertainment. BT Thurso has become a metaphor for a period of work that is like an extension of school and is transient. It is a stepping-stone in that grass-is-greener worldview.

For those who live outside Thurso, travelling to and from Manpower each day took particular effort. Take for instance my friend Diane. She worked at the call centre for seven months, and lived in Lybster. Each morning, Diane drove 30 miles up the very rural Causeymire road to begin work at 7am. This often meant leaving her house at 6am. In winter months, the road blocked with snow, Diane would find the road impassable and have to travel to work via Wick, adding a further 15 miles to her journey.

It is also clear that when young people here take jobs that are off this collective path of employment, it does not fit easily with their perception of work. Diane later went to work in a Thurso hotel that is staffed by individuals in their forties. The hours and money were good and although Diane admits it was ‘no bad crack’ and thus enjoyable, she intensely missed her peer group. ‘I was on my phone

all the time, calling them at BT or at Steven's, wherever they were working. They were all together having a grand time, I was bored on my own. So I quit'. This kind of attitude came up often when I was talking to young people: as much as working at BT Thurso is something they claim to dislike, it is the one workspace where large groups of young people work together, and this makes it more popular than being 'bored on my own' as Diane put it. At the same time, though, some young people (mainly men) have multiple jobs in Caithness. For example, Ray not only works daily as a refuse collector for the council, he is also the doorman at a Wick club every Friday and Saturday and works as a delivery driver throughout the week. It seemed to me that wherever I went in Caithness, putting out the rubbish, or dancing in the club, taking a delivery order at the pub, or watching the football, Ray was everywhere. This is another kind of employment pattern recognizable to other communities in the north.

An alternative route to employment is to work for the family business. I knew of at least seven Caithnessians in their late teens and early twenties who are particularly well-known faces due to the success and wealth of the family company. These companies are typically in the fishing industry or in contract work. Social class creeps into this aspect of Caithness life as in no other and, while McCrone might argue that 'Scotland is now a "middle-class" society with greater amounts of upward social mobility' (2001: 25), Caithnessians would not agree. This is a land of hard, manual labour as fishermen, as labourers for local contractors, and digging up roads for the national transport companies. When Tam appeared one day, shivering from cold and covered in dirt having been working on the roads, I remarked on how laborious work is in the region. He told me that I must describe people like him as 'workers' not 'working class' because, to Tam, the very notion is patronizing. Individuals within this community who have family businesses stand out, at risk of 'acting like incomers'. As the children of such families reach the end of secondary education, these young people know that they will go straight into very well paid jobs, with a flat and an expensive car, and in the next few decades will become management before inheriting the firm. Others in their peer group seem to perceive these individuals as separate to the group. While they are not peripheral, these successful 'business teens' will not be socializing in the same group when they are

forty. Amongst Caithnessians who do not migrate, the peer group of your teens is the peer group of your forties. The predictability of Caithness life reassures some and terrifies others, who are likely to migrate. This is discussed fully in chapter six below.

At home in the world: young people and housing

One significant advance in the prospects of Caithness young people is the arrival of affordable housing in the region. Not only has this provided a source of independence, it has also been accompanied by new employment opportunities, including the arrival of a large national supermarket, and a branch of a fashion chain store. Young men clamour to work at the new Tesco supermarket, while young women delight in the staff discounts available from the clothes shop New Look. The chance to live away from one's parents is something which latterly has become a focus of Caithness youth attention. It appears to be the next best thing to elsewhere. One way in which teenagers like Liam and Gemma, both 16, are able to remain in Caithness without few prospects is through social housing. Both of these young people hail from Caithness villages. To mobilize resources such as council flats, an individual must be willing to move to Thurso. These two young people have rather troubled backgrounds: expulsion from school, convictions, and a miscarriage have all complicated the relationship of this couple. Having estranged familial relationships, both Liam and Gemma left the family homes and the local council provided them with a bedsit style of flat in Thurso. The difference that responsibility and running a household have made to Liam and Gemma is something that adults in their home village favourably comment on. Gemma had begun a course at North Highland College, Thurso, and Liam was working with a local contractor's business. The flat was immaculate and both had a renewed drive to do well, to make the opportunity work. According to villagers who knew them at home, this was a novelty that would wear off. However, this practical way of proving themselves served to repair their familial relationships.

This happy scenario does not, however, have the approval of Caithnessians in general. I have heard older residents say that young people are having to make no attempt at relationships or jobs because of such 'ways out'. A particular sore point

that I noted was the unmarried pregnant woman who applied for a two-bedroom flat in Thurso. Carys had lived at home in Thurso for 17 years with her father since her mother had died when Carys was born. Carys' boyfriend, Fraser, lived with his parents in Wick. For employment, Carys was a representative hosting parties for a cosmetics company while Fraser worked as a labourer at Wick harbour. Living together was impossible and no suitable housing was available at the time in Thurso. The couple were still living apart when baby Stewie was born. Unmarried, with a child, and by this time not working, Carys was certainly the subject of much gossip when she was allocated a flat through the Thurso Housing Association. Fraser still had not moved in with his girlfriend and small son, but visited occasionally. For challenging 'traditional' 'nuclear' notions of family life, this young couple and child were a source of bafflement. Caithnessians abhor the notion of 'getting something for nothing' which is exactly what some claimed Carys and Fraser had set out to do.

Housing remains a problematic area in the lives of young Caithnessians. Vicky, a young woman from Wick, had trained at Inverness College to become a nurse. Having taken a part-time job at the Dunbar hospital in Thurso, Vicky had a steady – if somewhat low – income. She decided that, having a solid base that would allow her to remain resident in Caithness, she would rent a flat in Thurso. Finding that available flats could cost up to £600 per month, rivalling city rentals, Vicky relocated to Wick. There, a stunningly renovated flat with two bedrooms, both en suite, a huge living room, modern kitchen, and a decorative 1930s-style entrance hall, cost her just £275 per month. The extra money spent on petrol to take her from Wick to Thurso and back daily still worked out cheaper than moving to Thurso.

For young people, Caithness poses something of a dilemma. On the one hand, the more opportunities and facilities arrive there, the more interesting and varied their everyday lives become. On the other hand, the closer these country towns come to urban areas, the more expensive life becomes. Caithnessians are not used to this sort of problem. For instance, the arrival of a large Tesco supermarket in Wick made food more affordable, but put a strain on local family-run businesses. Simultaneously, booms such as employment and in-migration have caused housing prices to rise. There is a 'double-edged sword' feeling in Caithness at this time,

particularly felt by the young people who find themselves occupying the boundary between childhood and adulthood.

At home in your thirties: being the eternal *boyagie*

My friend Stephen is 34. He makes £12,000 a year working in a good position with the Highland Council. He tells me that the money is spent of ‘doing up the car, trips to Inverness with the boys, clothes, and nights out in Wick’. He lives rent-free with his parents and has done so his entire life. Each morning when he gets up, his mother Valerie has prepared breakfast for him and is packing his lunch. Stephen’s clothes are laid out for him by Valerie and his car waits in the drive, fuelled by petrol his parents pay for. Stephen’s salary is simply ‘spending money’. This is in no way unusual for adult children in Caithness.

There is a serious opposition of extremes: in some families, children are encouraged to be independent and to move on with their own jobs, homes, and relationships at a young age of around nineteen. Others, like Stephen, stay at home well into their thirties. The concept of a ‘Caithness child’ is quite flexible – adult dependent children are very evident in this area. Clearly, though, this Caithness phenomenon is a gendered one: women in their thirties rarely still live with their parents while Caithness men in their thirties very commonly do. In my small census of the village, I found that four men in their thirties lived permanently in the parental home. The two women in their thirties who lived at home were temporary, one due to the breakdown of her marriage, and the other because she had lost her job. The temporary nature of their residence was stressed by the women, who appeared to be embarrassed by this living arrangement, while the men seemed more relaxed there. Women are also more likely to migrate out of Caithness (see also Glendinning et al 2003), and so perhaps these women had a sense of not ‘getting on’ or ‘moving on’ because they had temporarily moved back. My argument is that the felt inevitability of female migration comes from traditional employment patterns. In a place where fishing, farming, and work at Dounreay are very male-centred, women have had to work harder at finding employment and ways of remaining in Caithness. Some men, like Stephen, attribute this phenomenon of men staying at home as adults to close, positive generational relationships. In his case, the parent-child relationship in terms

of 'getting along' is very close, Stephen sees Valerie as a friend. However, in practical terms, she cares for him in the same way as when Stephen was in infancy. Stephen does not see himself in a child-like position. As he put it: 'I could easily move out, but poor Valerie loves making my sandwiches'. Behind a joke is a difficult scenario: when, for instance, Valerie becomes elderly or ill, it is uncertain who might care for her. Further, any relationships Stephen has with women appear to fizzle out, perhaps with none able to deal with this parent-adult child relationship, or match the high standard Stephen expects from women.

In some cases, such as that of mother-and-son crofters Sheila and Paul, aged 80 and 40 respectively, the family business creates the parent-child living arrangements. This scenario is less common nowadays, as children will often live nearby and simply travel back to the farmland to deal with business. The obligations and responsibilities surrounding this can be challenging. A decade ago, Paul left the family farm and took work at a large company in Wick, living in a council house in Pulteneytown. Paul would return to the farm to help: during his holidays, he would work full-time on the farm. Having lost his job in Wick recently, Paul was searching for another when his mother announced that he should simply move back to the family home and work full-time on the farm. Paul was wholly against this idea, enjoying his independence and working life, and also maintaining his occasional work on the farm. He and his partner, Linda, lived together in Wick and Paul was unwilling to revert back to his younger, farming days. His mother's powers of persuasion won Paul over, and he recently moved back to the farm – situated between Lybster and Wick – taking Linda with him. They now live in a caravan opposite the main farm house. Life there is not easy for the couple, but Paul wants to keep his mother happy, and Linda is willing to try out this lifestyle. In this respect, unlike Stephen, Paul is acutely aware of the dynamics of his parent-child relationship and the obligations that linger.

Pride of place: feelings of belonging amongst young people

The notion of 'staying put' – whether in the family home as an adult-child or during a family break-up, or choosing to stay put in Caithness after the transition to adulthood is a difficult negotiation for young people.

Lybster, 1970: Jinnad has received all A-grade passes in her exams. An unconditional entry to study History at the University of Aberdeen lands on the mat. Jinnad has always had this aim of ‘bettering’ herself, ‘seeing the world’, imagining life away from home. Around the same time, Jinnad is approached by a company at Wick harbour who offer her a high annual salary to start work with them immediately. Telling me this story decades later, Jinnad explains that the decision should have been harder, that perhaps she should have gone to Aberdeen. Overall, however, her aim in applying to university was to open up avenues that were closed in Caithness. When she was offered a fantastic job, the need to leave was not so pressing. Jinnad had the opportunity to stay put and move on at the same time. As explored in the following chapter, ‘staying’ and ‘moving on’ do not fit easily together in Caithness. Even today, Jinnad – in her very large house, with her successful business, and expensive cars – stands out as something of an anomaly. In Jinnad’s hand was the unconditional university offer, the one thing she *imagined* she wanted. The reality was her decision to stay *despite* the offer.

Lybster, 2006: Marelle receives a similar offer to study in Edinburgh. She immediately accepts. To follow your heart and stay can often mean giving up the prospect of something better for some Caithness young people, particularly when what they actually desire is those same prospects in the homeland. To go with your heart and leave is, however, the ever-increasing choice of the Caithness young person. Often, the dichotomy of staying or leaving is a constitutive and inevitable part of Caithnessian belonging.

6.
Myths and motivations of movement:
Caithness exile and expectation²³

Div ye mind e day in Kaitness fan ye felt ye'd hed enough
An ye left e croft for iver in e wurld till do yur stuff
An ye heided bravely for e sooth through drivan win an rain
An ye swore at dreary countryside wid no see ye again
Div y mind boy? Div ye mind?

Bit spite o win an rain an muck ye canna stop away
An many's a weary chourney hev ye hedden since at day
Ye lek till see chuist wance again e pleice far ye steyed.

(Donald Young)

In this chapter, I explore notions of what I term ‘push-pull’ belonging. Imaginations of elsewhere, obligations at home, dreams to follow, and actual migration are all part of everyday Caithness life. In a region where personal identity is tied up in notions of place, genealogical roots, and obligation, the mere contemplation of departure can complicate kinship ties. This chapter explores not only actual movement, but also those myths of movement, which include hoping to leave but never going; leaving and wishing for return; wanting to stay and feeling forced to leave. To be Caithnessian is to have an inchoate dilemma about staying or leaving, an opinion on those who stay or leave, and a difficult decision about whether ‘being there’ is an inevitable part of Caithness belonging.

Anticipating elsewhere: young people’s push-pull relationship to home

At the small bus stop at the top of the road, in the silence of an early Lybster morning, I helped Marelle load her suitcases onto the bus. Nostalgic tears filled her eyes and the smile of anticipation was on her lips. My closest friend in the village, she was leaving, having been offered a place at a university in Edinburgh. Relatives hugged her, made her promise that she’d return home at least once a month. Envious friends told her to ‘show ‘at beeg city how Lybster does hid’. They were concerned that she was going alone – they had offered to take her to Inverness for her

²³ Due to the nature of data for exile, much of the ethnographic material presented here was gathered through telephone calls, letters, and email communication with Caithness migrants.

connecting bus. But Marelle wanted to leave from Lybster, though not leave Lybster for good: ‘Hid’s chuist lek a chob, I’m no’ *movan* movan. I’ll chuist do iss for a whilie...’. The convincing narrative of a promise, the job prospect that demands a move: this shapes the migration of the young Caithnessians I know.

Out-migration from rural areas still mainly involves young, single people, especially graduates, citing lack of work as their reasons for leaving. They feel as though they *have* to “get out to get on” (Beech 2005: 454, my emphasis).

Marelle’s motivation for movement fits Beech’s notion of the typical exile to a certain extent, but her *perception* of her future does not, and is important to note. In insisting that she is not ‘*movan* movan’, Marelle flags up not only the potential of return, but its inevitability. The journey is imagined as occurring in one of two directions. This sort of narrative seems frequent in Caithness. However, the village rarely sees its exiles return. In just doing her Edinburgh job ‘for a while’, Marelle paints a reassuring picture in which Caithness of the future will be able to offer her a career. Her mother is waving her off, choking back tears, still checking that her daughter is truly happy to be leaving. Marelle is trying to reassure her. The excitement that she feels is tinged with guilt – there are expectations of her as a ‘guid daughter’ that she is abandoning for her career. The weight of this hits her hard as she hugs her family goodbye, apologizing quietly in her mother’s ear. Hearing her say sorry is difficult, but she gets no reassuring response, just an ‘aye, well’, suggesting that she *should* be apologetic. This is reflected in a contemporary Caithness play:

Chaimig [an elderly man]: ‘They belong here, thur niymes tell ye at. Aal e Gunns an Sinclairs an Swansons an Sitherlans. They belong here. But fit’s thur til stiy for, answer me at? Ye look at e Highlands an ye think id’s beautiful. Well id’s no beautiful – it’s a prophecy. Yur livan in e land o e dispossessed, an e dispossessed hev niythan, no even a voice.’

Ray [a young exile]: ‘Aye, yer right enough. So fit’s e point?’

Chaimig: ‘Ach, min! Ah thocht ye’d hev mair fecht, ah thocht ye’d hev mair fecht...’

(Henry Adam, *Among Unbroken Hearts*)

Opportunities which ‘force’ young people over the Ord seem tied up with the obligations, relationships, and responsibilities they feel they are abandoning. This is apparent in the same play:

Amanda [Chaimig’s granddaughter]: Ah chuiist got five As in ma Highers...

Ray: Ye’ll be leavan soon then, eh?

Amanda: I donno. A dinna think so

Ray: I thought at was e way hid went up here. ‘Finish school, get e fuck oot’

Chaimig: Is at how id is wi e young? No care for far they come fie? No care for e pleice they were boarn?’

Amanda: Ye see, ‘at’s fit ah mean – If I go, I’ll break his heart. If I stay, I break my own.

The play - *Among Unbroken Hearts* (Adam 2000) – is the story of a returning exile to a South-East Caithness village (i.e. an unidentified place very near Lybster). It is a powerful evocation of the safety and stasis myth which exiles often use to remember ‘home’. The protagonist, Ray, became a drug addict in exile and returns to Caithness to reclaim his life. His dream-like expectation of home could not match his new addiction, and soon we see the myth shattered as he stands in an old croft and injects his heroin. In doing so, Ray transports the landscape of his mind. Whilst reading, we rethink Caithness, we encounter the expectations of both migration and generation when people reflect on their place of origin.

Perhaps the most well-known Caithness commentator on exile is the semi-autobiographical novelist Neil M. Gunn. A native of Dunbeath, his greatest worry was the way in which some parents encouraged Caithnessian emigration: ‘...When I see the best mothers driving their sons, their own flesh and blood, away I sometimes wonder. It’s a problem. It’s perhaps the world’s greatest problem’ (1946: 21).

Within individuals, there are of course conflicting perspectives about places, opportunities, and relationships. Paul Basu (an anthropologist who worked in nearby Dunbeath) sums this up well when he writes that there is an ‘ambivalent and sometimes perplexing state approximating reality’ amongst exiles (2007: viii).

Marelle’s cousin, Carla, found the easiest way to negotiate her push-pull relationship to home was to *transport* Lybster and Caithness to Edinburgh when she moved there for university. A slightly reluctant exile, she found a coping mechanism

in endearing her city friends to the Caithness way of life. Panoramic photographs around her walls create a miniature Lybster in her city flat. Her love of ‘gettan e crack goan’ (i.e. creating humour and finding entertainment in most scenarios) and her self-assured sense of belonging to Lybster help her through. Some exiles have worried about appearing almost ‘too local’, ‘too teuchter’²⁴ when they move to the city.²⁵ Carla is the opposite. She has endeared her friends to Lybster – when she goes home to the village, she brings them along for a road-trip that has become legendary amongst them. She plays CDs of local Caithness musicians in the flat. Through everyday, banal activities like listening to certain music and having certain photographs on the wall, she quietly imbues Edinburgh with a Gollach style. To deal with her exile, she brought her two worlds together. In Carla’s case, movement is not so much about following *people* as about following *Caithness*. One thing she cannot stand is when her Edinburgh friends copy her accent:

They aren’t taking the piss, they say they love the accent. But how the hell can you love an accent? It’s patronising. It’s not my voice that makes me Lybster. If I hear one more person yelp ‘Here! At’s right bonnie an’ good, lek!’ I’ll go mad. I love that they love it, but I don’t want people down here thinking Caithness is some bloody Disneyland for them to visit with wee ruined crofties and funny words and think it’s dead cute’.

