THE AWAKENING: EMPOWERED BY WATER

WHAT ARE THE PERSONAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR FEMALE ACTIVISTS IN THE IRISH ANTI-WATER CHARGES MOVEMENT?

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Felix and Valerie Griffin who awakened in me a passion for social justice and equality.

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks to identify what are the personal and political implications for female activist in the Irish anti-water charges movement? While this movement is not a women-only organisation, nor is it concerned with gender-specific issues, the key findings in this research will demonstrate an astute and growing political awareness among women and a determined commitment to active political engagement. While this has not yet awakened any great ambition for these women to enter the structural political arena, their desire to have systematic and cultural change in Irish politics may hold the key for fuller female participation in the future. This thesis will argue that women are such a powerful resource to the anti-water charges movement; they can greatly influence and shape the organisations political goals. If the women's concerns and objectives are genuinely taken on board by the broader movement, there could be a popular push for a more accountable political system and culture that also facilitates women to take their place equally alongside men in Irish politics. Rather than trying to 'fit' women into the current political system via gender-quotas, a change in system and culture, proposed and endorsed by women, may attract more able females into the Irish political arena by default. In order for the movement to embrace these concerns, it also has to organisationally demonstrate internal participatory practices and a culture that values and recognises the key contribution these women make.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Research Question

The emergence of the anti-water charges movement in Ireland has seen mass mobilisation of ordinary men and women engaging in protest actions. Originating as a stand against the introduction of water-charges, the movement has now become a vehicle for the outpouring of anger against broader austerity policies and the political establishment. For many outside the political class, being part of this movement has marked the awakening of political consciousness. In a male dominated and patriarchal political arena, this research specifically targets women and asks, what are the personal and political implications for female activists in the Irish anti-water charges movement?

1.2 Contribution to Practice

In accessing female activists directly during a 'live' campaign within a new national movement, there is an opportunity to contribute to movement practice by documenting the specific biographical reasons why these women have been mobilised into political action. In their qualitative stories lay other insights into broader concerns beyond the issue of water. This thesis and a proposed anthological publication will add to recent research on this movement conducted by Hearne (2015).

This research will also add to our understanding of women and politics in Ireland. While the anti-water charges movement is not a women's movement, nor is it concerned with gender specific issues, the key findings in this research will demonstrate an astute and growing political awareness among women and a determined commitment to active political engagement. While this has not yet awakened any great ambition for these women to enter the structural political arena, their desire to have systematic and cultural change in Irish politics may hold the key for fuller female participation in the future. This thesis will argue that women are such a powerful resource to the anti-water charges movement; they can greatly influence and shape the organisations political goals. If the women's concerns and objectives are genuinely taken on board by the broader movement, there could be a popular push for a more accountable political system and culture that also facilitates women to take their place equally alongside men in Irish politics. Rather than trying to 'fit' women into the current political system via gender-

quotas, a change in system and culture, proposed and endorsed by women, may attract more able females into the Irish political arena by default. In order for the movement to embrace these concerns, it also has to organisationally demonstrate internal participatory practices and a culture that values and recognises the key contribution these women make.

1.3 Background Information

In 2010 the Fianna Fáil-led Government and the EU/IMF/ECB (the 'Troika') agreed a bailout programme that included the setting up of a new public utility called Irish Water. A number of controversial decisions soon followed the set up of this company, including the appointment of John Tierney as CEO[1] and the purchase of Siteserv[2] by businessman Denis O'Brien[3]. In December 2013, despite growing opposition, the Government rushed through legislation (The Water Services Bill 2013) in order to introduce charges from the first of January 2014. Opposition to water-charges and the installation of water-meters quickly emerged, with further controversies including the cost of the setting-up 'Irish Water', threats to turn-off water to a trickle for non-payment and concern that water would be privatised, adding to the growing anger.

In January 2014, local community protests started to emerge in Cork, Dublin and regional towns. Water charges became a major issue in the local and European elections in May 2014. In September 2014 the Right2Water (R2W) 'citizen's campaign' was established by a number of smaller trade unions and left political parties. The R2W group organised a protest rally in Dublin on October 11th 2014, with over a 100,000 people in attendance. Further national and regional assemblies were also organised in November and December 2014, and March 2015, again bringing huge numbers onto the streets. The large number of protesters at the first national assembly and the failure of almost two thirds of householders to register as a 'customer' of Irish Water, forced the Government to backtrack, putting a cap on the cost and offering a conservation grant to

[1] John Tierney was involved in the controversial decision to pursue the Poolbeg incinerator in Dublin
[2] Siteserv is the company that won the contract for the water-meter-installation in July 2013
[3] Denis O'Brien is Ireland's richest citizen. Although a tax exile, he has many business interests in Ireland and political connections. Controversy has surrounded him in relation to his successful bid for Esat telecommunications after he donated money to the Minister overseeing the sale, and he also received favourable interest rates and loan write-downs with IBRC (formerly Anglo Irish Bank). IBRC sold him Siteserv on very favourable terms, just before they were awarded the contract for the water-meter installations.

those who registered. These 'concessions' failed to appease the growing anger among citizens with protests continuing.

In September 2014, twelve people were arrested at a water-meter installation protest in Dublin North. This was followed by the arrest of twenty protesters in February 2015 in 'dawn raids' (including a 16 year old boy) and the arrest of newly elected TD, Paul Murphy for their part in 'detaining' Tánaiste[4] Joan Burton at a local event in the Tallaght area of Dublin. Grassroots community groups were emerging all over the country, blocking the installation of water-meters, with some areas effectively stopping meter-installations or providing enough resistance to slow down the process. Hundreds of local 'Say No' social media groups were established to organise local meetings, stop meter-installations and to protest at any visit of senior government politicians at local events. The 'detaining' of Joan Burton in Tallaght produced 'a *hysterical media response and was seized on by government spokespeople to try [and] portray the protestors as 'sinister dissidents'*. (Hearne, 2015, p.7) The response from activists was to claim there was political policing behind the arresting of activists and the police force was terrorising communities. Reports of heavy handed tactics use by the Gardaí were also emerging and shared on social media sites. This prompted hundred of women within the movement to stage 'silent vigils' outside Garda stations, wearing hi-viz pink jackets and holding candles. [5] These protests were specifically organised and attended by women and provided a striking visual gender specific form of peaceful protest, that was 'eerie' and 'perplexed' Gardaí surveying the scene when first done at Coolock Garda station (The Journal.ie, 2014). Court injunctions were granted to the meter-installation company, and four water protesters from Dublin were jailed for between 28–56 days for failing to stay a prescribed distance away from the installations of water-meters. (Hearne, 2015, p.5-8).

At the time of submission of this thesis, the campaign continues to be an active and live one, with daily protests continuing in local communities. A national campaign of non-registration and non-payment of the first water bills issued in April 2015 is ongoing. Various 'burn the bills' assemblies have also taken place locally and regionally. This is the historical context in which the women in this research are located and reflecting on in terms of their lived personal experience as activists.

[4] An Tánaiste is the title for the person who is 2nd in command in the Irish Government.
[5] YouTube footage of the vigil in Coolock, Dublin: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lwX9KSuRcus

1.4 Research Limitations

This research centres on the experience of ten women activists in various locations at a specific historical moment. It will not claim to be representative of all female activists involved in the anti-water charges campaign but simply a qualitative insight into the women who have come forward to be part of the research, exploring the personal and political implications of their activism. A broader and long-term study into the impact of female political activism arising from the anti-water charges movement would be worthy of investigation to gauge any changes in the political landscape in terms of systems, culture and gender-balance.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

Chapter two of this thesis explores academic research and theories in relation to other social movements, the concept and construction of community, and politics in Ireland in terms of gender. This is followed by the methodology chapter which sets out how the research was undertaken, the methods used and ethical considerations, in addition to highlighting my own ontological stance. Chapter four contains the research findings under a number of themes with analysis that ties the literature review and the findings together. Finally chapter five concludes with broader arguments based on an overall assessment of the women's experience and the potential for the future.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews pertinent literature in relation to three subject areas that are critical to this research, namely social movements, community and politics. In examining relevant aspects within each subject area, key points will be highlighted in this chapter and then combined with the research in the findings and analysis chapter.

Section 2.2 firstly looks at contemporary and historical social movements for comparison with the Irish anti-water charges movement. Within the Spanish M-15 movement, demographics, motivational factors and organisational strategies will be examined, followed by the issue of gender and power in the context of the South-African AEC. An historical look at South-American and European women's movements during political transition identifies the key reasons behind women's decisions to organise along gender-lines or as part of a mixed-gender organisation to promote their political agenda. In section 2.3 the concept and construction of community will be discussed, in addition to exploring the importance of the 'local' community to movements, one of the core themes within this research. Section 2.4 specifically looks at women and politics in the Irish context. The concepts of 'consciousness-raising' and personal 'frames of reference' will also be examined as key factors in 'coming to voice' politically, a critical process in the 'awakening' of the research participants.

2.2 European, South African and South American Social Movements

2.2.1 The Spanish M-15 Movement

On the 15th May 2011, seventy cities across Spain responded to calls by a number of internet-based platforms to take to the streets and demand 'real democracy'. This was the catalyst for the birth of the M-15 movement who occupied and reclaimed public squares in a number of the larger cities. Within these occupied camps there were daily debates on a wide range of political issues including corruption, social injustice, electoral politics and capitalism. The camps provided a site for consciousness-raising and active participation. With a decline in the numbers occupying and engaging with the camps, M-15 began a 'hybridization' process, linking in with other pre-existing social movements such as neighbourhood associations, various trade unions and political

associations. Within a year, it suffered 'internal tensions associated with political incorporation' with key members of particular associate groupings perceived to be seeking access into the existing political system and the moderation of the movement's goals. This resulted in angry internal debates and the removal of some members (Calvo, 2013, p.236 -239).

Prior to the establishment of M-15 there was significant apathy and lack of involvement in anything political especially among young Spanish citizens. What M-15 did was to disrupt this existing pattern of political culture. While other social movements in Spain had seen a rise in online participation, there was a decline in 'off-line' mass participation and collective action. Calvo (2013, p.239-240) identifies how M-15 offered something new and different. Firstly they moved away from defined leadership and representative modes of action, developing non-hierarchal, horizontal, autonomous and participatory organisational structures. They expanded their repertoire of mobilization to include the peaceful occupation of public urban spaces. By having broader issues, rather than one narrow and specific agenda, this movement had no well-defined singular opponent, so the blame was aimed at 'the establishment'. They developed dialectic relationships with wider society as opposed to the more traditional connections with social constituencies, thus broadening their appeal and connection across social groups. These strategies produced consciousness-raising laboratories were citizens acquired political information, developed critical thinking and got a taste of political participation.

From research undertaken by Calvo (2013) gender is not seen as an issue within M-15, with a good numerical-balance between males and females. The majority of those involved in the movement are young men and women (19- 35 years old), who are well educated and have a left-wing political orientation. The majority of participants are either current university students or have completed university education. This high level of education does not equate to jobs, with many graduates experiencing unemployment. Seeing themselves as 'political' activists, 99 per cent of members in Madrid have previously been involved in demonstration, whereas this figure was lower in Bilbao, dropping to 33 per cent. Activists have a well developed understanding of social exclusion and a collective urge to 'change things', but there is uncertainty or unwillingness as to how to develop their political agenda. There is a suspicion of

negotiating with existing political institutions for fear that it will have a corrupting effect on the movement. The movement's young members are described by Prenksi (2004), as 'digital natives' due to their educational and socialisation experiences being defined and embedded in digital forms of knowledge and communication, with social media the primary information source for most members.

The practice of continuous assemblies is of high value to participants, especially those who engage actively in these forums. Feelings of belonging and the development of the individual's capacity to think on issues of general interest are stated research outcomes. The main motivation for members is to effect change, with concerns about the public service, inequality, the economy and corruption high on the agenda. The 'experience' of collective action is also valued with one movement member stating; 'What truly matters is how the mental structures of those who have participated in all this have changed' (Alvarez, 2011, p. 22). The personal benefits for participants at forums include having a vehicle to show indignation, learning about systemic injustice, positive educational experiences and the expansion of their circle of friends. The role emotion plays in the fabric of the movement was also researched, with anger and moral outrage found to be critical in energising mobilisation. However the emotion of 'hope', scored low in the movement in Madrid, perhaps reflecting a reservation that economic inequality could be resolved quickly.

2.2.2 Women and Movements in South-Africa

In research undertaken by Miraftab (2006) on the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) in Cape Town, the subject of movements and gender was investigated. The AEC formed in 2001, representing a coalition of neighbourhood groups against evictions and service cuts-offs (including water) that were being imposed by banks and local councils on private householders and those in social housing. While post-apartheid South-Africa held great hope for meaningful universal citizenship, adequate housing and basic services for all, enshrined in the 1996 Constitution, the introduction of the governments 'no fee, no service' neo-liberal policy, stripped away the universal aspect of citizenship (p.196). These policies saw nearly two-million people evicted in the city between 1994–2006 for mortgage or rent arrears, and circa 93,000 household disconnections from the water supply in the same period. Most of those affected were predominantly unemployed, elderly or disabled social welfare recipients (p.197).