Carla does her utmost to convince others of Caithness’ true identity. In her own admission, Carla feels ‘like a right bloody Lybster missionary sometimes’. On one level, this is a personal statement of identity, but it is one that Caithnessians also feel as a group. The notion that ‘the rest of Scotland’ views Caithness rather myopically is something that sits very awkwardly with Caithnessians. When individuals like Carla move and ‘introduce’ the region to other parts of Scotland, they seem to feel they are giving something ‘back’ to Caithness by raising its profile. Another woman in her late twenties, Lynsay, felt the push-pull from and to Caithness so strongly that she has returned to her home village, Keiss, just south of John O’Groats:

I was totally prepared from the age of 12 – I wanted to go to university and I knew I *had* to leave Caithness for that. I fully expected that returning was

²⁴ A lowland term for someone from the north of Scotland

²⁵ As an exile myself, I related to their concern completely – toning down one’s accent, for instance, is often a mark of the exile who feels out of place.

near impossible, my degree wouldn't get me a Caithness job. I wanted to stay, but I'd be too qualified. But I knew that, I accepted that. As graduation loomed, I realised that I could only ever really settle in Caithness. Degree or not, all that preparation made no difference. Less than a year later, I was back here. And I won't leave again. I've got a job in heritage which I love, but maybe because it lets me stay rather than because I love the job.

Marell leaves Lybster with a foreboding sense of guilt, a promise of return, and a pull home that precedes her departure. Carla feels that in leaving she can introduce other Scottish people to a Caithness which is unfamiliar to them. Lynsay is prepared for exile in a practical sense, but her heart wins out and sees her return. These are women who are passionate about their home and it is formative of their own senses of self. It would be romanticised and inaccurate to present them as typical cases.

Disillusionment and disconnection?: the idealisation of 'betterment'

Often Caithnessians feel dejected there, and are consequently drawn elsewhere. As Edward put it:

It's not a right [meaning 'real' or 'complete'] place up here, you need to go to Inverness or further. We have no jobs, nothing to do, no money, and no locals anymore. It gets you down. It really gets you down.

This individual shares the view of some of Jeanette Edwards' participants in Bacup. Perceptions of place are significant for our understanding of why people stay or leave. Edwards found that local conceptions of what constitutes a city, a village, and a hamlet, are somewhat divergent to widespread conceptions (2000: 78). This can have an effect on young people's decisions to stay or leave.

Take, for instance, Wick. In its situation, structure, and with a population of around 10,000, it would largely be understood as a country town. In the everyday speech of Caithnessians, though, Wick is referred to not by name but as E Beeg City. This label is never accorded to Thurso, it is uniquely a reference for Wick. Lybster village is referred to by neighbouring villages as 'toon'. This is perhaps because, unlike its neighbours, Lybster has three pubs, shops, and facilities. 'Toon' not in terms of size or population, but in relative terms of its provisions. Dunbeath is classed as a village (it has a shop, a pub, a church). When I spoke to locals about

certain villages (by this I mean places classed in the Census as villages), they would laugh at me: ‘But hid’s no a village, hid’s chuist hooses!’. ‘E Beeg City’, ‘e toon’, ‘chuist hooses’: the nuances of these labels are lost in translation when – officially at least – Caithness is said to consist of two towns and the rest villages. It is inevitable, then, that places like Inverness, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh are literally and figuratively perceived as a huge leap from Caithness life. For some, arrival in such places is both reluctant and daunting. For others, the ‘insular’ nature of Caithness and their lack of encounters with identity ‘difference’ makes these places almost otherworldly. Cities are the site of what Rapport and Dawson call the main motive for migration: betterment (1990: 148). The notion that ‘elsewhere’ is the scene of a new-and-improved lifestyle is a myth that I encountered frequently during fieldwork. The geographic location that sets Caithness apart, the impossibility of commuting to jobs in other areas, and the difficulties involved in attending Higher Education facilities in the region, all play their part in young Caithnessians’ perceptions of home.

Factors such as ‘low pay in home county’, ‘commuting as out of the question for most in rural location’, and ‘dissatisfaction amongst stayers’ (Jones and Jamieson 1997: 2) certainly characterize a common Caithness situation. The practical and structural difficulties which come with living in a somewhat disadvantaged, set apart region take their toll on young people. When the situation of Highland depopulation is addressed in a political context, it surprises me – from my ethnographic viewpoint – that there is little attention paid to promote ‘staying’. Most talk is about enticing incomers: this in itself is no bad thing, but a new focus on enabling young Caithnessians to stay in the region could help those individuals we meet in this chapter. A dilemma between the head and the heart is evident for people making migration decisions in/from Caithness. At the time of writing, affordable housing is being introduced to Wick, which is one potential form of helping Caithnessians to stay. In the region, it is certainly true that:

Unless stayers were cohabiting or had children (i.e. social housing) they were likely to still be living with their parents. The local housing market offers little affordable housing for single young people and therefore may “encourage” earlier marriage or cohabitation. (Jones and Jamieson 1997: 4)

Take Zena for instance. Aged 25, she works in a local hotel and lives in Wick with her parents. Zena remarks – being the same age as me – that our lives are very different. For her, ‘money, well...none til my name!’ has necessitated her situation:

I wis good at ‘e school an’ I got a good job in Thurso wi’ BT, on phones an’ that. But I wis spendan’ too much on petrol, twice a day from toon til toon. Plenty o’ flats in Thurso but hid’s hellish dear up thonder. So I gave up my job. Took a job as a waitress in Wick. I get nothan for hid, but there’s no petrol money, an’ bidan wi’ mither evens it oot.

What does Zena want for the future? Does she want to stay in this job and with her parents for a while longer?

I see my pals, excited for leavan. An’ I think, how wid ye want til leave Caithness? I love Caithness! But I dinna love workan lek a skivvy an’ I dinna want til bide wi’ mither! I want til study childcare, so I hev til go and make money somewhere. Or I’ll hev til hev bairns. And bide in Wick. Cooncil wid hev til give me a hoosie then’

Jones and Jamieson would recognize this woman as a good example of their analysis. Zena told her brother James, aged 20 and also living at home, about my research and I received a text message from him which read:

Just workan day in day oot. Waitan. Aye waitan. Need til move fae Caithness. Love hid, but hard til enjoy life. ‘E place destroys ‘e place!

This notion of the place destroying itself shows the dichotomy of the Caithnessian population’s desire to ‘do something’ yet lacking the resources and opportunities to do so in the homeland. As Dr. Winnie Ewing – Highlands and Islands (including Caithness) SNP MSP - noted in Parliament:

The people of Caithness are brisk, energetic, enterprising and hard-working. Perhaps that is the key to why the young leave the area—they are used to that quality of enterprise and, if there is nothing for them, they will simply leave. (February 2000)

Certainly, this could be perceived as the younger generation’s starry-eyed aspirations and feelings that the grass is greener on the other side of the Ord. Laila, a sixteen year old from Dunbeath, explained to me that the lack of resources and opportunities lead to a feeling of hopelessness:

For a while, aal e young fowk spent their time sittan in e bus shelter in e rain, drinkan vodka and thinkan what are we doan here? But now they can hang oot in e pub chuint for a juice and crisps, play pool, and listen to e jukebox an' 'at. So ye dinna spend so long feelan annoyed be-an here, y'know? I got a part-time chob waitressan in e pub, and so gettan some cash I thought hid's no so bad stayan on at e school. Now I'm in fifth year at Wick High and I'm wantan til choin the Army. If we were still sittan in e bus shelter drinkan vodka, I would hev gone crazy by noo.

Social activities as seemingly banal as listening to music with friends and playing pool help take some young people out of situations like drinking too much through boredom, and take their minds off larger questions about opportunities and the future. Consequently, chances like part-time jobs encourage staying on at school. Now, this girl feels that she 'will go, but I canna imagine no coman back'. A career in the Army could lead to her movement: the inevitability accorded to emigration is something Caithnessians grow up with. In this case, though, she ultimately expects her own return. Older Caithnessians are often sympathetic to the young person's plight. Janet, a local in her late fifties from the village of Lyth (near John O'Groats) who has never lived away from Caithness, told me: 'I think it should be made compulsory for Caithnessians to go out and see the world and then decide whether or not to return. We're still very insular here.' In a sense, perhaps Janet is thinking about myths of movement and how she imagines elsewhere but never physically migrated. By traveling and 'testing the water', according to Janet, Caithnessians can make informed decisions, rather than myth-led dreams of a better life. The exile who feels their movement was a terrible mistake occasionally appears home.

In the early 1980s, Henry left Berriedale to study in Edinburgh: 'I imagined it would be everything I never had. But my homesickness, hell, it was bad, I was home every weekend.' In his second year, he quit his degree. Too ashamed to return to Caithness and 'admit defeat', he got as far as Inverness. To Henry, it was a happy medium. It was a city with opportunities for him and his interest in accountancy. Ultimately, though, it was city life itself that disagreed with this Caithnessian. 'Home suffocates me after too long, other places were too much. I was so down, like, Christ almighty, is there nowhere I'll just feel ok?'. The push-and-pull of his Caithness roots were acted upon. He stayed for two years: 'my family told me I had

ideas above my station for moving. I think I probably stayed in Inverness so long to kinda punish myself for thinking I was better than Caithness’.

Jedrej and Nuttall reflect over the bitterness of return, when parents are ‘silently depising’ the return exile who, ‘far from reversing the rural depopulation is slammed for giving up a city career’ (1996: 44). In most cases I have encountered, such parental dismay does not occur. Importantly, though, the imagination that it *might* is enough to control an exile’s movement. Simultaneously, on the other hand John’s sense of loss is perhaps relative to his aspirations of movement: his motivation and expectation of exile failed to live up to his plans.

Henry was later offered a job in a bank in Thurso, which he took. Moving back to his village and commuting to the town suited both him and his parents. He married Gail – also from his home village - in 1990. Her attitude to moving was entirely different to her husband’s. She took a job in Inverness:

We had grown up together, Henry’s a bit older than me. I thought it was dead exciting when he went to Edinburgh and Inverness, and I liked the adventure of escaping to the city. The thing is, I really plunged into it: the shops, the nightlife, the world was my oyster, you know?

Henry found it easier being away from Caithness when he was married (to a fellow Caithnessian). ‘Ok, you can’t get many jobs in Caithness, but you’d never feel lonely there. When Gail wanted to go to Inverness, it felt better that time’. Gail felt a pang of the homesickness her husband had experienced when she became pregnant: ‘I loved being the young girl playing about in the city. But when I was someone’s mum? No way. I wanted the safety and security of Caithness for Beth. Henry would never let our kids be brought up away from home.’

Their experiences make Henry and Gail look to the future and Beth’s own desires that will inevitably arise: ‘she’ll need her own adventures and we’ll support that. She won’t want to come back, the young ones don’t normally. Unless she’s like her dad. And that would make us kinda proud. You can’t be a dreamer about staying or leaving. We were lucky, Henry’s working in Thurso again, I don’t know, maybe Beth will feel forced out of Caithness.’

This couple’s different experiences and views of ‘home’ and ‘away’, of losses and gains, are echoed in Rapport and Dawson’s work: sometimes it seems that

'home is neither here nor there...rather, itself a hybrid, it is *both* here *and* there – an amalgam, a pastiche, a performance' (1992: 7). There exists struggle amongst exiles with a conceptualization of *where* 'home' is, which explains the push-pull relationship. Others contain a sense of Caithness as 'home' regardless of their geography. And some create two simultaneous lives which lie awkwardly together, and whose negotiation is a difficult game to play.

In a recent forum discussion on the Caithness community website, a young university graduate zealously informed fellow Caithnessians that he had just arrived home having graduated and was 'desperate for a job up here'. Members of the forum assumed that he meant summer work – the idea of a returning exile clearly perplexed them. However, he responded quite definitely that he was aiming for long-term work and wondered why people would be quick to write off such a suggestion.

Investigating exile: from 'depopulation' to real-life dilemmas

Recent studies of communities and identities in Scotland (including my own work on Sutherland, see Masson 2007) have often focused on relationships between 'locals' and 'incomers'. These include the various articles on identity markers, practical belonging, and performativity (Kiely et al 2005), Jedrej and Nuttall's study of rural repopulation and white settlers (1996), and Watson's thesis on 'Being English in Scotland' (2003). I am also inclined to agree with Degnen who suggests that: 'As "forgetting" had to be added to "social memory" and "remembering", I argue that "absence" needs to be added to "presence" in terms of place and experience' (2005: 742).

While academic works and popular media have picked up on the statistics of Highland depopulation, little attention is paid to the motivations and myths behind departure. The structural basis, patterns, and themes of leaving are accounted for in rural and educational sociology (e.g. Glendinning et al 2003; Jones and Jamieson 1997). However - while this subject is a timely focus for the north of Scotland – it has left obscured the significance of out-migration and the narratives of 'home' and 'belonging' which come with being an exile. A close look at those who leave and those who stay illuminates the story of Highland migration.

Rapport and Dawson (1990) have edited a volume on *Migrants of Identity* which goes some way to bridging this gap. They define neither 'home' nor 'movement': to do so would be to misunderstand and misrepresent the nuances and blurred boundaries of belonging. Rapport and Dawson concentrate on possibilities of 'homes' and 'identities'. They also focus on how migrant narratives remain centred 'at home' though the migrants themselves are placed 'elsewhere'. Here, I take this a step further. Looking at motivations and experiences of actual movement, I illuminate it with an exploration of the myth and expectation of movement. Significantly, here, the ethnography is three-fold: it is about Caithnessians who stay put and feel a loss and a longing for their emigrants, for a Caithness of the past. It is about those locals who leave and battle with a constant in-betweenness of being both 'inside' and 'out'. And it is concerned with those locals who imagine that their own exile from Caithness will be an eventual inevitability. Rather than look directly at exile stories, I trace their effect on the place from where they departed, the people they left behind, and those they inspired to follow them.

A crucial aspect of Caithness life is the *myth* of movement. Caithnessians in their early twenties who imagine and idealize leaving or those reluctant exiles who – some forty years after their departure – still imagine and idealize their own return. The relationship between actual and imagined movement is important in creating a true picture of how Caithness the place shapes the belonging of its people. Caithness is as much in Caithnessians as they are in it.

Impressions of exile from those who stay

'Lybster's finest export has been its people' (Young 1998: 6)

People...endlessly place each other by shared memories of where what had been and by what events they had experienced together (Degnan 2005: 733)

'It is because migration exists as a normative pattern of behaviour within the community that the comparison between home and away is sustained in its present form' (Mewett 1982: 240)

Exiles – in their fleeting return – are sometimes part of the definition of 'home' for those who have always remained. It is summer, 2006 and Lybster gala is taking

place. The village is alive with characters who left this coast decades ago. It is the 50th anniversary of the Gala, and ‘nearly everyone’ has returned home to celebrate. Jessie, an exile in her sixties, is dressed as a pirate on the prize-winning float, and she is in her element: ‘I haven’t done this in twenty years! There’s no way I’d be done up like this anywhere else!’. It is during village rituals such as this – and weddings and funerals – that we see ‘the same faces in the same places’. It is then that locals feel their village is as it ‘should be’. To one Lybsterian in her thirties ‘e whole year we wait for hid. Hid’s e only time Lybster feels lek wur village again’. Her words are somewhat reflected in Degnen’s analysis:

The irony here is how absences and erasures, which are inversions of physical and present, become loci of memory, or, rather, remain as loci of memory, despite their connection to the physical reality being interrupted. This is a way of remembering that, in terms of the villagescape, glosses over ruptures and emphasizes continuity in the face of absence. (2005: 740)

‘Fa’s deid e day, Kim?’ Tam asks me as he walks into the pub one evening. I tell him I don’t know, and ask if he saw a funeral. ‘No, no. I saw Alice’s boyagie Cheordag back. Bides in Eberdeen, mind? Aye, an’ I chuist thought he’ll be back cos some chielie’s deid’. The returning exile is assumed by locals as being back in the village for one of two things: a funeral or a holiday. It is nearly always the former, to such an extent that when an exile is spotted at home, the immediate association is that the village has been hit by a death. Cheordag was indeed home for a funeral in Thurso.

Seeing an exile leave or return at the ‘top o e rod’ (i.e. the main road to enter Lybster) involves more than the physical site of arrivals and departures. It symbolizes feelings of loss, the anticipation of return, and is a reference point which features in people’s narratives of migration. When children are returning back on holiday, the wide-eyed delight of the mother waiting at the top of the road for them is wonderful to see. The returning exile never simply arrives at the house, they are met at the top and brought back into the village. It is a ritualized sense of homecoming. David told me that coming over the Reisgill bridge, seeing his parents’ car in the hotel car park awaiting him, ‘feels like Christmas Eve every time. It wouldn’t be the

same going to the house on my own'. Being 'on your own' is not very 'Lybster': accompaniment is a true characteristic of being in the village, and this begins as soon as you arrive. The same is true of leaving – like Marelle at the start of this chapter. The rituals involved in saying goodbye start with the journey up the long Lybster road. This is spoken of affectionately: it means that everyone arriving or leaving has something in common.

Historically, it is noted by locals (who stay) that 'Lybster's finest export has been its people' with a proud acknowledgement that 'the Lybster community flourishes in far-off places' (Young 1998: 8). It is certainly the case in Caithness that the local who left continues to make a mark on the community:

'Irrespective of where she went, the short-term or long-term migrant is still referred to as an exile. Emotive terms imply you had little option but to go, migration was about proving yourself...Though physically absent, the migrant retains a social presence' (Mewett 1982: 230).

An example of the displayed Caithness exile is the John Mowat Collection in Wick Library. As a Caithness exile in Glasgow, Mowat's love of his native county led him to collect books and pamphlets written by Caithnessians about Caithness, and about Caithness by those from elsewhere. In 1959, Mowat himself wrote 'The Story of Lybster'. On his death, he bequeathed his unique collection to Wick Library. The collection is referred to with pride by his compatriots. Neil Gunn is perhaps the most notable of Caithness exiles. His childhood home in Dunbeath is marked by a plaque, the village heritage centre has a wooden floor decorated quotes from his novels, and a walking tour of the strath follows scenes from those novels, which mainly deal with the migration of Caithness young people and the pull to the homeland, something Gunn himself experienced. These are good examples of the social presence an exile can retain despite physical absence.