In 2006 due to internal crisis, the AEC was forced to reflect on its long-term agenda and strategies. It was moving away from its 'gut driven' grass-root actions as it became more resourced and invited to negotiate with State organs. Debates included organisational structural change, with some advocating greater structuring while others argued that this would create organisational elite, mostly men, who would accumulate information and skills (p.203). Other issues such as accountability, democratic decision-making and participatory democracy within the organisation itself was a push for change coming mainly from female AEC members (p.198). While women made up the bulk of grass-roots mobilisation, the AEC steering committee was composed of nine men and one woman, with the movement reflecting the patriarchal hierarchies of society and other community-based movements. The role and position of women within the AEC was reflected in this statement by Gretrude Square:

> ...ladies are doing all the work, the men are doing all the talking and all the flying...we are the people doing the work mobilizing, getting people to protesting, the marches and so on...We are ready now to do the flying, and do the talking, and also the work...because times are long gone that the women must just sit at home and keep quiet while men is doing all the talking and walking... because we are speaking now... I am talking about the Campaign, the change is happening now. (p.202)

With women as the primary care-givers in families, men were freer to be the ones doing the 'talking, flying and walking' when it came to the campaign. However, women recognised themselves as a valuable resource to the movement not only in their work on the ground, but also in handling the internal male dynamics where the 'men fight amongst themselves' and the women are the ones 'jumping in' to save the organisation (p.203). When women confronted the predominantly male steering committee about gender-inequality and a demand for more accountability within the AEC, it was met with a mixed male reaction of surprise, a walk-out protest and from some, a recognition of women's role, with one man stating that '... if the Campaign manages to survive its current problems, it is because of women' (p.203). The organisational crisis in the AEC opened a crack that assisted women to question gender hierarchies in the organisation and a destabilisation of the patriarchal gender-order. On a personal level, women's activism had given them greater awareness, a sense of empowerment and better communication and social skills. In the domestic sphere, many women were the primary or sole carer in young families, so were constrained in their political participation. But other women had the practical support of extended families, or older children at home

and had more time to participate in community activism. Miraftab argues that in such circumstances, the ability of these women to open certain organisational cracks to serve their aspirations for a new way of doing things, should not be underestimated (p.210).

Miraftab observes that a common feature of most grassroots mobilization, including the AEC, is the bulk of their memberships are women, yet not in leadership positions (p. 209). Community activism is a form of political action particularly undertaken by women, and is often fuelled by their gendered responsibilities as care-givers. Women within informal community activism have been effective in keeping larger social and political struggles alive, where their survival strategies and poverty management skills are assets that build social capacity, strengthen civil society and benefit development projects. (p.205 & 211).

2.2.3 Women's Movements in Europe and South America

Baldez (2010) argues that historically, women in many countries experiencing democratic transition or realignment respond by mobilising along gender-lines to advance their own agenda and to ensure women's equal participation in politics. Where women already participated in other groups, mobilization around other issues is easier than for isolated individuals. When these women's movements gather momentum, they are capable of attracting the attention of opposition party elites (usually male political actors) who try to co-opt women as a constituency for their own electoral gain by incorporating women's issues into their political agenda.

In comparing four women's movements in Brazil (1960s-1980s), Chile (1970's), East Germany (1980s) and Poland (1980s), Baldez identifies three variables that enable women's movements to emerge during democratic transition. Firstly informal and formal networks that builds organisational infrastructure; secondly, direct contact with the international feminism movement which helps frame their discourse and organise separately from men, and thirdly, the exclusion of women in the process of decision-making by opposition parties can acts as a catalyst for coalition formation among a diverse range of women's organisations.

In Brazil and Chile, women organised themselves around social issues rather than gender issues. In Germany it was women's equality and sexuality that prompted

organisation. In all three countries, links with international feminism were strong, giving them support that transcended national boundaries and national-identity. Other formal organisations such as Churches and Unions also assisted women in practical ways, providing safe places to meet and organise, playing a critical role where opposition to the oppressive ruling class was forbidden. In Brazil the women's movement grew when the government ignored women's social issues and they successfully lobbied new emerging political parties to adopt elements of their demands. However the movement in Brazil fragmented when different women's groups aligned to different emerging political parties. In Chile a number of women's groups formed a coalition after opposition leaders moved to assume leadership of the mass protests organised by the women. This coalition eventually forced the incoming democratic government to adopt their demands in the 1980s. In Germany, four distinct citizens movements emerged in the late 1980s during political realignment but none had women's issues on their agenda. This prompted the formation of a women's coalition which did force some short-term concessions, but the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany soon monopolised the political agenda, pushing women's issue out of prominence. In contrast, there was no emergence of a women's movement in Poland during their political realignment. Baldez identifies two factors that contributed to the non-organisation of women collectively. Firstly, the State mediated information from abroad, so contact with the outside world was limited and they projected foreign influences as suspect, resulting in no development of direct contact with the international feminist movement. Secondly, women's issues were explicitly addressed and negotiated by the Solidarity Movement when it emerged as a power. In Poland's case, the inclusion of women's issues into the political agenda mitigated the need for women to organise politically on gender-lines.

2.3 Community

2.3.1 The Concept of Community

> The sociology of community is concerned with the whole range of community relationships and not with only one particular form... Community does not have one single meaning, but many. (Crow and Allan, 1994, p.2-3)

The concept of community has many forms. Firstly it can refer to a geographical area which Willmott (1996, Chapter 6) calls a 'community of place', and Lee and Newby (1983, Chapter 4) term 'locality'. These terms do not however describe the social

interaction that takes place within geographical spaces and as Stacey (1969, p.144) observes; 'Physical proximity does not always lead to the establishment of social relations'. Other concepts more descriptive of social relationships Willmott's terms a 'community of interest', (based on common factors like ethnicity, religion, and occupation etc) which can be within defined geographical spaces or more widely dispersed. Lee and Newby use the term 'local social systems' to describe social relationships but only consider these within geographical spaces. The form of community that captures 'community spirit', that is, a shared sense of identity and social interaction, Willmot terms a 'community of attachment' and Lee and Newby call 'communion'. As Crow and Allan point out, community is the language we use to '... express ideas of 'solidarity, interest and identity' which are at the heart of community life.' (1994: xv)

2.3.2 The Construction of Community

While acknowledging the importance of individuals and groups in actively constructing communities, Suttles argues that the idea of communities emerging organically appeals to us because it implies;

> ... a process in which communities [are] more nearly the products of personal and human nature than the contrivances of planners, bureaucracies and depersonalized institutions. (1972, p.9).

However, the role of external forces must be examined in how communities are socially constructed, including the impact of capitalism, neo-liberalism and the building of national identity.

Tonnies in his observations of people moving from the land to urban centres during the industrial revolution reflected on a loss of community. He argued that a true form of community could only be found in rural locations. This sense of community was built on close familial ties, collective ownership of land and a unity of mind; the latter representing '... the truly human and supreme form of community' (Tonnies and Loomis, 2002, p.42). Urban living on the other hand was the opposite, and while it may resemble community with people generally living peacefully together, it was '...the artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings' (Tonnies and Loomis, 2002, p.64). Within urban settings people protected their own interests, nothing was given

away freely, labour and items were commodities with an exchange value, and nothing was of common value to be shared by all.

More contemporary theorists share similar observations on the demise of community with Bauman arguing that the word 'community' sounds sweet and the images it evokes represents '... the kind of world which is not, regrettably, available to us – but which we would dearly wish to inhabit and which we hope to repossess... [but] Community is nowadays another name for paradise lost...' (2001, p.3-4). He further argues that we live in ruthless times, where competition and one-upmanship thrive, few are in a hurry to help others and 'The 'really existing community' were we to find ourselves in its grasp, would demand stern obedience in exchange for the services it renders or promises to render' (2001, p.4).

Wellman (1999) in exploring social relationships argues that community is not dead, but transformed. The advances in telecommunication and transport technologies have broadened personal networks, creating communities that have '... ties based on shared interests rather than ties based on kinship or neighbourhood' (Wellman, 1999, p.25). Public places have now become spaces to pass through or places to go shopping, with community activity operating out of private houses between small informal groups of people, either socialising face-to-face or communicating by telephone or internet. Contact with neighbours still exists around practical matters such as domestic safety etc, but are not social relationships.

On a broader level, Anderson (2006, p.2-3) argues that since World War II, every successful revolution has defined itself in national terms, and rather than 'nationalism' being something that is coming to an end with the consolidation of countries, '... nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time.' For Anderson, the nation is an imagined political community, imagined both essentially as limited and sovereign. Within the imagination of the members within a nation, even though they will never know or meet most of their fellow-members, lives the image of their communion (2006, p.6).

2.3.3 Movements and Local Community

Within community theory, the existence of the concept of 'local' community, based on a geographical sense of local identity is contested. In examining these theories, Murray

(2007) outlines academic arguments put forward by Tomlinson (1999) and Beck (2002), who contend that globalisation, trans-nationalism and the cosmopolitism of urban spaces have transformed our notion of national and local community, with location becoming less relevant for communities. This in turn has produced spaces that are open to inclusion and cultural diversity. Identity is no longer about the geographical, but based around interests such as sexuality, gender, ethnicity, politics etc. Community is now 'deterritorialise' and formed through shared values and identity. Those who embrace community as local are viewed as insular, closed to other influences and discourses, traditional, exclusive of others and selfish.

In contesting this view, Murray (2007) uses a case study of a local community in Dublin city, engaged in a campaign against the installation of an incinerator in their area. In his research he has found that:

> The local as a socially constructed 'place' continues to be of primary importance even in the age of globalisation. 'Place' provides both the physical and geographical references for identity formation, as well as invoking a sense of shared history and culture. (2007, p.125)

A sense of community was vitally important to these activists in the face of outside forces, with sentiments expressed that they were not only doing this to protect their area, but also for the generations to come. There was also evidence that it was not a case of NIMBYism (Not in my back yard) as the activists were objecting also to a national policy of incineration, not just its location locally, contradicting the notion that local communities are selfish and insular. The external organisational linkages formed during their campaign also contradicted the notion of local communities being exclusive entities closed to outside influences or discourses. However in engaging with those outside of their community, the ownership of the campaign remaining with the community was of vital importance, and the agenda of outside supporters scrutinised. This was reflected by one research participant; 'I wouldn't be used by anybody, whether it be a politician a councillor an official or an NGO' (2007, p.132). Based on the importance of a 'sense of local community' for the anti-incinerator campaign, Murray rejects the claim that community life and identity is undergoing radical change in an age of globalism, with the theory having little supporting evidence to back it up (2007, p.133). In contrast, evidence from his case study 'suggests that 'community life' in early 21st century Ireland may well remain the preserve of locality and place' (2007, p.117).

2.4 Women and Politics in Ireland

2.4.1 Gender Quotas

After the general election in 2011, Ireland ranked 24th out of 28 European Member-States with only 15 per cent female representation in the lower house of the Oireachtas. This is well below the EU average of 28 per cent. Legislation enacted in 2012 introduced gender quotas, placing the onus on political parties to have a minimum of 30 per cent female candidates running in the next election. Failure of political parties to meet the quota carries with it financial penalties and a reduction of state-funded support (Gender Equality in Ireland, 2015). The youngest member of the Oireachtas, Senator Kathryn Reilly (2015), identifies five barriers to women's participation in Irish Politics, which she calls the five C's. These are culture, confidence, childcare, cash and the candidate selection process. With the introduction of gender quotas, she argues that the issue of candidate selection is being dealt with head on, but the other issues remain real barriers for women. While there are many women behind the political scenes, they '... are often very absent from the stage' and a culture of masculinity is embedded in Irish politics, making it 'male, pale and stale'. Reilly argues that respect for women in politics is missing in both the public and political spheres, citing an example of abuse on social media towards a female elected representative and alluding to a lack of respect for women within political parties. Byrne (2015) on the other hand, sees the gender quota bill as '... a male solution to a male problem and merely a gloss on the real issues of the old schoolboy network and cronyism that still pervade in Irish political life'. He argues that it is condescending to women, an insult to past and present female politicians, and a tokenistic gesture by a predominantly male institution. Furthermore, candidates should be selected on their ability to do the job, not on their gender, and the introduction of a quota system does not necessarily mean the best candidate will be selected. However, I would argue that before women can even be selected as a candidate, they must first make a decision to enter the political arena.

2.4.2 Gender Barriers

Research in the United States (Fox & Lawless, 2010) specifically examined political ambition and gender, starting from the moment people first considered running for election. The research targeted an equal number of male and female lawyers and business leaders; professions identified as the most likely to precede a career in politics;

which were also two professions where women had successfully broken-down traditional gender role socialisation. Educators and political activists were also targeted because of the higher number of women that emerged from these sectors as political candidates. Of those surveyed, 59 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women indicated they had considered running as a political candidate, meaning 'many women weed themselves out by never having considered running' (2010, p.148). This was the first gender gap identified, with the number of women entering the second phase of the survey lower than men. The survey then asked questions on political culture, domestic gender-roles (division of labour and childcare), self-perceived qualifications and ideological motivation. Even though the women surveyed were seven times more likely to be responsible for domestic duties than the men, it was the 'self-perceived qualification' which was the strongest predictor for females considering running as a candidate. The gender gap narrowed considerably when women perceived themselves as qualified, yet fewer women than men described themselves as very qualified. With encouragement from others in political and non-political spheres, the likelihood of considering a candidacy doubled among women. The main research findings concluded that women were just as likely to get elected as their male counterparts, but it was the initial phase; actually considering running, where there was a gender gap and lower female representation.