One structural link to Caithness to keep the homeland very much a real part of everyday life for exiles in Edinburgh was the Edinburgh Caithness Association. To enable the community (particularly the young) to flourish in exile, an association was set up in 1837 to link Caithness and its largest exile community, which was in Edinburgh and Leith. A group of men living in Edinburgh and originally from Caithness, met at the Café Royal and created the Edinburgh Caithness Association.

They were ‘establishing friendly intercourse among natives of Caithness and gentlemen connected with that county residing in or near Edinburgh, whereby they may become better acquainted with one another and, if possible thereby to promote the best interests of their countrymen’²⁶. Promoting the interests of Caithness while resident in Edinburgh shows a civic commitment to the north (the aims set out to improve education *within* Caithness). Further, the Association not only still participated Caithness life from a distance, it also created a sense of ‘Caithness community’ in Edinburgh: providing ‘relief for distressed natives in the city’ (ibid.). This twofold objective is intriguing: it supports the movement of Caithnessians and simultaneously the progress of Caithness itself.

Why the focus on this Edinburgh-Caithness link? The 1861 Census found 1,596 Caithness Exiles living in Edinburgh with their wives and children. It was between 1861 and 1871 that Caithness saw its first real decrease in its population, which was accounted for by this type of mass migration (see Smith 1988). Current residents in Lybster have explained to me that the link exists in the fishing industry and in Leith, because Caithness fishermen all had to get their papers from Leith and could end up working there, whilst Leith men spent time in Wick (hence Leith Walk, a street in Wick). For the next century, the Association met once a year to hold a ceilidh. The Association ceased to function during the First and Second World Wars, and there is little information on its activities after 1950 and I have yet to meet a Caithness exile who reveals their membership. The Association still functions today, as a promoter of Caithness, a gathering place for self-styled ‘natives’ and more as an annual reunion ceilidh and social club rather than as provider of educational bursaries and ‘escape’ from the city. The sentiments behind the Association – ‘Caithness’ as central, identifying members as ‘natives in the city’ – show the resounding centrality of Caithness as home, the ways of being related and ways of belonging that come from that particular place, and the sense of community retained. While Associations like this one provide ‘relief for distressed natives’ there is rarely any relief for those left behind:

It was so damnably lonely at times. Most of his schoolmates...had left the district altogether. Only those like himself, who had left school early, still

²⁶ Edinburgh Caithness Association Annual Reports 1840 – 1950.

lived in their birthplace. But [Dougie thinks] – oh God! I love this land! (Miller 1992: 62).

Locals support the exile community, feel at a loss to define their village and county without those individuals, and try to entice them home. There are pangs of loneliness and the occasional guilt trip put upon visiting exiles. Ultimately, though, there is a tacit understanding that, often, ‘exile’ is a key component of being Caithnessian.

Reticence and reiteration of rootedness: naming, placing, memory and forgetting

While some people are too attached to the area they leave even if they could do better elsewhere, others cannot wait to get away (Jones and Jamieson 1997: 1)

The ruptures in the familial relationships and negotiation of identity of exiles was exemplified by one exile who, upon leaving, changed his name to ‘shake off’ his ‘obvious’ Caithness identity. Now aged 41, he went to Inverness aged seventeen where he introduced himself as ‘Steven Gunn’. His name is actually Sinclair Gunn. He told me that he changed his name because ‘it’s heavy’. He seemed to mean that it was too imbued with Caithness – the two names are actually ‘original’ Caithness surnames and for someone attempting to move on and change, they are a constant reminder of his reluctant rootedness. He wanted choice and a fresh start – in terms of employment and in terms of his personal identity. Significantly, twenty four years later, he still has not admitted this change to his parents, feeling that they would be offended and disappointed in him. ‘So my name changes depending which side of the Ord I’m on. Do you think I’m daft? In answer to your question, moving around literally changes who I think I am’.

While identity claims demonstrate people trying to fit in, rooting themselves, and situating their biographies, the case of Sinclair/Steven shows that concealing traces of one’s self can be just as constitutive of identity. The fact that he changes his claims depending on what side of the Ord he is on is a good example of the ‘eclipsing’ idea that Marilyn Strathern (1988) has explored: elements of relationships

are temporally and contextually concealed and revealed. Blood, shared knowledge, and memory are three themes that become 'transformable' in the shadows of everyday life, and which highlight ways of belonging.

Steven/Sinclair's perception of 'bloodlinks' is communicated through the story of his names. His blood is Caithnessian, and this is where he 'started out': changing his name does not mean he cut ties with Caithness. Rather, it is transformed into somewhere he is quite mocking of, somewhere that he cannot relate to. He speaks of the place in the past tense much of the time, his days as Sinclair Gunn are for 'holidays' over the Ord, and reminiscent of his memories. He classes himself as 'not like my parents – they are really *from there*'. Born and bred, he thinks of himself as 'born there, got out'.

Steven/Sinclair's mother - Dora - told me she was slightly disappointed in him: 'he was hellish about "talking right" when he moved. He's embarrassed o' us, I chuist ken hid. We talk every day on e phone, he loves his femly, lek. But I thought I telt him 'at femly and hom were e same thing'. She worries about her grandsons (aged 21 and 18): when they visit with their father, Steven/Sinclair complains of the duration of the journey and the banality of the destination, and the children have copied this.

Dora's eldest son – Kerr – moved to England. He has a very different attitude to that of his brother. His mother told me that he speaks with a thick Lybster accent. When I first met him, he told me his life story and he managed to bring back all of it to Lybster harbour: 'home, where I belong'. His perceptions of himself, of family, of home are very village-centred. He is a reluctant exile who uses 'any excuse' (his words) to come back. Unlike his brother, he does not telephone his mother daily. Instead, he is a frequent visitor home, and this she prefers. His mother was initially angrier with her eldest son for leaving – he went all the way to England, whilst the youngest moved two hours' drive away. Now, though, their attitudes towards Caithness have reshaped how she understands their movement. She worries that her eldest son – single and childless – would have passed on 'a good idea o' be-an a Gollach', and that meanwhile, her youngest 'hes a chance an' refuses til'.

What are the temporal effects of these movements? Steven/Sinclair talks of it as very linear. He 'was' this person, he 'was originally' from Caithness. In

changing his name he ‘started again’. Past and present have a boundary between them that he is keen to uphold. How do his patterns of concealing and revealing affect his relationships? ‘I keep it from mother because she’d just go off her head’. How does he feel this affects his children? ‘I wish they were closer to my parents’. What if his children did the same as he did? ‘They wouldn’t. I grew up painfully aware and self-conscious about my name and that bloody place. I gave them a better start in life. Not that my parents were wrong. But I had a lot to put right’.

One interesting exile pattern is the son who leaves, only to be later followed by his parents who leave Caithness for the same city. While some of my participants feel that exile is something you do if necessary, my partner, a Thurso exile in his thirties, feels the same is true of return:

When my parents followed me down here, I didn’t have a reason to go back up. My ex-girlfriend was from Caithness too, and she kept in touch with everyone up there, but now I don’t have a reason. I’ll probably just wait and go back feet first!²⁷

The relationship between movement of parents and children and how each communicates their sense of Caithness belonging is interesting in both directions. While genealogical records are kept almost religiously in Lybster and brought out to be updated at life-cycle moments, genealogical information was talked about far more often by exiles who communicated with me. The significance is heightened by their absence, and some individuals were always on the look-out for more familial history. Practical markers of belonging (as discussed by Kiely et al. 2001), and here I specifically refer to blood links to a place, are something that linger in the lives of those who leave. Dave, in his late forties and now living in southern England, told me that:

I’ve researched the paternal family tree and traced us back to the 1700s. Our parishes were Canisbay, Keiss, Dunnet, and Wick. So we’ve been well rooted! The maternal lineage goes back in a similar manner, but she has some ancestors from central Scotland. Most of them have remained in Caithness – I reckon less than 10% went elsewhere. Some went to South Africa in the 1900s, and my uncle went to Edinburgh, and a few went to North America...but even then, they all still came back.

²⁷ By this, he means he will be buried in Thurso.

Intriguingly, Dave uses the phrase ‘came back’ to refer to Caithness despite being physically absent himself. This is another reason why I argue it is crucial to think about the myths of movement; the way people imagine their belonging, where they *should* be, becomes predominant. Explaining that some exiled relatives went to far-flung areas and ‘even then, they all still came back’ has two effects. Firstly, the genealogical depth of his knowledge reassures him that he is Caithnessian. Secondly, the fact that ‘most’ of his family stayed and the exiles all returned, gives him a reason for return. It identifies him as not set apart and explains emigration as par for the Caithness course. This strategy maintains his own personal expectation of return. Here, the genealogical pattern of migration is not a historical account of his family, it is a model for his own choices of movement. Other exiles often describe how their ancestors were central to the development of Caithness, and therefore their own physical absence is considered irrelevant: they are forever tied to the place they have ‘inherited’. Exiles from Caithness are the epitome of individuals wishing to mobilize their identity claims.

Inheriting Exile: Children learning to long for Caithness

People may physically migrate, but...while no longer situated there, their narratives are at least *centred* there. (Rapport and Dawson 1990)

Ten years ago, Calum, moved to Aberdeen and married an Aberdonian woman. They have an eight year old son, Kieron. Calum is at pains to ‘teach’ Kieron Caithness. They get only rare opportunities to visit, but I met them for lunch in Wick one day and was astounded to hear this little boy tell me his ‘favourite place’ is ‘Dunnet Head’ and that his ‘favourite person’ is ‘Granny Occumster’ (she is not his granny but actually an old family friend). Calum admits that he has instilled such a serious sense of Caithness in his son that the child makes references he is not entirely familiar with. To aid his sense of Caithness, Eric has recently written a book for Kieron. Called ‘Kaitness Yarns o’ Be-an a Boyagie’,²⁸ it includes chapters such as ‘Messages’, ‘Pullan Taaties’, and ‘Cuttan Peit’ (his spelling). This is a highly romanticised version of growing up in Caithness, the exile’s selective memories

²⁸ Caithness Tales of Being a Young Boy.

make for pleasant (if slightly Kailyard-esque) reading, but it is a powerful account, a resource for assimilating his son who has somehow inherited exile. Kieron is reminded daily of where he ‘comes from’: Calum has compiled his genealogy back to 1700 and the family tree is framed on his son’s bedroom wall. Calum’s focus on Caithness is perhaps due to the fact that he is something of a ‘black sheep’ of his family. He is the only individual in his family to have left: ‘we’re not very nomadic beyond three parishes!’

When I was working a shift in the local pub, I met Chris who introduced himself as a ‘Dunbeather’. Later, he explained that he was born and brought up in Edinburgh, but that his entire family was from Dunbeath:

Dad used to take us here every summer, and he never said ‘holiday’, we were always going ‘home’. I was the only one not born and bred here, so I grew up in a really Caithness environment, I felt quite homesick for it. I mean, Edinburgh’s ‘home’ because my whole life is there, but I feel like I’m from Dunbeath, you know?

I asked Chris if the old adage is true – is home where the heart is? Chris felt that was slightly too ‘cute’ a way to say it, but basically, yes.

I’m just one person, living and working in Edinburgh. But that’s a small bit of a big picture. My family, my roots if you like, having the Sutherland surname...that’s where I’m from, and that makes it ‘home’. Where you’re from. So like geography makes me from Edinburgh. But it’s more that makes Caithness home.

His father has a different perspective: Sandy believes that Chris’ geographic separation from Caithness makes him long for it. He explained that Chris grew up with Caithness, while his friends at school had never heard of the place. The boy liked having a different story, when he was about seven he suddenly adopted a Dunbeath accent like his father. Sandy told me that ‘if he had bed in Caithness til his thirties lek me, he wouldnav hed been lek at. Distance is a funny thing til your identity’.

For children like Kieron and Chris, Caithness is something performed, something which sets them apart. They inherit a longing for the home that has been explained to them in terms of rootedness and separation. To Kieron and Chris,

Caithness is a place they visit very rarely, but is the very place they call home. They use Caithness to situate themselves within their families: Caithness here is a place of kinship, not physical geography.

Of course, sometimes Caithnessians are children when they leave: Meg was 8 when her parents decided to move the family to Australia. Meg adopted a very romanticised notion of her homeland, fitting in well with the Kailyard myth that other exiles mainly rejected. Meg's first well-paid job at the age of 18 saw her immediately book a flight home. 'Australia was always my parents dream and never mine. It's pointless to sing songs about being homesick if you're not going to do something about it'. In returning, her sense of place and pull to Caithness was stronger than ever in her exile years. Today, she finds it 'difficult to cross the Ord, even if it's for a meeting in Inverness. I feel like that little 8 year old again'. She decided to return when she found herself 'singing songs from home, and crying all the way through and thinking I should stop crying and go home'. Meg is a prime example of the way McCrone has suggested for the émigré community, 'sustaining an idealisation of the homeland is crucial' (McCrone 2001: 101). This sense of *idealisation* is a key component in Caithness migration stories: imagining that the grass is greener on the other side of the Ord, feeling homesick and fantasizing that Caithness will be the same (and better) if you return, waiting at home idealising that your relative will see the error of their exile ways. All of these things characterise notions of staying and leaving Caithness.

One individual who talks about his identity as 'confusion' is Peter. Lybster born and bred, Peter left the village when he was 19, and went to Canada where he has lived for the past 35 years. We communicated via email and telephone calls. He told me:

I didn't know what I was. Then there was a photo of me in the Groat and it said "Caithness Exile", with the capital letters. So that's me, a bona fide exile. I find 'local' a hugely problematic term. Caithness surely has more incomers than locals now, no one knows each other in Caithness these days. So what on earth makes you local?

Peter's comment about terminology is fitting: in the context of exile, it becomes particularly apparent that to define categories like 'local' or 'incomer' is to

miss the heart of the matter. By exploring these narratives, we begin to understand the fluidity of belonging, the effect that movement has on communities, and that wider notions of far-north Scottish life need to be rethought.

'I wrestle with return': temporality and the transformation of exile experience

One aspect of exile that intrigued me was its relationship with return. For all the anticipation, for all the 'grass is greener elsewhere' expectations, after a period of exile, some exiles seem to hope that (if they return) Caithness will not have changed in the slightest. The exile's impression of home is in constant flux: the very place they were motivated to leave, they hope will have remained as they remember. Take Donald for instance:

I perceived Wick as a bigger place than it probably was – it was the centre of my universe. So while I regularly went to Edinburgh and Aberdeen on holiday, Wick was the significant place in my personal experience. I had no burning desire to leave Caithness, but I wasn't adverse to the idea either. Indeed, there was a degree of inevitability about it because of further education. In my teens, there was the tension of leaving for education and staying for a love interest. I don't recollect that the choice was difficult. In the end, I went and kept the girlfriend anyway!

I would have preferred to bring up my children in Caithness. Over the past decade, I've really wrestled with the idea of return. I keep coming really close to going back. Having said that, I turned down two jobs at Dounreay – I want to go back to Caithness, not the whole Dounreay thing, you know?

Here, Donald provides me with the entire temporal shift of his experience of being in Caithness, nonchalant leaving, and a desire to return. Importantly, the place Donald wishes to return to is the Caithness he left. In reality, he is well aware (from job offers at Dounreay) that 'his' Wick and Caithness have changed in his absence. But his nostalgic feelings of belonging have saturated his new life – his disappointment at raising his children elsewhere, his 'almost' return. Though he is physically absent, Donald's narrative and desire to belong are both centred in Caithness. Caithnessians who move between places often directly associate this with a feeling of in-between identity.

In practical terms, it is not a straightforward matter of *desiring* to return to the homeland which shapes a Caithness exile's decision. As Jones and Jamieson have found, various factors on the level of policy, education, and local disadvantage (1997: 2) cross-cut the subjective, emotional decisions about leaving. These objective factors are the ones most commonly discussed in talk of Scottish migration. For instance, the Highlands and Islands Economic Update 2007 shows that unemployment rates in Caithness and Sutherland are higher than both the Highland and Scottish levels. The cyclical – and often seasonal – nature of employment in Caithness means that economic security is a very uncertain matter. People who have already left find little to accommodate their plans to return.

Jedrej and Nuttall have commented on the retained links between people and places: a kind of tacit knowledge which incomers arrive without and cannot easily 'learn' is interconnected with notions of belonging as a constant even when a local becomes an exile:

By naming places after people or by commemorating an event with a name, people are located in the landscape, giving a sense of social continuity. The linking of persons and local topography is a characteristic feature of maritime societies' (1996: 123).

This is particularly relevant because, in the north of Scotland, 'landscapes are essential memoryscapes. Those who can name them, who are named in them, cannot be separated from them' (ibid.). Here, I suggest that the Caithness exile is a prime example of this idea. These attitudes are best understood by the term 'over the Ord': this is the main road into Caithness but also a phrase that Caithnessians use to separate their identity from the rest of north Scotland. In the particular case of exiles, it is the phrase that connotes 'home'.

However, this is a unspoken way of belonging: the exile's retained place in Caithness life despite their movement is most clearly evident in their ritual returns for events such as weddings and funerals. As Donald put it: 'when someone dies, that's the only real time Wick's got the same faces in the same places'. In this sense, exiles change Caithness as a place. The place is attributed a memory of its own, lacking its 'original' faces, and somehow understood as complete only when it's 'same faces' return together for a community event. In my early days of fieldwork, I

was shown video footage of Lybster from 1955 in which dozens of people are seen walking up the wide main street en masse to the church for a wedding. Later, the footage cuts to 1976. Twenty one years later and the very same faces – a mixture of locals and locals who left - are making the same journey. Some who were children in the 1955 footage are in the sequel, exiles, married with children and creating new lives elsewhere. But the words ‘same faces, same places’ resonated very clearly at that point. The one constant is that locals and exiles alike share a notion of ‘being Caithnessian’ that powerfully overrides other ways of being in the world.

7.