2.4.3 Consciousness-raising, Coming to Voice & Frames of Reference

For most of the women in this research, the development of their political awareness occurred around the issue of water-charges. This political awareness they have termed their 'awakening', marking the beginning of their 'consciousness-raising' journey, critical understanding of their historical 'frames of reference' and their 'coming to voice': The interplay of what these concepts mean are captured beautifully in the following quote:

> Only by coming to terms with my own past, my own background, and seeing that in the context of the world at large, have I begun to find my true voice and to understand that, since it is my own voice, that no pre-cut niches exists for it; that part of the work to be done is making a place, with others, where my and our voices, can stand clear of the background noise and voice our concerns as part of a larger song. (hooks quoting Jane Ellen Wilson, 1994, p.185)

The concept of 'consciousness-raising' is the process of uncovering the root causes of social issues and turning the personal into the political. It is a key concept in Freire's (1996) pedagogy which he terms 'conscientização'; the journey from the moment you become aware of your own 'situationality', and through reflection on the conditions of your reality, you are challenged to act. Engaging in critical thinking and understanding, you discover others to be also 'in a situation' that is problematic, and from this collective conscientização, the ability to emerge out of oppression and intervene to change reality can begin (Freire, 1996, p.90). This is done through an ongoing dialogical process that embraces cooperation, unity for liberation, organisation and cultural synthesis, moving constantly between reflection and action (praxis).

hooks (1994) in promoting education as a practice of freedom, builds on Freire's concept of conscientização, translating it into critical awareness, engagement and active participation, whereby everyone claims knowledge (p.13-14). hooks acknowledge the emphasis placed on the important initial stage of transformation; '...that historical moment when one begins to think critically about the self and identity in relation to one's political circumstances.' This conscientization is not an end in itself, but is joined to meaningful praxis, and in this process, capable of transforming the world and giving it meaning (p.47-48). This is achieved through interactive critical dialogue, with all in power and taking responsibility for their own learning (p.151-152). In engaging in this practice, 'Once you learn to look at yourself critically, you look at everything around you with new eyes' (p.117). Within this environment you can learn how to '*come to voice'*, which '...is not just the act of telling ones experience. It is using that strategically – To come to voice, you speak freely about other subjects' (p.148). Through the development of critical thinking and listening to other voices, one can engage in multiple locations, gathering knowledge more fully and inclusively (p.91). By learning new ways of knowing; consciousness is transformed and a climate of free expression that is liberatory is created (p.44).

For hooks, her ability to learn was always contextualised within the framework of generational family experience, tracing back to specific behaviours, gestures and habits of being (1994, p.3). Critical understanding of your past and your background are part of discovering what hinders or empowers you in finding voice. For Mezirow (2007), transformative, emancipatory and empowering learning begins with understanding your own personal 'frames of reference'. Once identified, we can extend or refine these

reference frames or learn new ones. Our understanding of reality is constrained and filtered through socio-linguistic, psychological and epistemic conditions. The psychological factors that produce our frames of reference include our personality traits but also any repressed parental prohibitions that can dictate or influence ways of feeling and acting in adulthood (2007, p.11). Allan (2009) argues that for women there can be an expectation that you will act in a certain way; to be respectable and lady-like. These expectations are projected by institutions, society and within the family from parents, which in most societies are traditionally patriarchal in construction. Although the expectation for women to behave 'lady-like' is historical, today a competing neo-liberal discourse around modern girl-hood promotes the notion that females can be anything they want and encourages them to display their 'Girl-Power' (2009, p.146-156).

2.5 Conclusion

The review of specific literature in this chapter provides the contextual framework for the analysis of the research data in chapter 4. Specific points in relation to, movement demographics, motivational factors and organisational strategies; gender and power; concepts and construction of community; and political awareness and ambition will be used for comparison and contrast against the themes that emerged in the research. Before presenting the research findings and analysis, the next chapter details the methodological process and rationale used to gather the data for this thesis.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will firstly look at the research question and the rationale behind what it seeks to expose. My own ontological stance is then explored to set on the record my world-view, exposing my subjectivity to the reader and identifying what has shaped and influenced the lens in which I have approached the research subject. This is then followed with a section on feminist methodology and epistemology exploring researcher/participant power-relations and the production of legitimate knowledge. The next section looks at the advantages and disadvantage of employing a qualitative approach to the research, followed by a critique of the research method used. The ethical considerations with this particular research are then identified, followed by a section on the research process itself, detailing the steps taken to gather the data, how the participants were identified and the main considerations at the forefront of my mind before and during the group interviews. Finally there is a section on my own reflexive process in carrying out the research.

3.2 Why This Research Question

This research question seeks to expose, what are the personal and political implications for female activists in the Irish anti-water charges movement? The reason why I have selected this area of research is many-fold. As a community activist for over thirty-years, I have a particular interest in community activism in response to social issues. I have been involved in, witnessed and experienced meaningful change that has impacted positively on the reality of people's lives through collective action. Within my work, on an observational level, I have found women to be the most pro-active on the ground in tackling issues practically, while their gender representation in structures and governance is very low.

The second reason for choosing this research area was the opportunity to access women who are currently active in one of the biggest grassroots social movements in Ireland, and to document their reflections within the context of an ongoing campaign. In 2004, I read Sinead McCoole's book, *No Ordinary Women*, which documented the lives of previously unknown Irish female activists in the revolutionary years of the early twentieth century. McCoole (2003, p.14–19) through painstaking research over ten

years, finally uncovered and gave recognition to the major role of women in 'Irelands fight for freedom', but this came unfortunately after many of the women were deceased. The women involved rarely spoke about this period of their lives, especially those who had been imprisoned for their role in the Irish Civil War. This was seen as 'an episode to be concealed' and an embarrassment to families. While McCoole's book is written specifically about female activists, it lacks the women's own personal testimony and insight in any great detail, instead using official documents, information from family members and photos to piece together their stories. In carrying out my research during the historical period the activism is taking place, and by employing feminist research methods, I hope to create a reflexive space that will be a useful praxis exercise for women in this campaign, based on their own lived experience and knowledge. This I hope will also document their role for future generations, acknowledging their struggle, their actions and their contribution.

In relation to the matter of water-charges, I would share these women's primary campaign goal, the abolition of water charges on the grounds that water should be a human right and the commoditisation of water has unequal implications economically for those on lower incomes. I have participated as an individual citizen in national and local people's assemblies and marches on the issue as an activist. I am fully committed to peaceful protesting in organised assemblies, the non-registration as a 'customer' of the new semi-state company Irish Water, and the non-payment of any bills.

3.3 Researchers Ontology

In exploring my participant's world-view, it is also useful to examine how I as the researcher see the world, based on my own lived experience and knowledge. From reflecting on my own life, I can name and bring to the fore my own subjective views and identify how I see the world I live in and why I see it that way.