‘Incomers don’t have a story’ : Processes of belonging amongst White Settlers and Atomics

Identities often precede people and their way of being in the Caithness world. In Caithness, the imagination surrounding incomers is fixed before they arrive. Questions about identities are asked, sometimes polite, welcoming ice-breakers and sometimes full of suspicion. ‘Where are you from?’ can be asked and heard in a variety of ways. The significance of asking such questions is clear to locals. Locals know and share similar roots, stories, and experience. Through that knowledge, community relationships are cemented. In this respect, I was not surprised to hear a local claim ‘incomers don’t have a story’. Of course they do have roots, stories, and experiences of their own, but they exist outwith Caithness and do not include Caithness. Therefore, locals perceive these untraceable new faces as without a story.

Two groups have been perhaps most scrutinized in their arrival to Caithness, so-called ‘white settlers’ and ‘Atomics’. Migrants such as these, according to Jedrej and Nuttall, fall into categories: ‘those for whom employment is not a factor but who find living in a rural area more congenial than a large town’ for white settlers and ‘those who have had to move into the rural area because of their employment’ for Atomics (1996: 2). White settlers is the term attributed to English incomers to rural Scotland who are perceived by locals to give little consideration or respect to local culture and often attempt to change/anglicize that culture. It is borrowed from colonial days and the experience of indigenous groups in their encounter with white arrivals. In a place where participation is a large part of belonging, these people who arrive must carefully navigate their way around Caithness. To arrive and attempt to ‘take over’ or ‘change’ the place is to make few friends and encourage suspicion about one’s motives. To ‘sit back, learn from the locals’ and mimic is advantageous.²⁹ Atomics describes the incomers who arrived in influx during the 1950s, and steadily since, to Caithness for work at the atomic energy power station at Dounreay, near Thurso. This particular group has had an ongoing separation from locals, identified by them as ‘Atomics’ with their own, separate housing estate and

²⁹ These terms – take over, change, sit back, learn from the locals, are direct quotes from locals explaining to me how they perceived ‘good’ and ‘bad’ arrivals.

social clubs. An ‘Atomic’ can find that fifty years after arrival, fifty years of living Caithness life they remain excluded and visible as the other of Caithness life.

Dealing with difference

The notion of local identity involves contradictory uses of boundaries: as has been shown in previous chapters, while domestic boundaries are fluid and boundaries between villages are in constant oscillation, some boundaries remain rigid. For white settlers and Atomics, this rigidity can mean a serious sense of exclusion. This is in part because their presence in Caithness is transient in a way similar to Simmel’s concept of the stranger:

[The stranger] is who comes today and stays tomorrow ...[remains] the *potential* wanderer; although he has not moved on, he has not quite overcome the freedom of coming and going’ (1964: 404, original emphasis)

During my conversations with these particular groups, it seemed incomers are *always* going on a journey of becoming, by being involved in certain community activities – such as their children being at a local school – but rarely reaching that destination of belonging. Senses of identity, inclusion, and exclusion are often tense and I pondered why such tension rarely boiled over into full-blown confrontation. There seems to be an over-arching sense of the ‘unsaid’, of ‘imagining’ each other. In a place such as Caithness, though, Anthony Cohen’s comment is apt:

...People’s sensitivity to potential conflict could be described as sophisticated and unremitting peacekeeping. This sensitivity does not reflect any squeamishness about argument. It is a product of long experience of the tensions which inhere in close social life in circumstances from which escape or retreat are well nigh impossible. People do experience as stressful the continual mutual scrutiny which generates social ‘knowledge’. (1987: 34)

Merely because actual argument or confrontation rarely happens is not to say that relations are good. Everyday, banal instances of exclusion tell us that. Take Eve, for instance. She is a ‘white settler’ in this context and married for more than thirty years to a Caithnessian. Having lived all that time in the region, Eve told me:

I just got used to being ‘that English wifie with the bairns’. I wasn’t offended, they were just making sense of me. I would go into Wick and ask,

say, an electrician to do work on my house. He'd say 'Missus, I'm too busy this week'. I soon learned that to get anywhere, I had to say 'my husband has asked me to ask you to work for us'. That did the trick immediately every time! My mother-in-law – also an incomer married to a Caithnessian – taught me that. And you know, I quickly enjoyed doing it. It's not gendered like that now, but knowing the game was interesting. People who don't really want to fit in will just sit and moan about that. But I didn't, I just got on with it, and now I'd never dream of living elsewhere. I think incomers just need to play the game.

Eve's acceptance of her treatment shows her making excuses for locals ('just making sense of me'). Learning what to say, learning to play the game: Eve demonstrates that she feels an obligation to fit in, and that an incomer who does not become included has done something wrong. She promotes the place to me, and suggests that when exclusion occurs some fault must lie with the incomer. This narrative is at odds with her experience. As much as it took thirty years to find some sense of fitting in, Eve's thirty years of Caithness life appears to have imbued her with a local attitude: despite being an incomer, and treated as such, she demonstrates local expectations of belonging. She explains her own transformation: 'thirty years ago, it was "English wifie at's married wi' Eddie". And now they say "Eddie, Eve's husband."' Eve shows a level of gratefulness for – after decades – being recognized at all.

Murray Watson argues that the longer an incomer stays and the stronger his input, the higher his 'structural invisibility' becomes: there is a 'near invisible absorption of so many English-born migrants' (2000: 1). In Caithness, this is unimaginable. While Watson does leave room for noting that 'suspicion of the incomer and his motives are natural enough' (ibid.: 59), it does not fit for Caithness that there is 'an abundant sign that most locals welcome the infusion of new blood and ideas, while quietly and politely declining any values considered inappropriate to their way of life' (ibid.). Positively, though, some white settlers do 'mix happily with locals' (ibid.: 122). Bert is a good example. My fieldnotes reveal:

At the harbour. Coming up with names for Bert's creel boat. He's always getting stick for being English. Someone said 'call it the FEB'.³⁰ I've heard FEB in other places but never here. Everyone laughed, even Bert. He told me that last St. Andrews Day someone got him a cigarette lighter with the

³⁰ FEB: Fucking English Bastard

English flag on it. Engraved on the back, they put 'Bert's a FEB'. He loves it.

For Eve and Bert, the issue is one of 'being English': in the former's case, it is negative, and in the latter's case it is playful. The explicit reference to Bert's Englishness recalls McIntosh et al's article in which a local claims 'we hate the English except you 'cos you're our pal' (2004): some incomers form good, close relationships with their new community and overcome the identity stereotypes that locals apply to incomers. Crucially, though, we must bear in mind that Caithnessians show little concern for their own national identity. It is only when faced with another national identity (normally English) that Caithnessians become defensive of their own place in the world. This is a common reaction to the arrival of incomers. As McIntosh et al have demonstrated

Most of the time an individual's national identity is something that is a cause for little concern or debate; part of our sense of self that can be naturalized and absorbed into our mundane and banal everyday practices' (2004: 45)

As was noted in the introduction, Caithnessians tend to side-step any claims to Scottish national identity. They are, of course, part of the nation: my point is that locals tend not to place focus on national relationships. Scottishness does exist in Caithness for the purpose of locals claiming 'we are not English'. National identity here is very much a resource in defining 'who we are *not*'. When McIntosh et al. suggest that 'it is one of the central constituents of a "Scottish" identity and sense-of-self that the Scots are open, welcoming and friendly to "incomers"' (2004) I wholly disagree. It is not friendliness and openness that bring out the 'Scottishness': it is the difference and separation, all the nuances and negotiations of 'us' and 'them' that define the Scottish local-incomer interaction. It is given new light when others arrive and change the dynamics of everyday life and local notions of belonging. Certainly, locals attempt to be 'welcoming and friendly', but this can be superficial and initial. This wears off and soon, apparent in banal everyday activity, incomers are made increasingly aware that they remain peripheral.

Incomers are expected to participate and show commitment to the community: Eve's children are perceived as locals, and Bert is a fisherman. Performative belonging is not easily reached or maintained, but the attempt to fit in

according to local rules eases everyday relations. Ali, in her twenties and from London, settled in the village permanently and bought a house. Locals were disgruntled by this, particularly because she was able to afford a five-bedroom house that would be too expensive for them. When Ali started teaching a sports club, began offering salsa dance lessons, and volunteered at the village Sunday school, the perception of her by villagers slowly changed. Participation in Caithness life does not always equate with an immediate sense of belonging. Sometimes, an individual's identity is questioned whatever role they play in the local community. Simultaneously, some born-and-bred locals have a similar complex identity relationship with Caithness. For instance, Kathryn's story appears in my field diary like this:

Kathryn's from near Wick, her family owns a large estate. Her surname is recognised as 'local', her family has always lived here, and she has a physical appearance that locals would recognise as their own: pale skin, striking blue eyes, and brown-blond hair. Having been to boarding school, she has a rather clipped accent. This changes everything. To locals, this local is anything but. Kathryn remembers working in a Wick pub when one evening, someone threw a glass in her direction and told her to stop pretending. She angrily threw him out, telling him 'don't tell me I'm not a Wecker!' with a distinctive Wick accent coming through on the last word.

These examples show that there is no givenness about identity markers: an incomer with no genealogical links, who sounds different and perhaps looks physically different, might not fit in the same way as someone with practical markers such as blood-ties and place of birth. The example of Kathryn, however, serves to show that even a local without explicit, demonstrable markers such as accent, can find identity just as questioned. This is meant to support my argument that identities often precede the arrival, or knowledge, of individuals.

Peripheral attitudes: Scottish incomers perceived as 'self-excluding'

One Arts Centre in the area attracts a number of incomers who live only seasonally in Caithness. Buying holiday homes on the north Caithness coast, they appear for theatre productions and drama workshops mainly in the summer months. Known as the 'Happy Gang', these are individuals with a penchant for ecological concerns and organic living. They have no real link with Caithness, and have a transient presence

in the area. ‘They aren’t fond of the locals, they just want a rural location for their hippy nonsense’.

Frank is in his fifties, an incomer from Glasgow who has lived in Caithness since the 1970s. Unlike the Arts Centre visitors, Frank utterly absorbs himself in local life. He is on every committee, attends every party, and is always the last person to leave the pub at night. In this sense, from the outside, he is immersed: he appears to belong. This is not how locals perceive Frank. His sense of belonging is evident in his favourite saying - ‘they call me the Count!’ – but locals find him ‘arrogant’, pushy, and over-bearing. By over-compensating for his incomer status, Frank becomes excluded for trying to include himself too much. Locals, however, insist that Frank makes his own exclusion inevitable.

Angela moved from Orkney to Lybster with her young son. Her identity preceded her actual arrival: villagers voiced assumptions about Angela ‘having an accent like ours’, about similarities between island Orkney and coastal Caithness, and about Angela’s rural community background. This image pleased the villagers, who embraced the mother and son when they arrived. Soon, Angela was witnessed to be an alcoholic and her son was returned to the custody of his father in Orkney. Becoming increasingly anti-social and disruptive, Angela was soon unpopular, and her lack of popularity was attributed by locals to her incomer status. Paradoxically, it was her supposed closeness to locals that helped Angela initially fit in. Were a local to find themselves in Angela’s situation, the issue would not be excused away in identity terms: with incomers, their outsider identity becomes a convenient narrative with which to explain all kinds of behaviour and attitudes.

Recently, a Caithness pub was bought over by a couple from Edinburgh. Within one week of opening, they had radically changed the décor, vastly reduced the stock, introduced a ‘swear box’ where anyone heard cursing must donate one pound, and barred ten of the local regular customers. Local anger in this case does not stem from the fact that these people are incomers, or from a city and therefore might not understand how Caithnessians like their social lives to run. Rather, the anger exists precisely because the couple are based outside Caithness yet having an effect on everyday life. Mira was dismayed, confused that they could ‘run our lives, change everythin’, then drive back to Inverness’. This banal instance mirrors the

feeling of myopia by the rest of Scotland that penetrates Caithness life. This kind of other – unknown incomer of same nationality – is problematic in a way that the White Settler (by definition English) is not. There is a sense amongst Caithnessians that other Scottish people should understand them, and should try to maintain a Caithness way of life. The gulf between Caithness communities and other Scottish people is wider than that between Caithness locals and White Settlers. While this might be an urban/rural problem of translation, Caithnessians present it as a Scottish problem: to paraphrase Mira, there is a sense that travelling north up the main A9 road should not be a ‘big deal’ but incomers from other parts of Scotland ‘act like they’re from another world’.

These cases in particular recall Tamara Kohn’s notion of the ‘invisibility of incomers’ whereby through social action in the present, incomers can find a local belonging (2002: 152). This is what Frank actively aims for, and it is something locals expect will happen to Angela. Except neither find belonging or invisibility. Locals construct and reinforce exterior boundaries: contextually, sometimes whatever incomers do, they are already situated at the periphery of society by locals. Paradoxically, it is the feeling of being peripheral from the nation that irks Caithnessians themselves.

Atomics: the ‘sub-species’ of Caithness

The large group of incomers that Caithnessians did not anticipate were the thousands who arrived to work at Dounreay in the 1950s. Dounreay is the farmland in Caithness situated nine miles west of Thurso and was sold in the 1950s to the Ministry of Defence and the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA). On the site, five nuclear reactors were built: three belonging to UKAEA, constituting the Dounreay Nuclear Power Development Establishment and known collectively as ‘Dounreay’. The other two were owned by the Ministry of Defence, and formed the Vulcan Naval Reactor Test Establishment, ‘Vulcan’. While locals made up most of the workforce at Vulcan, Dounreay took workers from elsewhere in Scotland and from England to Caithness. The purpose of Dounreay was to test the fast atomic reactor. Significantly for Caithness and its image in the wider world, the location was *specifically* chosen in case of explosion, to ensure that even in the worst circumstances ‘large populations’ would not be killed. Fifty years on, this still irks

locals. Fortunately, the scientific expertise here saw all testing carried out successfully, and the plant was brought to an end in 1994. That year, the UKAEA was replaced by the Nuclear Decommissioning Act (NDA).

In the early days, Caithness found itself at the forefront of atomic research. Scientists had realised that the heat from atomic reaction could be used to produce electricity and, due to post-war demand, such energy was seen as a saviour. Before a fast reactor (i.e. a reactor that could produce 60 times more energy from uranium than a normal reactor) could be erected, a test site was required to ensure minimum effect on the local community. The UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) wanted a remote site: ‘just in case’³¹. That site was Caithness, precisely the coastal area in the parish of Reay. The persistent feeling of myopia and misrepresentation is hardly surprising when, as a BBC Radio 4 programme suggested, ‘it seemed sensible to place a reactor way up here – it’s 630 miles from London’³².



Fig. 8: The ‘remote site’ chosen by UKAEA

A workforce of over 3,000 arrived from all over Britain. Thurso, the nearest town, saw its population almost treble. The new arrivals were received in a variety of ways (detailed below), all of them (I have been told) with some sense of surprise. My use of identifying terms such as ‘local’ and ‘incomer’ reflects the way individuals in Caithness adopt the terms. Examples include:

³¹ Watching the BBC documentary with a few locals, their displeasure and feeling that the ‘just in case’ comment was ‘typical’ became angrily evident

³² BBC Radio 4 *Dounreay* 29.03.06

It was only hard-working men that came – the softies neednav bothered their comin’ til Dounreay (Dounreay construction worker, local)

The significant difference was wages – they were getting six times more than anyone was making locally. The difference was like this – people in Caithness were changing their occupations to get a Dounreay job, hoping to get money like that (Policeman, local)

I went into Wick to buy fish and it was very, very expensive. So I walked to a fishmonger’s round the corner, dropped the fish on the scales, and their price was much cheaper. I found out that there was two prices for everything – one for the atomics, and one for the locals (incoming Dounreay worker)

The ones who *enjoyed* the region, well, they got involved and were soon liftan tatties and cuttan peit. It was new blood into the county (local man)

Kenny, a Wicker in his sixties, explained that in the 1950s the Dounreay incomers – known as ‘Atomics’ – were, in his words, ‘considered a sort of sub-species. We didn’t make it easy for them. We shut them out, they didn’t get a chance.’³³ Although this context is original Dounreay arrival in the 1950s, it is important to note that the same negativity was placed on a national level in 1993 when ‘Settler Watch’ sent letter bombs to Dounreay and the Scottish Office (Jedrej and Nuttall 1996: 56).

Maria arrived in Thurso in 1956 and has lived there with her husband and two sons ever since. In 2006, she visits the bakery and is next in line to be served. The shop assistant does not know this customer by name. Rather than serve her, the assistant instead peers over Maria’s shoulder and shouts to the next customer she recognizes, a born and bred Thursonian. ‘Ach, Mrs Swanson! Fine day, what can I get you?’ Looking straight past her first customer, the assistant’s understanding of ‘local’ and ‘incomer’ is an explicitly exclusive one. At lunch one day in Wick, my friend spotted Maria sitting in the corner. Her family had arrived for work at Dounreay in 1956, and fifty years later still felt seriously excluded. My friend told me she felt very sorry for them: ‘they look lonely and out of place’. We invited them to sit with us and, when I explained my research, the woman held my hand as she spoke. She was desperate to share the above story with me because, as she put it, ‘I

³³ Briefly, ‘atomic’ denotes a Dounreay worker and their families. The Dounreay housing estate is the ‘Atomic Estate’. Atomic is an in-between, inchoate identity,. Further, locals who take work at Dounreay can occasionally ‘become’ Atomic. This is discussed later in the chapter.

love Caithness, I'm just not sure it loves me'. The emotional turmoil that incomers face when arriving in any new place is often persistent in painful memory. Then, in other cases, it is a persistent actuality. I asked Maria how she felt about the bakery incident and she used an analogy: 'being an incomer is like a bit of string, you don't know how long it is, how long it'll last'. This recalls the work of Kiely et al. who suggest that attributing identities to others and judging their claims of belonging is as significant a process as the identity claim itself (2001: 36). 'Becoming', then, was something this woman strived for but was not 'allowed' to achieve.

UKAEA housing: the architecture of isolation?

Although suddenly a very evidently mixed population, notions of 'locals' and 'incomers' remained separate. This was literally marked on the landscape when the UKAEA built its own housing estate to accommodate the massive influx of workers. The 'Atomic estate' was, and still is, the local term to describe those houses built in Thurso by the UKAEA and the Scottish Special Housing Association specifically to accommodate the influx of Dounreay employees. They could not build these houses fast enough: almost overnight, thousands of incomers were in need of homes. The Norse street names have a certain irony to them. Caithnessians identify as Norse/as strangers and yet the local authorities donate this Norse-ness to the street names of Dounreay arrivals. At the time, one Atomic explains, 'you cling to your roots, maybe they called them that to show that they sort of owned us, or that we were on their turf'. One Atomic, Geoff, laughed at my naivety: 'the Vikings invaded, didn't they? Locals wouldn't have felt Norse at the time. And then we invaded them too, that's what they mean!'

The 'Atomic estate' was setting itself apart from local housing. Tall - unlike the smaller, characteristically low Caithnessian houses - the buildings huddled together. The social separation is not meant to be painted here as some kind of ghettoization. Rather, it shows how certain decisions - such as building a separate, somewhat distanced, estate - were perceived as socially exclusive and also self-exclusive. The Atomic estate in many ways became the architecture of isolation. This was evident in my own Caithness arrival, when I considered living in Thurso.



Fig. 9: The Atomic estate

Dhrena, from a village near Thurso, was helping me find accommodation in town when, beginning fieldwork, I planned to live there. Driving into the centre, she pointed out a huddle of houses. ‘Atomic’ houses stood out, and for more than their height. There was a room for rent in one of these houses. As we looked around, it felt homely and welcoming, my senses automatically focusing on traces of kinship and family life. However, on leaving, Dhrena asked me ‘would you be ok living in an Atomic house?’ She was not making some derogatory remark about Dounreay workers or suggesting that I would come to any harm there. When I asked her what she meant, Dhrena simply said: ‘Well, I thought that if you’re studying Caithness, you’d be best living with a Caithness family.’ Today, more than fifty years after its beginnings and in the midst of its decommission, Dounreay is still set apart, and the people who arrived for work remain peripheral in the most mundane, but exclusive, ways.

Fran could barely bring herself to talk about her move to Caithness when her husband was employed at Dounreay in the 1970s. She stated sharply and did not want to elaborate:

It was just the worst thing I have ever done. I regret it so much. Thirty years of being here, wanting to be anywhere else. Living on the atomic estate felt so out of the way, and we stood out. So I made him [her husband] move to Wick. It’s getting better.

For this woman, it is not so much Caithness that is the problem – she is settling in Wick. The issue is the specific atomic estate, signalling her difference, and shutting her out. Some treated the Atomics like longer-term tourists who might provide economic benefit. The idea that the ‘invader’ would keep pubs busy and shop tills ringing was noted as a sort of one-upmanship on the part of the local community. For instance, a stanza from a Caithness poem includes:

There’s some fowk smilan’
At the thocht o’ ‘at invadan’ throng
The pubs’ll aal be busy an’ the nightclubs goan strong.
The merchants’ll be winkan’ when they’re thinkan’
O’ aal the clinkan’
O’ aal that southern sillar
At’ll come their way
Afore long.

This poem demonstrates that identity preceded arrival: locals were planning to benefit economically from the atomics. The concern was not with incomer incorporation, but with cashing in on ‘southern sillar’, the money that the atomics would generate for Caithness. Atomics themselves told me that they have always stood out, and were always overcharged at the fish market. Of course, these Atomics did not arrive in recent weeks or years. Dounreay’s construction began in 1950. But the memory of arrival and processes of assimilation or alienation still pepper a large number of the narratives I heard. Take for instance, the three old men with southern accents who first met each other in Caithness. They sit in the corner of the Dounreay Social Club animatedly talking about their shared Edinburgh football allegiance, they are *creating* memory work. Not *remembering* but *creating* shared memories that simultaneously cause a group identity and self-exclusion. As the local man who joins them soon finds out, he can’t join in – after all, he has no point of reference, anecdote, or connection. He, rather than the southern group, is peripheral.

Local Atomics? : Caithnessian employees at Dounreay

It is important to point out that occasionally ‘atomic’ families come from Caithness genealogies, and would have been classed ‘local’ prior to Dounreay. However, the collective memory’s selective forgetting has created a distinction. Becoming and belonging must be understood as two-directional. Although incomers

never become ‘Caithnessian’ and instead go on an awkward journey of fitting in, we see locals transformed in identity terms, becoming ‘Atomic’ when they join Dounreay. Now, in Caithness (whatever the situation was before), we encounter an understanding of ‘belonging’ quite similar to the one Strathern found in Elmdon (1981). ‘Real families’, ‘old families’, seemed somehow to turn ‘new’ in their allegiance to Dounreay.³⁴ In short, whether one is a local or incomer, the distinction here is either ‘Dounreay’ or ‘not Dounreay’ and these particular boundaries are made explicitly clear through mundane, everyday exclusion.

Roddy is in my kitchen at six o’clock in the morning, chatting with Sanny and preparing sandwiches before catching the Dounreay employees bus at six thirty. Pouring some coffee for us, I ask how he likes working at Dounreay:

‘I didn’t know you were an Atomic, Roddy!’
‘Lock o’ trock!’³⁵ I’m no’, I’m chuist a labourer when I’m no’ on ‘e boat’
‘Aye, Rod man, ye’re an Atomicker! Div ye drink in ‘e Dounreay Club an’ nivver read ‘e Groat?’ Sanny laughs
‘No, maist o’ us are part-timers, we’ve got other work, local lek, asweel’

Roddy is a typical local Dounreay employee. While the scientists at Dounreay arrived from other places, some work such as labouring was taken by locals. For the early days, the balance of employment is unclear. Certainly, in today’s Caithness, locals and Atomics alike talk of the scientists as Atomics and the locals as labourers, which is surely a folk myth that has arisen from their separation and image of one another. This is in part due to the fact that the locals have multiple employment. The most common process is to own a boat and work it part-time, taking the Dounreay job for the rest of the time, or to work offshore in the oil industry and taking another part-time Dounreay job. Dounreay is perceived as a ‘top-up’ employment for those weeks when more traditional employment is not available: being ‘chuist a labourer’ demonstrates that locals working at Dounreay sometimes do not think of it as employment proper. Few young Caithnessians take the Dounreay route rather than the typical pattern discussed in chapter five, and it appears that local

³⁴ This is however uncommon. It usually occurs when a Caithnessian’s ‘local’ identity is not particularly strong. For instance, someone Caithness born and bred but with non-Caithnessian parents is more likely to become ‘othered’ than someone who ticks all the local identity boxes.

³⁵ Lock o’ trock means nonsense, literally ‘load of rubbish’

employees tend to be from Caithness villages rather than Caithness towns. Sanny mocks Roddy, implying that he has the same detachment from Caithness life as Atomic incomers.

Despite being the epitome of difference in Caithness, Dounreay has become a central part of everyday life. Anyone who has tried to drive through Thurso at 5pm on a weekday will be aware of this. A convoy of cars coming from the west, the passengers all in identical neon yellow safety jackets. The ritual is eye-catching in size and in its unchanging format. It is in this journey that Dounreay workers look identical: it is impossible to tell locals and incomers apart as the long convoy passes by. The difference is crystallized once more as the cars stop. Locals such as Roddy and Ewan park in the High Street and go into the Central bar for a drink, still wearing their safety jackets and talking about the day's events. Incomers are less frequently seen doing this. The Atomic/local Dounreay worker differences witnessed in the pub, or in housing, have been rigid since the plant's beginnings. Intriguingly, though, the separation of locals and incomers even in their shared work space shows that a local who works at Dounreay is never truly an Atomic.

Pass the milk: the realities of everyday exclusion

I had to wait til everyone else had been served at the grocer's. I asked for tatties, the mannie gave me things that were sprouting. I asked for a marrow, he gave me a yellow one that was slimy. The van that came round, the greengrocer charged me full price for lettuce that was off, the same lettuce he had refused to sell the local woman in the queue before me. Things like that sound crazy, it's not like our houses were being bombed or our lives were threatened. But we *were* shut out, our lives were very unhappy for a long time. I worked at Dounreay and in the staffroom, atomics spoke to atomics and locals spoke to locals. I mind a local passed me the milk one day and his pals never spoke to him the whole of break time. I remember after about 5 years of this, they realised that I come from a fishing family about six hours drive from here. All of a sudden, shopkeepers were chatting away, I wasn't invisible in a bad way anymore, I was invisible because I was normal. That's how conditional and awful Caithness was when Dounreay appeared. Nowadays, they know that Caithness would've disappeared without incomers so they are a bit better. But I cried myself to sleep for weeks when I arrived, then my children were born there and I felt guilty for putting this place on them. What I forgot of course was that my children are locals.

These words belong to Amanda who moved to Thurso when she and her husband got jobs at Dounreay in the late 1960s. Spoken in 2008, she is referring to the decade when she arrived. The realization that she came from a similar community, and the arrival of her children, gave Amanda a sense of ease, but her resentment is strong some thirty years later. It should be clear that locals are never simply on the receiving end of incoming populations. In-migration is not simply a movement that happens to passive locals, and such rural locations are not necessarily exclusive, ignorant backwaters. The encounter between the two is fraught with difficulties: on one hand, the pushy incomer who tries to take over threatens locals, and on the other a local refuses to serve bread to an incomer who has been in the region for fifty years. The problem seems to be that encountering others and dealing with difference means facing up to one's own identity. Caithnessians demonstrate they are secure in their community's identities, yet feel misrepresented and misunderstood by outsiders and on a political level. Incomer interaction forces locals to consider the wider world, and it is this – as much as the arrival of incomers *per se* – that causes such exclusion. It is about the processes of making sense of a world that Caithnessians find themselves in, yet separated from: Dounreay, and its subsequent decommissioning, has forced Caithness to re-examine its boundaries, its identities, and its place in the world.

Within a few years, this reluctant incomer was mother to two boys. And of course, her babies were Thursonian, Caithnessian, *local* children. Children, born local to incomer parents, can become what Carsten calls (albeit it in a different context) 'agents of transformation' (1991: 329): in this case, they blur the opposition between 'local' and 'incomer'.

Incomer children and the negotiation of belonging

Dora in Lybster told me a tale of being in the Girl Guides in 1957 and going camping with the Dounreay Girl Guides. The Lybster girls found that 'Atomics were cosmopolitan'. This had its own effects: at night, the Dounreay Guides dared the others to strip to their underwear. 'We were horrified! We weren't prudes. Just wee girls still, sort of naïve'. The Dounreay Guides carried out their own dare, got caught, and everyone had to do a hike in the darkness of Dunbeath at midnight.

‘They were completely terrified. We didn’t care, we were used to every step of the walk and the dark was normal. That’s how I understood them, then. Both sides knew things, both sides didn’t know. Both naïve. You just took it from there’.

The telling difference Ena noticed as a young mother in the 1950s was that Dounreay children were terribly bullied on school buses. She thinks that the locals picked on the Atomics ‘simply because they were bitter, felt hard done by’. For years, the school buses had adult riders accompanying the children to make sure they didn’t fight with each other. Ena continues, reflecting on the early years of Dounreay:

It wasn’t just the kids – the local men were bitter because the Atomic men really shook up family life. Suddenly, men were seen pushing prams in Caithness. This was totally alien to many Caithness husbands and the Caithness wives soon had very high expectations! And this just wasn’t how 1950s Caithness worked, this couldn’t suddenly become normal.

It was not a passive group of incomers who joined local workers at Dounreay. Atomics soon made their mark. As Sanny commented: ‘Aye, it was good for employment and good for science, but it killed the Thurso accent’. Further, standards at Thurso High School were imagined to have improved with their arrival, by the rule that ‘we thought “scientists are clever, so their kids must be”’. One local man, a classmate of Atomic children, reflected of his schooldays that ‘when the Atomics came on the scene, you would always try to beat them. The Atomic feeling was that they were better than us, and we probably felt they were better than us too’. This awkward oscillation of similarity and difference was not only apparent in the 1950s. Stephen, who went to school with Atomic children in the 1980s recalled some legendary fights that occurred between locals and Atomics. Of course, this is part of school life: the distinction of local and Atomic was probably not the root of the punch-ups. Ralph Glasser’s memories of school life in the Gorbals (2006) provides the message that school fights are themed in such a way that a contemporary issue provides a ‘reference point’ for the adrenalin. The way such fights are *remembered*, however, is in the shape of their dualism. Other fights will have occurred at school that are not recalled in the narrative because the broadest social ‘theme’ of ‘otherness’ in modern Caithness has indeed been Dounreay. Memory is collective in

Caithness. This man's memory is not solely of the Atomic-local fights *per se* but of a more widely dispersed idea of identity that infiltrated Thurso life at the time. School fights happen by an acted-out feeling of difference: the wider feeling of 'difference' between Atomics and local might be a reference point for this man to remember the fights as an example of such difference. In reality, the two are probably unrelated. It almost feels that people 'suppose it must have been Atomic-local'. Time did little to alter this attitude and opposition. Bob, an Atomic in his thirties, told me of Thurso High School in the 1980s, some thirty years after Dounreay came into operation:

Kids are just cruel at school, that's all. Atomic kids sometimes had more money and trendy stuff than local kids. So-called 'locals' might have been beaten up because they weren't cool if they didn't wear the right trainers. They weren't beaten up for being 'local'. That's just daft. Equally, the Atomics weren't bullied for that. But here, we're so used to difference, and yet it's not at all easy to be different.

Sometimes however, early generations of 'locals' and 'Atomics' *were* bullied simply for being on one side of the divide. My partner, Angus, a Thurso local whose parents arrived in Caithness as Atomics before his birth, considers himself Caithnessian. 'Atomic' was an ascribed identity. Angus remembers as a child chasing the unpopular local children and, along with fellow Atomics, calling the locals 'Nukes' – a generic derogatory term. It was only when he was slightly older, and reading a comic, that he realised 'Nuke' stood for 'nuclear'. The term had originally been used by local children to make fun of 'Atomic' children. Over time, the direction changed and 'Atomic' children aimed the insult at children they did not like, appropriating the word. In this sense, the fighting *was* based on the opposition of local and Atomic, although not as knowingly as one might imagine. Further, such Atomic children (now adult) insist that non-Atomic children started the fights. This is not blame-placing. With a certain pride, Angus tells me: 'They started it. And if they hadn't, we would have'. These children, attributing identities on one another, found their place in the world by precisely *not* being the other. This quality had more in common with the way local children were thinking than the atomic children realised.

Other kinds of other: questioning arrival and belonging

‘Aye, fit are ye doan up here?’

‘And where div ye come fae?’

‘Fit are ye needan?’

‘How long are ye bidan?’

These are just some of the questions that might be posed to incomers by Caithnessians. At the start of the chapter, I argued that identities can precede actual arrival. The meaning of questions such as these are wholly dependent on who is asking and who is listening: they can be defensive suspicions on the part of a local or a genuine interest in new people. In Caithness, they are central questions and act as an ice-breaker. Regardless of the incomer’s roots, Caithnessians will ask the same. To wonder why a newcomer is present, and how long that presence will last, might be interpreted by the listener as negative and unwelcoming. It is common for Caithnessians to take a serious interest in new people: my village mother, Elsie, is known as ‘E Griller’ for her knack of asking questions of belonging. Elsie explained to me that she enjoys knowing all there is to know about the people around her: as was explored in chapter four, ‘knowing’ and community go together. Locals do not need to ask these questions of each other. In asking them, locals can both include and exclude incomers: but that depends wholly on the way in which incomers hear the question. In attempting to understand (whether positively or negatively) the new people in Caithness, locals are made more aware of their own place in the world. Now, more than ever, encounters with others are crucial in the maintenance of localized identity. This is the focus of my final chapter.

8.

Caithness is an island: self-representation and relationships with the rest of the nation

Preceding chapters have built a picture of locals, incomers, boundaries, and relationships. Here, attention is paid to the bigger picture in which Caithnessians are presented problematically to the rest of the nation. If this chapter has an essence unlike the preceding chapters, it is because it deals with specific events and themes that demonstrated to me during fieldwork an ‘acute sense of being in the presence of a fragile community’ (Jedrej and Nuttall 1996: 113) and a community that staunchly defends its localism. The Highland Council lists Caithness as ‘high’ in its ‘zones of fragility’ mapping: ‘fragile rural areas are taken as those which are socio-economically disadvantaged’ and four aspects highlight the disadvantages: population sparsity, population decline, level of prosperity, and accessibility/peripherality (Highland Council 2003). In very real terms, Caithness is on the edge. Its future is wholly dependent on the migration decisions and employment patterns of its young people, its relationship with incomers, and more secure links with the Scottish nation.

Caithnessians themselves would never agree with this classification as fragile. They demonstrate a pride (some might call it hubris) in their localized identity, and now – more than ever – they are negotiating this identity in order to maintain it. As Jane Nadel-Klein explains:

[They] find themselves struggling to stay afloat in a world run by much larger players. Adapting to these changes has given the [community] a toughness and resilience as well as a sharp, critical eye and tongue. They are not about to watch their eclipse happen quietly. (2003: 1)

This involves their own everyday and ritualized forms of self-representation, the ways in which Caithness identity is appropriated by government structures, and plans for the future of Caithness’s relationships within Scotland. This chapter deals with one main source of community self-presentation in Caithness: the Gala. It then moves on to the current controversy of Caithness: the Gaelic road signs deemed appropriate by the Highland Council and argued strongly against by the population

itself. The decision by the government's Boundary Committee to remove Caithness from the map of Scotland is also discussed. Permeating all of this is more everyday concerns with separation from the rest of Scotland. It was explicit in these moments that Caithnessians put a great deal of work into their identity matters, whether in highlighting misrepresentation or difference from others, or in trying to establish different links with the rest of the nation. To set the scene, I begin in the summer of 2008, in Wick.

Gala week: a socio-political comment on identity

James, dressed as a Rastafarian, pushes a cart filled with mock cannabis plants through the streets of Wick. The slogan painted on his brightly-coloured trolley exclaims: 'I Hear Wick Needs A New High – So Here I Am With Ample Supply! Campaign For A New Wick High!' Half-jokingly - and rhyming in the traditional style of the gala float declaration - this refers to the recent protests and pleas to both the Highland Council and the First Minister about the seriously degenerated state of Wick High School. At the time of writing, money that could be spent on this education facility is instead being spent on controversial Gaelic road signs and the community is in strong protest.