I am firstly a white working-class Irish female, born in Dublin into a 'mixed marriage' family. My mother is from London, England and originally of the Protestant faith and my father is a Dublin born Catholic. My father's predecessors were nationalist republicans from Belfast (his paternal-grandparents). My parent's marriage was not seen as typical in a predominantly homogenous Ireland during the 1960s and this brought with it some pressures as to what were acceptable and expected societal and

cultural conventions in relation to any off-spring they produced. The most obvious of these was to bring up their children as Catholic. Both of my parents have a strong national identity with their respective countries, and although both come from working class backgrounds, they differ in their educational attainment, political values and cultural norms. While this could have been a site of much conflict, and it was on occasions if politics or religion was the subject, what it did instil in me and my two brothers was a respect for difference and an ability to look at the situation from more than one view-point.

In terms of gender difference, besides the biological, I cannot remember being treated any different to my male siblings within the family unit. My father and his three siblings were raised by his mother, who became a 'deserted wife' when her husband left for England, leaving her with four small children. She worked three menial jobs to provide her family with a modest home, food and basic education. Within my father's family unit, it was the norm to have a female as the head of the household and the breadwinner. This I firmly believe informed his view of women as equals to men. It was no wonder that his choice in a wife was also to be an independent strong woman. My mother having had no relationship with her own father then lost her mother when she was ten years old. Subsequently she was brought up by her maternal grandmother, who was widowed in the First World War. My mother's education was through a boarding school and then straight into the labour market once her education was complete, gaining her own financial independence. Similarly to my father's upbringing, my mother too had lone working women at the head of the household.

At various times during our childhood, one or both of my parents worked. Sometimes it was my mother who was the primary breadwinner, at other times my father. I cannot recall any memories of my father ever feeling emasculated in terms of his economic status or role when he was either unemployed or when my mother was earning more than him in her profession. I strongly believe that it was both parents' upbringing and life experience that created within our family unit uncontested gender-equality, the opposite of Irish society's perceived gender-roles. This equality extended to all aspects of our lives, from our interests, hobbies, sport, work and education; to pursue what we wanted and to become our own person, based on our abilities and not our gender. While this may seem like a Liberal Feminist approach based on equality and egoism, this was

not the case. There were also strong altruistic values instilled in us, and we all were active participants in community life. This is what led me into working in the Community and Voluntary sector.

My first activism was at the age of ten. On Tuesday 7th March 1978, a neighbour, Anne O'Connor, was fatally injured on the Malahide Road while returning home from her night work in a local hotel. She was a young mother of four children. Within a couple of days, my own mother and other female neighbours decided to lobby for a set of traffic lights. The direct action they took was to gather themselves and their children and block the Malahide Road preventing the commuter traffic going between the leafy suburbs of north-east county Dublin to the City Centre. We were successful in our action and traffic lights were installed. It was Anne's untimely death that showed me how effective women can be in coming together to challenge for change, change that literally can be the difference between life and death. It was my mother through her own example that taught me the power of protest and the value of community, something I believe the participants in this research also show their children and community by their example.

My life may seem utopian and without gender-inequality to the reader, but this however was not the case. In the wider world I was met with the structural and institutional inequalities that exist within society. As a child I clearly remember having to wear a mantilla at Church because I was a female. In secondary school, which was a convent all-girl affair, we were limited to perceived female subjects and taught 'lady-like' behaviour. When I returned to work after marrying and having children, I had to fight the Tax Office to keep my own PPS number instead of automatically being assigned my husband's number with a 'W 'placed on the end. When as a married couple we went for our first mortgage, I was totally ignored by the bank official until he asked me if 'I had a little job?', and when he realised that my income was greater than my husbands, I got his full attention.

Fortunately, I married a man similar to my father, who has a very healthy respect for women and within our household gender roles hold little or no meaning. Our children have grown up in this environment, and hopefully have the same world-view of gender-equality as their parents. I have been very fortunate that my professional relationships have mainly been in the voluntary and community sector, where the principles of

equality, empowerment, participation and social inclusion are core values. My initial learning environment was within a loving family home, where gender difference was biological, not social or cultural. The family structures in my life have never been patriarchal but based on equality. By the time I had to engage the outside world, any gender bias was a barrier to avoid, challenge, breakdown or get around. Because I am a firm believer that equality makes for a better society, I am as passionate when men are discriminated against unfairly, or any other section of society because of a category they are labelled with. But I also recognise that other women's life experiences are individual to them and they view the world differently. There are barriers for other women that seem insurmountable or totally oppressive. Some women make individual stands against inequality or injustice, while others use the support and critical mass of other women to challenge or change the situation. In recognising and valuing my own history and experience in shaping who I am, I also give recognition and value to the research participants own biographies, allowing me to truly engage with them in a genuine manner. This is the essence of a feminist methodological approach to research and one that I am very comfortable with.

3.4 Feminist Methodology and Epistemology

> There is much to be gained from exploring the lives and experiences of women in understanding society and correcting the silence which surrounds women's voices. (May, 2001, p.21)

A feminist approach challenges conventional scientific and quantitative methods of research. While conventional research methods encourage aloof detachment by the researcher from the research participants, a feminist approach views the research as a two way process. The participants are not just a source of data, but carry with them their own history, a sense of self and the importance of their own experience. The researcher also brings these to the table and their own biography is an important part of the research. It is therefore necessary that the researcher identifies and engages with the participants. While empirical researchers would argue that this approach is not objective nor does it make for 'good research', feminist researchers argue that a detached and objective approach is '.... an undesirable one which disguises the myriad of ways in which the researcher is affected by the context of the research or the people who are part of it.' (May, 2001, p.21) By avoiding an 'objectivist' stance, the feminist researchers' beliefs and behaviours, through their own reflexivity become visible and open to critical scrutiny, and this arguably makes the research more objective through its open

subjectivity (Harding, 1987, p.9). This research deliberately exposes my own biography and reflexivity in an open manner both to the reader and research participants. The research process was designed to value implicitly the participants own history, importance and experience. These elements ARE the research.

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It raises questions as to; who can be the 'knowers'? What is legitimate knowledge? What kind of things can be known? Feminist research argues that traditional epistemologies exclude the possibility that women can be 'knowers' or 'agents of knowledge'. They further argue that the voice of science is a masculine one, and history is written from the perspective of (the most dominant) males (Harding, 1987, p.3). A distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematic from the perspective of women's experiences, using this experience as a significant indicator of reality against which hypotheses can be tested. As there is no universal woman, there is no universal women's experience, so it is the plural, 'women's experiences' that are being researched, which again moves away from traditional research with a universal truth for all. The subject matter is not just any old experience of women, but specifically their experience in political struggle both in private and public spheres. It is through this struggle, women come to understand self and the social world (Harding, 1987, p.7-8). This research recognises the women involved as the 'knowers' and 'producers' of 'legitimate knowledge' through their individual public and private lived experiences in their political struggle as activists.