Zena comes down the High Street dressed in what look like Roman robes. She is carrying a home-made banner that reads: 'They Came, They Saw, They Conquered. And We Still Couldn't Read The Gaelic Signs'. Meanwhile on Fergus Road, there is a middle-aged man dressed as a book. His title is 'E Kaitness Guide Til Galik' ('The Caithness Guide to Gaelic'). His outfit opens to reveal a playful phrasebook of Caithnessian-Gaelic translations such as 'Fit lek e day?/ciamar a tha thu?' These signs represent the unwillingness of Caithnessians to accept the Gaelic road signs that are being erected around the region. With a historical presence of Gaelic through migrant communities, Caithness and its people have never identified as Gaelic or had a significant usage of the language. As discussed above, it was a transient encounter that came with Clearance and mainly died with the generation who brought it. Certainly, today's Caithnessians perceive Gaelic as foreign, as these Gala displays prove.



Fig. 10: 'We're not Gaelic'

A *Steven's of Wick* fish lorry, with a trailer of exceptional length, has been transformed into a model Viking longboat holding forty Caithnessians all dressed in what Fraser tells me with a laugh is 'wur national dress'.

A replica of a First Scotrail train is next in line, with drivers and passengers all looking glum and bored. A mound of leaves, standing taller than the train, blocks its way. This represents the highly problematic public transport issue in Caithness. This literal example of being disconnected from the rest of the nation is political, and maps directly onto Caithnessians' lack of feelings of belonging to the Scottish nation.

Oil is the theme of the last float, and it says less about oil production that is rumoured to be off-shore at Lybster than it does about Caithness' relationship to Scotland and anger concerning the Gaelic road signs. Amongst the locals dressed as oil workers, signs read: 'Caithness Rich In Oil!' with a translation underneath in the

style of a road sign reading ‘Gallaibh beairteach leis an ola’ under which is written ‘So Oil Rich Caithness Declares Independence!’

This festival is the key Caithness annual ritual where action is saturated in symbolism. Caithnessians present the Gala as play; it is a week-long celebration of all things local, an excuse for serious intoxication, and an event that brings Caithnessians from home and away close together. Underlying this purpose, though, is a method of communication, a close examination of their local social structure and a commentary on local politics. While ritual might be argued as traditional, in status, or about liminality (Mitchell 1994: 491), it is the case for Caithness that this kind of carnival is ‘particularly evocative but also particularly malleable. They can therefore lead to change, as much as they can evoke tradition and continuity’ (ibid.: 493). In Caithness, the Gala is crucially both. Wick Gala has been an annual event since 1953, but its roots lie in a more localized process from 1937.

Cathie explained to me that fishing became poor in 1931 and after six years, the fishing committee attempted to bring a feeling of positivity into the Caithness community by introducing the Herring Queen pageant in which a local woman would vie for the place of Queen and two attendants. Applicants were required to have at least one parent involved actively in the fishing industry. Crowned at Wick harbour, the Herring Queen was then taken to sea with local boats forming a procession. It is rumoured that 8,000 people watched as Reta Shearer was crowned in 1937. For the duration of the Second World War, the Herring Queen procession ceased and when, in 1949 it reappeared, the fishing industry was already in serious decline. The Herring Queen could not be crowned if no herring had been landed. The Town Improvements Committee replaced the ritual with the Gala Queen procession which is still in place today.

The Gala Queen procession was at the heart of the Gala, and over the years since 1953, the events surrounding the procession have grown in both number and significance. Now, while the crowning of the Gala Queen is ceremoniously the centre, participants and spectators eagerly await the arrival of the Gala floats. These are lorries carrying long platforms decorated to match a particular theme and upon which locals pose and entertain the crowds. Some of these floats are playful, spoofs of recent movies, or straightforward fancy dress. The most notable – and

increasingly common – though are those floats that make social and political commentary. Like the ones above, these floats remind Caithnessians about their own identity politics and act as communication with outsiders and local politicians.

Tam uses a paintbrush to spatter thick, oil-based black paint in my direction. In my bright orange boiler suit and hard hat, I shut my eyes as the oozing, unctuous paint rains down on me. I splutter with a laugh:

‘So, who are we doing this for again?’

‘To show people what we’re made of!’ Tam hands me a plastic tumbler of neat vodka and instructs me to drink it in one fast gulp and I shiver.

‘Show who? Other *Gollachs*? Don’t they already know?’ I gulp.

‘No, everybody else!’ Tam thinks I don’t understand.

‘Who’s watching?’ I ask, pulling on my rubber boots.

‘MFR’s here!³⁶ And the Highland Council!’ Tam exclaims.

‘What are we telling them?’

‘Caithness is going to be oil-rich. Sure, we could be independent from Edinburgh!³⁷ And that council needs telling, we’re not Gaelic, so just leave us be!’

Tam is delighted. Before I have time to consider this, I am sitting on the back of a fish lorry dressed as an oil worker in support of Caithness independence.

Caithnessians are compelled to present themselves often in response to socio-political moves made on their behalf. The current controversy, which underlay much of the Gala proceedings, concerns Caithness identity and history directly. As has been mentioned during this chapter, the Highland Council has voted in favour of erecting new road signs in Gaelic around Caithness towns and villages.

Claiming racism, reclaiming roots: the Gaelic furore and identity misappropriation

Gaelic road signs in the region, as some Caithnessians exclaim, are inappropriate: in no way do Caithnessians perceive themselves as having a Gaelic identity. As was highlighted in chapter three, the historical relationship with Gaelic has been both

³⁶ Moray Firth Radio, the main radio station of the Highlands and far north

³⁷ For Edinburgh, read ‘Scotland’. Often when Caithnessians say ‘Edinburgh’ they are referring to the Scottish Parliament, which is something I learned both by context and by asking why they focus on Edinburgh.

problematic and perceived as wholly transient. While Caithnessians claim not to be anti-Gaelic, there is a serious anger at the identity appropriation being done to the local community by the Highland Council.

In brief, as a result of the Gaelic regeneration of the Highlands, bilingual road signs have appeared across the Highlands. Paradoxically, although Caithness is neither Highland nor Gaelic, it comes under Highland Council jurisdiction and is therefore included in the Gaelic plan. Eight of the ten Caithness councillors voted for Caithness to be excluded from the motion: this was voted against by 36 votes to 29 at a full council meeting in Inverness. This has created a furore in Caithness. As Wick councillor John Rosie put it:

I have nothing against the Gaelic culture, but we don't want to be immersed in it when other services are under pressure. This is a cultural matter. It can't be right to attempt to implement a policy the people of Caithness consider to be alien to them. It will restore the reputation of the council if they are big enough to change the policy rather than force it down the throats of the people of Caithness.³⁸

Highland Council members from outwith Caithness rejected such claims, and counter-claimed that Caithness councillors were guilty of using racist language towards Gaelic. Highland Council SNP leader John Finnie (2008) claimed of the Caithness councillors that: 'They are using the same language as every racist: "We have nothing against Gaelic, but we don't want to be immersed in it." There are a huge number of issues that are far more important to be debated by the council than this.' Wick councillor Graeme Smith would disagree, blaming zealots for this Gaelic move:

The [Highland Council Gaelic] committee is forcing the issue through. That zeal is getting up the backs of the large part of the Caithness population who feel this is being imposed on them against their wishes. If the committee had a bit of sense, they would have backed off a bit, instead of forcing ahead with an unhealthy zeal.³⁹

To Caithnessians, there are few issues more important than their identity. The

³⁸ ““Racist” claim over Gaelic signs fight’ *John O’Groat Journal* 31.10.08

³⁹ ““Zealots” blamed for Caithness signs controversy’ *John O’Groat Journal* 20.06.08

trouble with that, and with Gaelic, is revealed in my fieldnotes:

Sitting in a Wick restaurant tonight, about 20 of us, when one of the men I didn't know, an English guy up for Dounreay, starts getting a bit tetchy. Says 'Bet you know how you'll analyze me, Kim. 'Cause I'm English, incomer sitting in Caithness, eh? Reckon that's easy for you, eh? What if I said *ciamar as tha thu?* Not so obvious now am I? What do you say to that? English guy can speak Gaelic in the Highlands!'. His aggressive manner put me on edge, I said I wasn't planning to 'analyze' him at all. Noticing my discomfort, he kept pushing the point. Local guy who I know stepped in. 'She'd say the same as me, man – we don't speak Gaelic in Caithness and we're not bloody Highlanders!'. The whole table (mainly Wickers) laughed, he seemed so ridiculously unaware. But it left everyone really offended, fired-up about not being Gaelic. The fact that he doesn't 'get it' means he doesn't 'get Caithness ...

There is a constant sense of feeling in Caithness that the rest of the nation does not understand this land. The official attribution of Gaelic identity through road signage has acted as a catalyst for serious allegations against local councillors, national politicians, and the analysis of the region itself.

As the designs for signs were unveiled, councillor David Bremner explained the historical situation of Gaelic in Caithness (summarized here in chapter three) to support his claim that such road signs are unsuitable for the region. He supported the claim that Caithness is not anti-Gaelic by explaining that the Gaelic *Mod* – the annual event of songs and culture, the main event of the Gaelic year – will be held in Thurso in 2010.

This seems paradoxical and can be viewed in two ways. First, that Caithnessians are not in favour of having Gaelic identification of Caithness but are pro-Gael and therefore welcome this other culture to the land it was once transient in. Second, that Caithnessians can hypocritically reap the economic benefit of hosting such an important social gathering. It is unclear why Gaels themselves have agreed to situate the *Mod* outwith the *Gaidhealtachd*, particularly when it is historically clear that residents of Caithness radically contributed to the decline of Gaelic. In both cases, the Highland Council's appropriation of Caithness identity and the Caithness hosting of the *Mod*, there is something very clear at work: tourism.

Gaelic was certainly historically apparent in Caithness but never formative of any identity there and is now long since absent. The work of Bruner and

Kirschenblatt-Gimblett illuminates the Caithness situation: tourist realism is a crucial concept here in which reality is presented in a distorted fashion to cater to the ‘imagination of others’ (1994: 437). ‘Tourism stages fantasy within geographically specific historic sites and real life worlds and blurs the distinction between them’ (ibid.). This is extremely pertinent for the Gaelic scenario in Caithness. In this geography’s history Gaelic was *present* but that in no way makes it a construction of the real Caithness life. Catering to what outsiders expect or desire, the Highland Council is creating, as one Lybsterian put it, a ‘Disneyland out of us’. This could be perceived as an example of what Dean McCannell calls ‘staging authenticity’:

The touristic experience that comes out of the tourist setting is based on inauthenticity, and as such it is superficial when compared with careful study ...a touristic experience is always mystified and the lie contained in the touristic experience ...presents itself as a truthful revelation. (2004:205)

While I and the Caithness councillors agree that Gaelic was in Caithness and that Caithnessians are not anti-Gaelic, it is important to put Gaelic aside for a moment. This issue has become saturated with talk of Caithness attitudes towards Gaelic. At the heart of the matter, however, is Caithness identity. If Gaelic is being claimed as the victim here, and councillors like Finnie argue that it is, it should be simultaneously highlighted that Gaelic is working as a convenient narrative for the Highland Council. Caithness councillor David Flear puts the matter into perspective: ‘This is not anti-Gaelic. This is just reality and listening to people – 27,000 people in Caithness against 12,000 Gaels who speak Gaelic in the Highlands. Let’s listen, let’s have some democracy.’⁴⁰ It is paradoxical to expect an angry population to accept road signs in a foreign language for the benefit of a group outside the region which is far smaller than the Caithness population. Elsie started a petition to stop the plan for road signs that had hundreds of signatures and was sent to the Highland Council to no avail. Meanwhile, teenagers from around Caithness started an online campaign to demonstrate against the signs by either chaining themselves to the signs, or tearing down the signs.⁴¹ Following my fieldwork, Mira telephoned me in outrage after a recent trip to the Carnegie Library in Wick where, she told me, ‘the opening times at the front door are in Gaelic then just summarized in English! We keep telling them

⁴⁰ ‘War of words over Gaelic road signs’ *Scotsman* 07.03.08

⁴¹ At the time of writing, the signs are about to be erected, so no such protest has yet occurred.

we're not Gaelic and now they're even putting the Gaelic before the English.'

Leabharlann Inbhir Ùige Wick Library	
Diluain / Monday	10.00 - 18.00
Dimàirt / Tuesday	10.00 - 20.00
Diciadain / Wednesday	10.00 - 13.00
Diardaoin / Thursday	10.00 - 18.00
Dihaoine / Friday	10.00 - 20.00
Disathairne / Saturday	10.00 - 13.00
Didomhnaich / Sunday	Dùinte / Closed

Fig. 11: Wick Library opening times sign in Gaelic with English translation, April 2009

Facts like this support my argument that tourism and economic benefit are at the heart of this and those outwith Caithness – with little or no grasp of its culture – are appropriating its identity by assuming Caithness to be something it is not, and by subsuming local identity. Not only is it subsuming local identity, it is revealing itself as inaccurate. The sign at Thurso train station is a good case in point: Thurso comes from Old Norse, *Theorsa* is simply a Gaelic bastardization of the name and is not a recognizable Gaelic word.

The local anger was particularly evident in an online poll undertaken by the *John O’Groat Journal*. This poll is in no way meant to be representative and I do not use it as empirical data.⁴² I do however explore the comments that people left on the website. The vote results suggested that 1,882 voters were in favour of the signs, 1,366 were against, and 41 thought ‘maybe’. Crucially, we must bear in mind that most people voting (it is clearly most because each vote is accompanied by an opinion, first name, and location) are in Canada or America. These elaborations give a fascinating insight into place, memory, and tourist iconography. They write general comments about the Gaelic history of Scotland, demonstrating no knowledge of Caithness: ‘yes because when you think of Scotland, you think of Gaelic, and that

⁴² Anyone can vote as many times as they wish, varying between ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘maybe’ if they choose. Furthermore, not everyone who would wish to vote has online access.

adds the flavour for the tourist' is one vote. From an American couple with no link to the area is the comment: 'yes, please keep the Gaelic roots you should be so proud of'. This *should be* is telling: the comments on the Big Vote tell Caithnessians who they are and how they should *feel* about identity. This is challenged by some locals: 'this is not a Gaelic area – shouldn't this be a Caithness vote? Why are people from outside voting?' An 'outsider' replies: 'You are in Scotland! The land of the Gael! Show you're Gaelic!', to which a Wicker responds 'respectfully, no'.

'Adding flavour for the tourist' is the tourist realism to which Bruner and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett (1994) refer. In creating a 'representation of the self' (which does not need to accurately replicate real life) and 'circulating that representation within an economy of performance' (ibid.: 435), some communities are able to separate 'performance' from the everyday. The Maasai of Kenya are the subject of Bruner and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett's work. On a ranch where tourists pay to watch a performance, the Maasai don 'traditional' robes and perform 'traditional' dances. Having finished this job, they return home, wear their Burberry t-shirts and listen to walkmans (ibid.). The former is what the tourist seeks out and, because it is historically accurate, the Maasai agree to perform this version of themselves. The latter is a reality too real for tourists, and this is not included in the experience. The situation works precisely because the Maasai have agreed it and are have a degree of control. For Caithnessians, Gaelic and its signs is put upon the community and removes rather than reworks a sense of Caithness authenticity. The feeling of being misunderstood, or politically ignored, is strong in Caithness due to this particular contemporary controversy. Concurrently, though, is a more powerful threat to local identity and that is the redrawing of far-north boundaries.

Keeping Caithness: the content of a border

Already, some locals are planning to protest when the signs are erected, to chain themselves to existing signs, and to graffiti any Gaelic signs. Geared-up for this kind of resistance, Caithnessians were hit in March 2008 by another blow to their identity. The Boundary Commission of Scotland, based in Edinburgh, announced proposals to politically re-classify the northern areas of Scotland. The constituency currently named 'Caithness, Sutherland, and Easter Ross' is proposed to undergo a merger and

become ‘North Highland’. As should already be clear from this thesis, Caithness focuses fully on localized identity. In Sutherland, and probably Easter Ross, this is also the case. To lump the places together is a problem from the outset. Most damning, though, is the notion that Caithness is to be ever-known as part of ‘North Highland’. Sutherland and Easter Ross *are* Highland and I found in previous research (see Masson 2007) that Sutherland people certainly claim a sense of Highlandness. For Caithnessians, this is another step too far. As Caithness, Sutherland, and Easter Ross MSP Jamie Stone (Lib Dem) put it ‘this is a cavalier disregard for the sense of community that still underpins the way we do things in the north’,⁴³

Local reporter Alan Hendry sums up Caithness feeling thus:

Countless generations have grown up as proud Caithnessians. With an innate sense of belonging to this distinctive triangle of land on the north-eastern extremity of mainland Scotland. But now it seems our unique county is in danger of becoming well and truly consigned to the history books. To the boundary bureaucrats, Caithness is an anachronism, an administrative inconvenience, and they want to wipe it off the map. The Boundary Commission for Scotland intends to scrunch up ‘Caithness, Sutherland, and Easter Ross’ and chuck it in the paper-recycling basket. And taking its place in the list of Holyrood constituencies will be the drearily utilitarian ‘North Highland’, in which historic county identities are rendered null and void.⁴⁴

Furthermore, the article continues:

Whatever emerges from the consultation process, naturally the county itself is not going to disappear in the foreseeable future. But what about Caithness as a place name? Is it destined to become a quaint relic of a bygone age, a fading reminder of a time when the county boundary actually meant something, when Caithness looked after itself and fought for its own interests? If the name of a county were to be deleted from that of the constituency, why, from that point on, would anyone bother to delineate Caithness at all? In a sense, the notion of Caithness being wiped off the map would be no mere metaphor. With neither a stand-alone Local Authority nor parliamentary constituency to keep alive its name in any meaningful way, you may as well uproot the ‘Welcome to Caithness’ signs and get used to calling it an ex-county. If you feel that officialdom has been chipping away

⁴³ ‘Let’s keep Caithness on the map’ *John O’Groat Journal* 07.03.08

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

at our collective identity and sense of community for too long, get in touch with the Boundary Commission. And, whatever happens, let's call for a rethink on that proposed name. After all, we're not North Highlanders. We're Caithnessians.

Phrases such as 'anachronism', 'administrative inconvenience' and 'identities are rendered null and void' are not only a Caithness concern, but also in the anthropological study of boundaries and identities. The fact that at the centre of the Scottish nation a committee is deciding the fate of the periphery demonstrates, as Gupta and Ferguson do, that 'the fiction of cultures as discrete, object-like phenomena occupying discrete spaces becomes implausible for those inhabiting the borderlands' (1992: 7). It is in a moment of serious change and social transformation that Caithness is forced to face up to its awkward links with the rest of the nation. To deal with this, Caithness has begun to open itself up to Scotland in an attempt to control the presentation of this border population's identity.

Identity strategies: Caithness tourism and marketing go national

Tourism is the new method that Caithnessians have chosen in opening themselves up to others. Unlike the tourist realism that Gaelic road signs offer, the new tourism ventures set up by Caithnessians are aimed at drawing both interest in Caithnessian life and economic benefit. Tourism has never featured much in Caithness life, mainly due to the fact that - going so far north - visitors tend to be en route to Orkney and other islands. The ferries to Orkney all leave from Caithness and this has created a certain lackadaisical view of tourism; I remember one Wick guest house with a website that welcomed the visitor 'Wick! The stepping-stone to Orkney!' In terms of tourism, the region has acted as a means rather than an end. During my fieldwork, all of this changed.

Aileen, an incomer in her thirties who has been in Caithness for five years, suggested the creation of a tourism venture operative. This was dismissed, in part because for some it was a 'typical incomer' suggestion and by others because of the un-tourist attitude that permeates Caithness culture. This is a place that - for all its woes about being misunderstood - rather likes the insularity that being a borderland population creates. Aileen pressed ahead and locals quickly realized that if they wanted any say in the tourist itinerary they would have to join forces with her. They

were pleasantly surprised. Clare, a Wicker, told me in an email that:

Aileen doesn't just want the tourists going to Groats or to obvious places. She wants a few of us to be proper local guides. So we'll have a mini-bus full of folk and we'll have our own route – she says we should choose places that mean something to us, personal, like, and stories and memories, and take the tourists there. Better than stopping for ice-cream in the car park at Groats anyway...

This did two things for the locals. First, it showed them a positive example of an incomer taking charge with localism in mind. Second, it let them see tourism as less of an industry and more about their own personal stories and lives. As I learned during fieldwork, Caithnessians very much enjoy having an audience listen to their tales of people and place. At the time of writing the tourism venture is still in its planning stages. Meanwhile, two more structured tourist attractions have been set up. One is a range of bus tours around the region, and another is a range of boat trips around the Caithness coast. The latter reveals the change in Caithness society. When I told my partner, from Thurso, about the sea trips, he was astounded: 'the water in Caithness is anything but recreational' was his point of view. It is true that during fieldwork, I never witnessed anyone take to the water for fun – leisurely fishing, perhaps, but this is the water of livelihood. This appears to be another example of what Bruner and Kirschenblatt-Gimblett describe as an entity that, when put into the tourist arena, is a 'representation of itself, circulating within an economy of performance' (1994: 435). The boat trips use the sea to perform in a way that is totally different to its natural use. Ultimately, though, it serves a new purpose in opening up Caithness, bringing in fleeting visitors, and creating economic benefit.

Another type of tourism that involves Caithness communities opening themselves up is village tourism. Projects like Waterlines visitors' centre in Lybster, or Mary Ann's Cottage in Dunnet, or the Dunbeath heritage centre, are all locations in which everyday life – harbour work or domestic activity – took place. Now, they are in the realm of the tourist. Compare the perceptions of place as experienced by various locals:

Sitting outside the harbour café, enjoying crab sandwiches and tea for lunch with my friends who were on a short break from their jobs at the village bank, I notice a tour bus venture awkwardly down the steep turns of harbour road. 'Who's that? What are they at?' Marelle laughs. 'Tour bus from Orkney'

Dora sighs. ‘Hellish no’ lettin’ us enjoy our lunch in peace, is it na?’ Marelle jokes.

On one level, she is being sarcastic: she is joking that tourism is so busy in the village that we have no time to eat, which is not true. At the same time, she is genuinely irked that these strangers have suddenly interrupted the flow of our day that is rarely punctuated by the arrival of visitors.

Two elderly American women enter the cafe. Angy offers his help. They do not wish to buy: they have arrived in Lybster mistakenly, mistakenly turned off the A99 when they had meant to head north to Wick. ‘My, I like your little secret’ one of the accidental tourists says to Angy.

Angy tells me he feels a mixture of emotions: happy that they enjoyed their trip, disappointed that they meant to avoid the village, and baffled at why anyone would think of Lybster as hidden or secret. His encounter with these women is the talk of the village all afternoon and explicitly made all of us think about the ways in which we present this place, what we demand of the place, and how it is often manipulated for various (normally economic) interests.

Tourism is the first of two ways in which Caithness has been represented by its communities and in which relations with the rest of the nation have recently increased. Next comes a deal with national supermarket chain Sainsbury’s that provides local Caithness produce on a national platform. For the farmers and fishermen of Caithness, this is an economic boon. Products include fresh meats and fish, preserves, and biscuits. For the region itself, it is good marketing; Sainsbury’s stores all over Scotland now sell this range of Caithness food, called *Mey Selections* and endorsed by the Prince of Wales. Back in Edinburgh after fieldwork, and shopping in one of these stores with my Caithnessian partner, I had *Mey Selections* brought to my attention. Products – such as ‘Barrogill whisky honey’ - localized in terms of Caithness (Barrogill is a place) and Scotland (and the connotations of whisky). Strikingly, the tagline reads: ‘Natural Goodness from the North Highlands.’ As has been noted throughout this thesis, Caithnessians feel in no way Highland, and in fact ‘Highlandness’ serves in Caithness identity work to describe who Caithnessians are *not*. Yet here we see Caithness rebranding itself for economic benefit. This is one key way in which Caithnessians are refiguring their relationship

with the rest of the nation. With a wry smile, my partner pointed out the display. The Caithness products were framed – like all Scottish produce in the store – by a border of saltire flags. We were both aware of the paradox: Caithnessians do not claim much of a link with Scotland, except to bemoan their feelings of periphery. And yet, here Caithness was, at the heart of the saltire flags. This relationship is not only real – much as Caithnessians claim localism, they are undeniably part of a nation – but economically beneficial. Caithness is in a time of change, and forging stronger and more positive links with the rest of Scotland is key.

Waiting and changing: Caithness feelings towards the nation

Throughout the thesis there has been a focus on the local, on distinctiveness, and separation. It remains true, however, that Caithness – whether its population claim links or not – is part of Scotland and here I explore how Caithnessians perceive the rest of the country. Why are locals so passionate about side-stepping national identity? One common feeling that I have witnessed in people's frustration is a sense of being detached. Senses of (not) belonging take on practical terms here: a lack of services is transformed directly into a feeling of a lack of relationship with the nation. For instance, to travel any where south of Inverness on public transport from Caithness, one must first get to Inverness and then connect. The services – both bus and train – are few and far between. Very often, said connection is missed because of the difficulties surrounding the first leg of the journey. My fieldnotes demonstrate my own everyday experience of disconnection:

Standing on the platform at Wick train station at 6am, needing to be in Inverness before lunchtime, I realize that of 13 Highland journeys to Inverness only 4 cover Caithness. For any hope of arrival before lunchtime, for a chance of catching a connecting train to any destination, I need to leave Wick at 6am, which means leaving Lybster at 5.30. This does not bother me, but is a serious source of frustration for the Caithnessians who say they feel ignored and poorly provided for. The buses are little better. Out of the 16 daily services, 5 will take you from Inverness to Wick. Travelling around this region is dominated by two things: waiting and changing. Lucky enough to catch the train or bus to Inverness, one must always change to a connection to travel further south. It seems that Inverness is the cut-off point, any further north sees services peter out. Having to constantly 'connect' does little but reinforce Caithnessian notions of disconnection from the rest of Scotland.

In this instance, I did miss my connection to Edinburgh. While this simply a one-off for me, a minor blip, for those who live with this unpredictable kind of travel, it is notorious. The Thurso and Wick train journeys to Inverness are commonly referred to as ‘leaves on the line’ : a half-joking reference to the fact that trains are forever being delayed or cancelled in Caithness, the problem attributed to leaves blocking the line. While this seems mundane, it is a reference point for Caithnessians, a real event in which they can root their displeasure with the Scottish political system and representation. At a distance from Edinburgh and the government, Caithnessians frequently in talking about ‘Scotland’ instantly equate it with Scottish government and resources. In my knowledge of Caithness, I attribute this equation to the fact that both historically and culturally Caithness has absorbed more from elsewhere, and Caithnessians often perceive Scotland as the land they are ruled by, rather than a land to which they belong.

In terms of resources, this was highlighted when the bus provision to Inverness was overhauled in 2008. In a merger between national CityLink coaches and local Rapsons buses, there had previously been good bus services – six buses went south daily from Caithness, and two buses went north daily from Inverness. The full journey from Thurso to Inverness would last four hours. In summer 2008, this was replaced by a new route which took much longer (up to six hours from Thurso to Inverness) and had no toilet facilities on board or any stops where passengers could leave the coach. Furthermore, the service no longer stopped in its usual Caithness locations. Bypassing villages that depend on the service, it added more stops in the Easter Ross region. This resulted in serious upset in Caithness: Easter Ross is serviced by several local buses from Inverness and its residents have no real need for the CityLink, while Caithnessians wholly depend on the CityLink and lost the majority of its services. The resource they had was transformed into a resource for a region closer to Inverness, and once more a feeling of being unaccounted for consumed the Caithnessians. Local petitions and protest meant that the previous bus services were reinstated, but the change had mobilized feelings of detachment that Caithnessians do not easily jettison. One local asked ‘do they even know where we are?’

This is reflected in another mundane task, that of ordering goods on the

internet. In many cases, postage and packaging is calculated by the postcode of the delivery address. In the far north, this is very problematic. Sitting at the computer in my Lybster house, I ordered goods and the delivery was estimated at £2.50. Typing in my postcode – beginning KW3 – the charge increased to £12.50. The ten pounds surcharge was explained by the red message that flashed on the screen ‘Not Mainland Scotland’. In this case, the error about Caithness’ location was due to its postcode; postcode lettering is the abbreviated form of the nearest city. Kirkwall is the nearest city to Caithness and it is in Orkney: anywhere with a ‘KW’ postcode is deemed to be an island community. While this should, and could, be rectified, it is what such errors represent that creates a bitterness towards the rest of Scotland. When I asked Sanny about it, he replied unsurprised: ‘no one knows we’re here!’

During fieldwork, I asked direct questions about people’s feelings of Scottishness, Britishness, or other national identity. While usually I rarely had to ask specific questions like this, whenever I talked to people about their belonging national identity was normally left out of their narrative. I wanted to know why.

Angy: ‘My identity is like one of those Russian dolls – Caithnessian/Scottish/British/European’ Dave explained to me.

Kim: ‘Do you mean Caithness is like the largest doll, with all the others inside it? Or the other way round?’

Angy: ‘Well, that’s the most important one, so yeah, Caithness as the big doll. That’s the one you can see. But maybe it could also be the wee doll, sort of like, the heart of all the different things I am’.

Kim: ‘So when are you Caithnessian, or Scottish, or British, or European?’

Angy: ‘British and European, I just said them because we are part of them, aren’t we? Like, with laws and that. Scottish, well we’re no like the English, but I’m not that bothered. Caithnessian’s just what I am every day’.

Here, Angy demonstrates a sense of identity obligation: he must claim British connection and European connection due to political structure. This in turn makes him feel ‘more Scottish’: national identity is relational for Angy. Ultimately, ‘just what I am every day’ is Caithnessian, the identity he called ‘most important’ and ‘the

heart'. Here, in the same way as authors like Kiely et al. (2005: 152) have argued, national identity does not figure much in everyday life. Even in a ritual sense, this appears to be true:

St. Patrick's Day, Wick, March 2007. Wearing Irish-themed costumes, Tam and I are cajoled into playing the tin whistle and the bodhran respectively at a party. We are hugely amused by this, and afterwards, go outside for some fresh air at Wick harbour. This is the second consecutive year I have celebrated the Irish festival in Caithness. I remind Tam that I have never been to, nor been aware of, any St. Andrew's Day festivities in the region.

'I told you before, we're not bothered by all that Highland stuff!'

'It's Scottish, not Highland, isn't it?'

'Aye, well. The Irish thing – well, we sound like them, and we get on with them.'

'It really is an island though, Ireland.' I wonder if Tam will be defensive.

'Aye, well. We've more in common with islands, then'.

Here, Tam highlights the lack of good relations between Caithness and the rest of Scotland, and more specifically the lack of participation in a Scottish ritual that occurs not only in the country, but around the world. It is not that Caithnessians boycott St. Andrew's Day or comment negatively on its connotations: put simply, it does not feature in their thoughts or their displays of identity. Burns' Night is treated slightly differently: some Caithness exiles in London have told me that they host a dinner and a ceilidh, perhaps in keeping with the notion that national identity matters more when one is outwith the nation. Within Caithness, I attended a Burns' Supper held by a social group led by incomers. The fact that an Irish cultural celebration exists here refers to the notion that McCrone has highlighted: small coastal communities in north Scotland are likely to look across the water rather than south to the rest of Scotland in shaping their identity similarities or fraternity with others (2002). It is perhaps a shared sense of periphery and distance, if not similar accent, that makes Caithnessians look across the water (to Scandinavia or Ireland) for a sense of fraternity. There is not some coup against Scottish power going on, there is a far more banal, nonchalant approach to the nation.

The absence of national identity and the compulsion of localized identity in Caithness is perfectly summed up thus: ‘nothing is simple about the experience of people who gaze at a past they see as devalued and who imagine a future in which they have no role’ (2003: 215). Caithnessians, in reshaping their place in the Scottish nation, are caught in liminality. On the one hand is their historical and cultural distinctiveness, and on the other is a fragility that national participation can ease. Furthermore, when Nadel-Klein suggests that ‘some fishing communities...see locality as a structure of feeling’ (ibid.: 213), this relationship between place and feeling is played out in implicit and explicit identity markers in Caithness. Being from Caithness is not simply about the everyday, or the scene of social life. It is real experience, real feeling, and substantial enough to eclipse other ways of being in the world. While this thesis has focused on what people do, coupled with and often in contradiction to what they *say*, it is necessary to highlight that the lack of national identity work or feeling meant I had to ask people to elucidate on their feelings about Scottishness and Britishness. Examples include:

‘I don’t think Caithness really fits into a national identity, and it doesn’t need to. We’re set quite apart.’ (Colin, aged 50)

‘Our geography, dialect, and history, our links to Scandinavian countries - maybe the question is “do you feel Norse?” In a roundabout way, I do feel Norse. And I don’t feel Scottish, we don’t share enough in common.’ (Anne, 52)

‘I feel backed into a corner talking about that’ (Clare, 35)

‘When abroad, I always say I’m Scottish. Scotland is a wonderful place with a very strong identity and it’s a disservice to bundle it in with British!’ (Kirsty, 22)

‘I’ve lived all over the world, I had phases of ticking “British”. But this one time, someone looked at that and said “Oh, where in England are you from?” So now, I refuse to claim anything but Scottishness! I don’t really care, but I don’t want folk thinking I’m English!’ (Sandy, 55)

‘Caithness is tolerant of nationalities. Just not the ones connected to us by land.’ (Mira, 30)

Here, Scottishness is plumped for when the other identity options are even less appropriate, and national identity becomes an identity that people feel forced to endure (‘backed into a corner’). Once more, *not being* a certain identity is something

Caithnessians wish to highlight as much as those identities they do claim. This recalls Cohen's experience of Whalsay whereby:

The presence of the outside world looms large on Whalsay. It is what sociologists refer to as a Significant Other, although what it signifies follows almost entirely from the collective self-image of Whalsay itself: the rest of the [Scottish] world is everything Whalsay is not. This omnipresent shadow is generally referred to as 'da sooth' (1989: 89).

Despite this national identity reluctance, Caithnessians are – at least by jurisdiction – Scottish. It is important, therefore, to bear in mind David McCrone's argument whereby 'nationality and citizenship are not the same thing - one can claim the benefits of being a citizen and yet claim nationality elsewhere.' (2001: 153). To this I would add that, by the same rule, one can claim nationality *nowhere* in terms of the complex realities of everyday life. When I asked people to elaborate, to understand why Scottishness is simply plumped for rather than constitutive of identity, there were claims of political misrepresentation and myopia, or a lack of everyday need for national identity. One political example comes from an incident involving the Caithness, Sutherland, and Easter Ross MSP, Jamie Stone (Lib Dem). In parliament in Edinburgh, Stone, who is an incomer to Caithness, had added a Caithness matter to the agenda. When the discussion reached said matter, Stone was absent from the chamber. He later explained his absence thus: 'Because mine was question number 11, I did not think there was a hope of getting to it.'⁴⁵ Stone, thinking the debate would not reach his Caithness question, simply did not attend. While it may seem to overstretch the case in using this example, I include it precisely because Caithnessians themselves focus on it as a convenient narrative for the perceived 'myopia' against them. Stone was exemplifying local expectations that underpin why Caithnessians often feel misrepresented: Caithness is a place no one ever 'gets to'. In contemporary Caithness society, however, there is an increasing need to strengthen a sense of relationship with (if not belonging to) the nation. The fact that First Minister Alex Salmond and the then Education Minister both refused to communicate with or visit Wick High School in its current degenerated state leaves Caithnessians feeling snubbed. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) shows Wick to be within the most deprived 15% of Scottish areas, due to its

⁴⁵ 'Stone offers "abject apology" after going AWOL' *John O'Groat Journal* 28.12.07

low ‘current income, employment, housing, health, education, skills and training and geographic access to services and telecommunications’ (Highland Council 2008).⁴⁶ Political ignorance and traceable deprivation enhance local feelings of myopia on the part of the Scottish nation, and mobilize an increased bitterness about Caithness’ place in the nation. Yet, simultaneously they *are* part of Scotland and – as much as Caithnessians might side-step national identity claims – they cannot side-step real experience of being part of Scotland. In the marketing and tourism deals, we see Caithnessians plump for a national identity by way of very real experience.

Anthony Cohen argues that ‘the nation does not need to be made explicit, possibly cannot be made explicit, but survives rather by being taken for granted and continuously expressed implicitly’ (1999: 151). In Caithness, the implicitness is elusive. In fact, the nation is made explicit with the specific intention to refute it. In Caithness, the nation and its large identity work as a convenient narrative to explain away the compulsion of localism. The scenario reflects Tom Nairn’s (2000) comments about the ‘heart’ of identity in which romantic imagery and myth history come to signify what it is to belong here. Working at odds with this heart is the ‘head’: the realization that for community maintenance and development, one must participate in a larger identity game. For Caithnessians, this is exactly the dilemma faced. The ‘heart’ is a romantic notion of Caithness distinctiveness and dream of independence, while the ‘head’ must re-organize the place into good relations with the rest of Scotland.