Another consideration for feminist researchers is changing the inequalities in the research process itself and being mindful of the power relations within that process. Feminist researchers such as O'Neill (2000, p.105-111) have developed their own research methods that value the unique contribution women have made to their class and culture, which have often been invisible, undocumented and misunderstood. O'Neill's approach to research is to make the process clear, understandable and accessible to all, especially the participants. She is highly aware through her previous experience as a participant herself, that research can be conducted in a way that is patronising, misrepresentative and leaves the participants feeling used. The use of academic language can also make the research inaccessible and alienating for the participants. She raises considerations as to; who should own and control stories of oppression and is it right that an 'expert' should interrogate the participants world and

speak on their behalf? In addressing the inequalities within the process of research, she moves beyond seeing people as 'units of analysis' to full-participants in the whole process and owning the research.

Research is a process and product of creating new knowledge. By applying a feminist methodology and epistemology, it is therefore reasonable to argue that the knowledge created is directly from the participants themselves. They are the owners and producers of that knowledge. This is the kind of knowledge production that Thompson (2007, p.26 - 36) terms 'really useful knowledge'. Thompson specifically acknowledges the value of looking at theories and practice (praxis) as appose to just getting things done, highlighting the inter-relationship between the radical traditions of adult education and social and political change. By taking time to reflect on praxis, it develops critical thinking, human agency, political growth and the ability to challenge what is taken for granted as inevitable. Theory in this case is derived from the authority of the lived material experience that is then used to connect to others with similar or related experiences. In so doing, a critical mass is formed and by joining together collectively, forms of social action can be taken to achieve political change. This is a dialectical process, reflecting on theory and practice and applying critical intelligence to the exploration of 'meaning' and how people make sense of their lived experience. It is a process of consciousness-raising that creates power in collective relationships, which when exercised can liberate people in their struggle to 'get out from under' the structural power from above. 'Really useful knowledge' is a form of popular education for democracy, active citizenship and participation in decision making. It is created in all political spheres, not just politics with a capital 'P', but within community activism, membership of voluntary organisations, pressure groups, campaigns and social movements.

In conducting this new research, huge consideration and effort was made to make the process and the experience one of equality between the researcher and the researched. A deliberate decision was made to be fully open about the subject, the process and the final document in language that was clear, understandable and accessible. The 'expert' would be each woman and I the person seeking their knowledge and collating that knowledge into an accessible format. In providing the space to expose this new and 'really useful knowledge', the research process would facilitate a praxis session, a

'timeout' away from the doing, a place to reflect and connect in a consciousness-raising exercise to achieve political change in whatever sphere their activism lay. They not only would be the producers of this new knowledge, but also the owners of it. Each participant would be offered of a copy of the full research thesis or an executive summary (if preferred) when completed and submitted. This would be a resource for them to use as they see fit. As the producers and owners of this knowledge, it was important for me to listen to their words; the language used and its framing, and to ensure their 'expert' words and 'really useful knowledge' were relayed accurately and in context. In order to do this, a qualitative approach to the research was undertaken.

3.5 The Qualitative Approach

> Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. (Bryman, 2008, p.366)

Qualitative research is an inductive process, whereby the detailed study of localised data and subsequent analysis can produce more generalised statements about the topic. The research is done by face-to-face interaction with the researcher participating in the mind of another and seeing through their eyes. Great emphasis is placed on the research process when there is a strong sense of change and flux as events and patterns unfold and where different elements of social systems interconnect with social life. These changes and flux can be revealed when participants reflect on the processes leading up to and after an event, to which they themselves attribute meaning. Qualitative research takes the form of the spoken or written word and/or visual images. It is the nature of the data produced rather than the method used that is critical. The advantages to using such an approach lies in the richness of the details gathered about complex social issues; details that reflect a social reality that can be ambiguous and sometimes contradictory. The most trivial details revealed can have significance in providing the context of the behaviour and participants' belief systems and values. In analysing these complexities, the data is also open to many interpretations rather than just one 'correct explanation', however the descriptions and theories generated are grounded in reality and the conditions of social existence. By employing a minimal structured approach to the research, any likelihood of any 'prior contamination' of the social world being examined and the risk of imposing an inappropriate reference frame on participants is minimised. This is achieved through asking generalised questions rather than specific ones, which can open up other areas of inquiry as participants reveal aspects of their

world that the researcher may not have even considered. (Denscombe, 2010, p. 273-304 & Bryman, 2008, p.385-389)

However, the disadvantages of using a qualitative research method are many. The researcher's self-identity, their values and their experiences are factors that must be considered in relation to the objectivity/subjectively of the analysis and findings. There is also the risk of the researcher 'going native' or losing focus on the research as close personal relationships develop between them and the participants. While there is in-depth research, it can be viewed as restrictive with only a small number of participants. Qualitative research can also be deficient in explaining how the participants were chosen and how the process of data analysis was carried out. The unstructured nature of the research is open to the criticism that it is harder or impossible to replicate the research and its findings. Through the process of coding and categorising the data, there is also a risk of de-contextualising the 'meanings' produced. The location, sequencing and circumstances at the time of the research must also be taken into account. There is a danger of over simplifying the findings to produce a clear explanation of complex social phenomena. All of these disadvantages not only have implication on the validity of the findings but also what theoretical generalisations can be applied. And finally, on a practical level, the techniques used for analysing qualitative data are more time consuming and less open to computer assisted analysis tools in contrast to quantitative research. (Denscombe, 2010, p.304-306 & Bryman, 2008, p.391-392)

This research relies on words and their meaning. It is an inductive process that aims to use the rich, detailed and complex data generated from the social reality of lived experience to produce explanations and interpretations. The small number of participants, while open to critique in relation to how any interpretation can be applied generally, does produce knowledge and data that cannot be gathered through quantitative methods without losing its richness and insight. Nor does a quantitative research approach allow for aspects of the world not considered by the researcher beforehand to emerge. The participant's reflection on their life before, during and after events aims to capture the change and flux between social systems and social life at a given period of time. As events continue to change and develop, the lived-experience of the participants is also changing, but the one fundamental of this research will not, that is the personal implications their activism has had to date.

Any critique of the researcher going native in this case is unfounded, as I was unashamedly native and passionate about this issue before the research started. However, I have not gone in with a restrictive agenda to prove my own theories, but have remained open to being lead by the participants in a number of directions beyond my initial plan. This has brought longer hours transcribing and the task of replaying over and over again, sections of the recording to tease out different voices when there was cross-talking, but all worthwhile for the quality of the information gathered. It is my function to present this data in a format that is true to the women's experience, in their own words and within the full context of the historical time and the discussion.