Positively, if ‘Scottish culture is characterized as split, divided, and deformed’ (McCrone 2001: 129), then the peripheral Caithness has enough distance to create its own solidarity, strength, and progress. As Dunbeath writer Neil M. Gunn (1973) wrote of his Caithness homeland, ‘certainly, astonishing things can happen within its borders’. In Caithness, the nation is conceived of only through resources and representation in terms of structure and politics. A history and culture of separation has lingered long and imbued local attitudes and identities with a feeling that national identity is superfluous and necessarily so.

⁴⁶ ‘Deprivation and Fragility’ Highland Council. Last accessed 14.02.08
<http://www.highland.gov.uk/yourcouncil/highlandfactsandfigures/deprivationandfragility/default.htm>

Conclusion

This thesis has been structured to match the way Caithness life was presented to me and consequently unfolded in front of my eyes. The first four chapters present a cosy, close-knit community of togetherness, harmonious relationships, and solidarity. Lurking within those chapters are moments of tension, otherness, and negotiation. Chapters five, six, and seven deal with the impact of migration on this community of kinship: young people's feelings about belonging and the future, and their decisions about movement, shape the Caithness future. So-called 'Caithness exile' changes the local population, in terms of size, atmosphere, and attitude: its perception as 'inevitable' says much about belonging in this place. Incomers bring with them their own baggage of belonging, and their new ideas about Caithness life: they also act as a mirror through which Caithnessians are forced to look and rethink themselves. Rethinking the self is most evident in chapter eight, where the fragile state of Caithness is revealed. Senses of separation and distinctiveness are difficult to maintain where economics are involved: local tourism and local-to-national marketing have taken over this closed community and become as inevitable as migration. In short, the structure of this thesis follows the way Caithness revealed itself to me: a veneer of harmony and closeness slowly reveals an unpredictable, always in flux community with a solid notion of belonging, but an ever-increasing awareness of the need for sustainability.

The methodological contribution of my thesis has been to live in Caithness at the heart of a rural community for eighteen months. There I experienced both the banal and ritualized ways of constructing community and giving meaning to it, the contradictions involved, the daily changes in attitudes and relationships, the ways in which local identities are lived-out. Methodologically, this gives an illumination to the largely statistical or thin-description research available on Scotland. By accounting for the nuances of community, the simultaneous fluidity and rigidity of belonging to a community, the very real effects of incomers and leavers, I can offer a thesis on why, how, and where identity matters. The length of time required to carry out ethnography means that entire years, with their rituals, population shifts, and political changes, can be explored. The presentation of the research means that while some chapters deal with large issues such as migration or political representation,

others deal with the happenings of a household kitchen, or leisurely afternoons at the harbour. These smaller scenes resonate far more clearly with people than large claims of, for instance, national identity. This is where identity, and localism in particular, matters. My role as ethnographer also affects my methodological contribution: due to the length of time I spent in Caithness, I could establish myself as a normal person, carrying out the same everyday duties, responsibilities and relationships as a young Caithnessian woman. I did not spend my time asking direct questions relating to my research, something Hammersley suggests ethnographers should avoid (1996: 89). Rather, I allowed participants to guide me through their lives and community, learning by almost becoming a local. The most significant contribution my methodology can offer is an illumination of the nuances and contradictions evident in a small community trying to make sense of itself and the world. By living with locals, incomers, and meeting locals who left, in a wide variety of contexts, I am able to offer not a snapshot of identity work, but scenes from the life of a community in times of stability and times of change.

This thesis should encourage more ethnographic research on Scottish communities. By presenting a village that is highly creative in its definition of kin, yet rigid in its boundary creation, I have drawn awareness to the hidden contradictions of kinship and belonging. This might help us reconsider our classifications of kin and of insiders and outsiders. Insight of how people in various parts of the country live their lives, understand themselves and others, and perceive the world around them, is absolutely crucial to fill the lacuna left by quantitative and more elementary qualitative research. Practical concerns are also raised here. Questions of population revitalization must be addressed on the levels of both social science and policy: encouraging young people to stay in their rural community, or tempting people to move into the area, is only possible when we understand the nuances of belonging and doing community life in that place.

My methodological contribution directly affects my theoretical contribution. My main theoretical argument is that, in the ordinary, everyday life of rural residents in Scotland, national identity does not matter. Furthermore, I have argued that it is precisely in encountering others (e.g. English incomers), being elsewhere (e.g. being assumed as 'British' on holiday abroad), or being asked in a survey that people

plump for nationality. I also contribute the notion that we must not study localized identity in Scotland simply to understand the nation: we must consider the everyday and the local precisely because they are the contexts in which individuals and communities truly live. For this reason, I argue that we shift our focus on identity matters to those locations where individuals and communities themselves make sense of the world. I also argue that questions of ‘who we are’ and belonging have a direct relationship with otherness. By encountering difference, and highlighting their own distinctiveness, this community comes to constantly define and redefine itself. Thus, I make a case for the constitutive relationship between similarity and difference. In terms of community, my theoretical contribution is an analysis of the fragility and fluidity of community construction: there is a two-way relationship between community and sustainability. If we are to analyze small communities, we must engage with the notion that their maintenance is as much about deconstruction as it is about construction.

Substantive contributions from this thesis include the study of community construction and meaning. I have highlighted the importance of studying ‘the everyday’, the way members of a community interact both positively and negatively, the way people work, the way they change their opinions daily depending on context, the tiny nuances that give people a sense of togetherness or difference, are all crucial components in the way they come to conceive of identity. I also suggest the centrality of houses, for this is exactly where such nuances and relationships are played out: the way one enters another person’s house, for instance, says much to the community about the status as an insider or an outsider. Small perceptions of everyday life are exactly what this thesis has strived to analyze, for it is in daily life that all of these themes actually happen and matter. Gender and generation are other substantive contributions of this work: in a seemingly equal community, where people work together with ease, there are traditional gendered roles at work that undermine what people actually say about community and belonging; in this respect, gender is the theme whereby I learned that what people say and what people do in terms of identity is often incompatible; spaces, activities, and characteristics are gendered here in ways that were reversed by the fishing industry, and reinforced by its decline. Generational relationships were a fascinating insight into highly-

localized identity. The closeness between young people and old people, with their shared experiences and shared places despite a gulf of years between them, is perceived as a symbol of social cohesion.

This thesis has argued that Caithness, and Lybster in particular, is a community of kinship, where ties not only of blood and marriage but also of general togetherness and relatedness over generations, are behind the conceptualization of local identities. Boundaries play a large role in the thesis because of their significant role in the community. There is a certain amount of fluidity surrounding what I call 'internal' boundaries: by this, I mean that friends can by virtue of their relationship become kin, while the neighbouring village is sometimes an ally, sometimes a rival. Internal boundaries are wholly context dependent, rarely crystallized, and always in development. Simultaneously, there are external boundaries in play, the epitome of which is the local/incomer separation. This, unlike internal boundaries, is rigid. An incomer, no matter how well-liked, assimilated, and after many decades of residence, essentially remains an incomer. The sociological concern with 'becoming' in terms of Scottish identity suggests that 'belonging' is a destination. My thesis has argued that it is – for incomers – a journey. They will never reach real belonging, or become invisible, but often they go some way along the path to belonging. Certain aspects of life, such as having children and bringing them up as local children, project incomers closer to locals, but ultimate, the distinction is clearly bounded. On this, amongst Caithness locals, there is little room for negotiation, and the same can be said of the local/national relationship. political representation, similarity and historical constructs of selfhood. The determination of distinctiveness permeates this thesis as it permeates life in Caithness. The struggling to sustain localism, to ward off national forces, and to retain community cohesion have been behind the scenes of each chapter. Locals undermine community ideals for economic benefit, which in turn can be undermined by attempts to strengthen local identity, and yet such a boycott of economic benefit ultimately undermines community. The dilemma involved here, the decisions and transformations involved in attempting to maintain yet sustain a community, are important theoretical concerns in the study of identity. Often, to bolster community, one is forced to betray the very construct of

community. This is an important consideration for social scientists studying belonging: it is wholly a matter of contradiction and transformation.

The chapters of the thesis developed in the way Caithness opened itself up to me. To summarize:

These are best demonstrated in the questions and answers dealt with in each separate chapter. To summarize:

Chapter one, 'Waterlines: learning Lybster harbour, learning Lybster life', asked what is at the heart of this community? How do villagers connect with each other? Here I explored the fishing community not in terms of industry but in terms of community life. By focusing on the heart of the village, the harbour, I demonstrated that the shared meaning and experience attributed to this place has been constitutive of Lybster identity. This provided an insight into the community to develop this kinship and belonging argument, how the village community is one of kinship.

Chapter two, 'Homes and public houses: the centrality of intimate spaces', asked how is this community played out in public and private spaces? Villagers invert popular notions of space. The family home as public and the public house as private, for instance, demonstrate a certain creativity behind the making and breaking of boundaries. In exploring the fluidity of internal, everyday boundaries of space and belonging, I developed the thesis' argument that community is both stable and fluid.

Chapter three, 'Togetherness and difference: relationships between communities, villages, and regions', explored what kind of relationship does this community have to other communities in the region, and to the neighbouring region? Setting off from the houses and public houses, I found that the boundaries of belonging between Lybster and a nearby village to be both rigid and fluid. This was explored in order to show how certain perspectives and relationships can eclipse each other depending on context. The significant development of this chapter was the crucial point that the encounter with others facilitates the perception of the self.

Chapter four, 'Knowing your *aishan*: close family relationships and friends-as-family', wondered amidst this focus on community relations, what forms do the closest family relationships take and what role do they play in this community? From difference and similarity, I demonstrated that 'family' comes in many guises in

Caithness and the links or differences between relationships are not always explicit. In a community where locals are genealogically linked and fictive kinship is as central as consanguineal, it is perhaps unsurprising that boundaries are reinforced to outsiders while internal boundaries seem fluid and ever-mobilised.

Chapter five, 'The best place to be young?', asked in what ways do young people embody the contradictions of Caithness community belonging? The people who best demonstrate the multilayered nature of being Caithnessian are its young people. The push-pull relationship to home - when leaving seems inevitable yet a desire to remain is evident, or a desire to leave is not matched by practical ability to leave - has opened us up to the complexities of being from a rural borderland community. In their narratives, their concerns, and their attitudes, young people here reflected over their identity and belonging in more explicit ways than other members of their community. This developed the thesis by moving it away from a stereotypical exploration of kinship and community by questioning those very things, and highlighting the problems and desires, the longing and belonging, that characterize rural life for young people.

Chapter six, 'Myths and motivations of movement: Caithness exile and expectation', dealt directly with out-migration, asking how does out-migration effect the Caithness exile? And what are the residual effects on those locals who stay? The chapter on young people considered ideas about out-migration. The following chapter dealt with actual experiences of leaving the rural community. The thesis developed thanks to the narratives of leavers, stayers, stayers who wish to leave, and leavers who wish to return. This gave the true sense of movement; movement characterizes Caithness and penetrates everyday life there. By devoting a chapter to locals who leave, I added a dimension to this community study and covered belonging for those who are physically absent yet always reserved a social presence,

Chapter seven, 'Incomers don't have a story: processes of belonging amongst White Settlers and Atomics', got to the heart of the 'incomer' matter. What is the impact of incomers on small rural populations? How are incomers treated by a borderland community? In many ways, the thesis built up to a chapter on incomers. The significance of small-scale, banal community activity and relations had provided a solid sense of how these people do identity. In developing the thesis to trace the

impact of arrivals, a clear sense of change is demonstrated. By examining how a borderland community copes with its new arrivals and *vice versa*, the thesis employed the concerns of sociological research on Scotland and applied it to localized identity. In doing so, we have a fruitful insight into the complex realities of community interaction.

Chapter eight, 'Caithness is an island: self-representation and the relationship with the nation', wondered in a time of social change, how do Caithnessians present their localized identity and strengthen ties with the nation? Population changes are not the only transformation being experienced in the far north. Current political controversies are raging over the very identities that concern this thesis. By addressing how this rural community communicate their opinions and demands, and how they react to identities being attributed to them, I have captured the feeling that penetrates today's Caithness.

The key benefit of this research is twofold. First, it offers a close ethnographic study of a Scottish region. This is something lacking in anthropology and sociology. By exploring localized identities for their own sake and not as an offshoot of the nation, I further analyse concepts of being a border population as explored by Kiely et al. (2000) whereby a region with salient or problematic ties to the nation has insightful notions about belonging, migration, and kinship. It is on the border, betwixt and between, that kinship and belonging are at their most complex and their most explicit. I borrowed themes similar to those employed in national identity research – identity markers, selves and others, achieved and ascribed belonging – in order to prove that such issues are far more real and significant on the local level. Claims of national identity and ethnicity are all very well, but they are abstract in everyday real life. In having the same concerns as researchers of national identity, and applying them to a small border community, I have underlined the importance of beginning our analysis at the heart of belonging. By employing the ethnographic method, I did not ask people to 'plump' for categories or restrict them to identity markers (see McCrone 2000, Paterson et al. 2004). Instead, I lived with these people directly between the lines of identity, I witnessed the nuanced notions of belonging and the negotiations people make in identifying themselves and others. In

other kinds of social research, for instance, claims such as ‘a friend is a relative’, or ‘a Caithnessian is Scandinavian’ would make little sense. Rather, here I have let people’s stories speak for themselves in order to open up this border population and rethink the ways in which we, as academics, explore other people’s lives.

The results of this thesis offer a narrative against political myopia and against tourist realism, whereby a region is appropriated and represented in a way its inhabitants do not recognise. Furthermore, they show the benefits of first considering minor differences and extreme closeness before tackling large difference such as ‘English’ and ‘Scottish’. These identities do feature here, always in the background. The results of this thesis prompt a rethink about where claims of national identity come from: it is clear in the Caithness case that national identity is only apparent or mobilized in the encounter with an ethnic other. Otherwise, it means little, the ‘nation/national’ tends to stand for political disgruntlement with the Scottish Government. Once again, this is suggesting more attention to localized identities and regional study in what has correctly been called ‘a nation of regions’ (Bromley and McCrone 2002).

The main contribution of this thesis has been to the anthropology of Britain and to the sociology of Scotland. For the former, this provides classic anthropological themes – kinship and relatedness, the significance of the house, belonging, selves and others – in a Scottish setting, of which there is little research in the discipline. Jane Nadel-Klein has both flagged-up the fact that anthropology at home is not only about the boundaries of a discipline, but of a country. As devolved Scotland grows, Nadel-Klein reminds us that there is currently no such thing as an anthropology of Scotland:

The field of study for the anthropology of Scotland is not self-evident. That, in brief, is what the issue of representation is all about. [There is a] *de facto* absence of a discourse that links and engages the various ethnographies of Scottish communities into larger discussion. The missing discussion might thus be called the anthropology of Scotland’ (1997: 86)

One key aim of this thesis has been to start ‘the missing discussion’. While the sociology of Scotland has a wealth of material on identity politics, migration, and local-incomer debate, it lacks, however, is full, immersed ethnography such as this to take real people and real, everyday scenarios back into focus. My thesis has not

simply been a story of people working at a harbour, chatting in a kitchen, visiting the pub, or dealing with new faces. This is the reality behind the face that Scotland presents of herself; this is the reality of a peripheral community creating its own centre of the world. I have explored the complex realities of belonging in a borderland Scottish population. Only when we have come further in representing communities – particularly on the periphery – in their everyday realities and explored the intricate significance of localized identities can we claim to understand Scotland.

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Other sources

Caithness community website: www.caithness.org

Appendix 1: 2001 Census results for Lybster village

POPULATION	Profile Area	Highland	<i>Scotland</i>
Total Population (number)	1,207	208,914	5,062,011
Male	622	102,297	2,432,296
Female	584	106,617	2,629,715
1991 Population	1,246	203,803	4,998,567
Percentage of the population who:			
are aged 0-4	3.9	5.4	5.5
are aged 5-14	12.5	12.9	12.4
are aged 15-24	9.3	10.6	12.5
are aged 25-44	24.2	27.4	29.2
are aged 45-64	30.6	27.1	24.5
are aged 65-74	10.3	9.3	8.8
are aged 75 and over	9.2	7.3	7.1
can speak, read or write Gaelic	0.9	7.5	1.4
were not born in Scotland	23.5	17.8	12.9
are economically active (% 16-74 pop)	60.6	68.1	65.0
are self employed (% 16-74 pop)	13.4	10.2	6.6
have a limiting long-term illness	22.7	18.4	20.3
state their general health as being:			
- Good	68.6	70.8	67.9
- Fairly good	22.1	21.3	21.9
- Poor	9.3	7.9	10.2
HOUSEHOLDS	Profile Area	Highland	<i>Scotland</i>
Total number of households	517	89,533	2,192,246
Percentage of households that:			
are owner occupied	67.9	65.7	62.6
are rented from the Council/Scottish Homes	22.6	18.0	21.6
are rented from a housing association	0.2	3.6	5.6
are private rented	4.4	8.5	6.7
living rent free	4.8	4.2	3.5
have no car	25.1	25.1	34.2
have 1 car	48.1	49.2	43.4
have 2 or more cars	26.8	25.7	22.4
Percentage of housing stock that:			
is second/holiday homes	3.9	6.2	1.3
is vacant	7.1	4.0	3.8

EMPLOYMENT	Profile Area	Highland	<i>Scotland</i>
Percentage of the employed working in:			
Agriculture/hunting/forestry	9.3	3.7	2.1
Fishing/fishfarming	1.7	1.4	0.3
Mining/quarrying	0.9	1.3	1.2
Manufacturing	7.9	9.1	13.2
Electricity/gas/water supply	1.9	1.0	1.0
Construction	12.5	9.2	7.5
Wholesale/retail/motor vehicle repair	8.8	14.7	14.4
Hotels/catering	7.8	9.3	5.7
Transport/storage/communication	4.3	7.1	6.7
Financial	4.3	2.0	4.6
Real estate/renting/business	9.5	9.9	11.2
Public administration/defence	5.7	6.8	7.0
Education	6.7	6.6	7.3
Health/social work	15.1	12.4	12.4
Other	3.6	5.3	5.3