3.6 Research Methods

> Although there are a lot of superficial similarities between a conversation and an interview, interviews are actually something more than just a conversation. Interviews involve a set of assumptions and understandings about the situation which are not normally associated with a casual conversation. (Denscombe, 2010, p.172)

The use of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to discover information about a clear list of issues with specific questions to be answered. However, there is flexibility built into the process in terms of the order of topics and participants are free to speak more widely on issues, develop ideas and elaborate on points of interest. The information gathered is the participants own words and thoughts, allowing them to speak their mind (Denscombe, 2010, p.175-176). This research method allows the researcher to probe beyond the answers, to enter into dialogue with the participants in seeking clarification or elaboration. The researcher seeks to know about the 'experience' of the participants rather than assuming it is already known. This allows for official 'truths' to be challenged and the feelings, meaning and values of the participants experience to be revealed (May, 2001, p.123-124).

By conducting group interviews, a greater number and range of people can be heard at the same time. While the researcher remains central to the process with questions and answers channelled through them, the group discussion and dynamics is more illuminating and interactive than one-to-one interviews. Group interviews allow the researcher to check the representativeness of the data through the interaction of the participants with each other, all bringing their own different experiences and opinions. The process gives the participants the opportunity to listen to alternative points of view, to support or challenge those viewpoints, and to agree or disagree (Denscombe, 2010,

p.176). Group interviews allow both the researcher and the participants explore the norms and dynamics around the issues and topics, with participants encouraged to talk and engage with each other rather than waiting on guidance from the interviewer. However, the interviewer must be mindful that the views and opinions given in a group situation may be modified which can impact on the validity and reliability of the data (May, 2001, p.125).

The advantages of using interviews are many. There is a depth of information and detail gathered from key informers, who have valuable insight into the topic being researched. Participants prioritise their ideas and opinions which allows the researcher to be flexible and adjust or develop other lines of inquiry. Because the interview is organised by prior agreement and consent, there is a higher response rate. On a practical level, the tools needed to carry out an interview are a simple recording device and conversational skills. Because the interviews are carried out face-to-face, this eliminates to a large degree inaccuracies in the transcription process. The interview process not only benefits the researcher but can be therapeutic for the participant (Denscombe, 2010, p.192-193).

Using group interviews does bring with it some drawbacks. Transcribing, coding and analysing the data is very time consuming. In particular when transcribing, teasing out different voices in the recording when there is cross-talking needs a keen ear and patience. A semi-structured interview by its very nature does not produce standard replies, making the data analysis process more difficult. Each interview happens in a unique context with a different set of individuals; therefore the findings can be challenged on their reliability, consistency and objectivity. Face-to-face interviews can also allow for verbal and visual clues to be transferred from the researcher to the participant that may influence their responses, and what they say may differ from what they actually do. Interviewing is an artificial situation and recording equipment may be inhibiting for some. The resources needed in terms of time and travel can be high, especially if there is a geographical spread of participants. Finally, the investigation of the ‘personal’ within the interview process can be a sensitive or upsetting matter for some participant, and the researcher must keep clear boundaries between gathering data and an invasion of privacy (Denscombe, 2010, p.193-194).

The strength of this research lies in the group discussion and dynamics. The interaction among the participants during the process was natural and warm. Alternative viewpoints were listened to, and challenged or supported. From my observations, the women all presented themselves as the people they were, warts and all, and within a short time into recording. When transcribing, because the interviews were face-to-face, inaccuracies could be eliminated and physical gestures noted that added to the written word. While four group interviews were undertaken in unique venues, there was remarkable consistency in world-views and emerging themes. I was mindful not to offer any visual or oral clues that may have influenced responses both pre-interview and during the interview process. However after the recording stopped, all groups continued to chat further and only then did I engage in the conversation without my researcher hat. The dialogue during the interviews moved from serious to light-hearted to very serious and back again. There were moments when participants revealed very private and traumatic events using the support of those around them to talk it through. These were therapeutic sessions for some, which was confirmed at the end of one interview when a participant stated that 'It is good to debrief' (Group 1: Una).

3.7 Research Ethics

As with any piece of research, ethical considerations must be at the forefront of the researchers mind throughout the whole research process. Given the highly politicised nature of the anti-water campaign and the responses by the State to date, the key consideration for this research was to provide a safe space for the women to speak honestly and openly about their experiences. To this end, the following procedures were explained to the women and followed through:

All women consented verbally and in writing to the digital recording of the interviews and the publication of direct quotes from those sessions. Participants were aware that while direct quotes would be used, any words that revealed their identity (names, locations etc) would be omitted from any quotes used and the transcripts. They were all emailed their interview transcripts within one week and were invited to edit or omit any information on the understanding that they could withdraw any part or their entire contribution up to mid-June 2015. Assurances were given that the recordings and transcripts would be stored in a secure location; password protected and only viewed/listen to by the researcher and if required, the research supervisor. The women

were made aware that the final thesis would be available through Maynooth University for viewing by other students and academic staff. The participants were also offered a copy of the final thesis if they would like it for personal reasons or as a resource for their group. The full contact details for the research supervisor and ethics committee were given to each woman so they could make direct contact if they felt they were unfairly treated throughout the process.

3.8 The Research Process

In inviting the women into the research process, there needed to be an element of trust and an awareness of who I was, what the research was about, and that I too shared their passion for the issue. I had three contacts made over a period of time through social media pages in relation to the water charges and other politically related topics, but the remaining women were unknown to me, and I to them. My three contacts responded positively to my invite via Facebook to be part of the research and also offered to bring along another four women from other locations within their counties (Tipperary, Kilkenny and Wexford). I also randomly targeted a number of Dublin anti-water charges Facebook pages and from that process, three women from three different locations came forward to participate. In order to build up trust, I invited the women to 'check me out' via my own personal Facebook page so they would see I was a long term member of Facebook and also very passionate about the water issue. I also invited them to ask me any questions they had prior to the interview, which was done both by phone call and private message on Facebook.

While initially my plan was to conduct interviews on a one-to-one basis, my first positive response was from one of the Dublin women. At the time, there was a lot of negative media coverage of water-protesters, reports of Facebook censoring and blocking pages and also the imprisoning of 5 water-protesters and the arrests of many more. Many activists were proceeding with caution and suspicious of engagement with people they did not know. To counter-act this, I offered to change the interview to a group interview, inviting her to bring along one or two other women she knew who would be willing to participate. Between them, they decided the time and venue for the interview. This was to be the way all subsequent interviews preceded. I was very keen to engage women from different locations rather than a group of women from the same place, who may or may not have reflected already informally on their experience, and

this was expressed to them. It was important to me that their answers were spontaneous and individual, but also that all within the group interview process were gaining from the experience in a new way through reflecting on their own experience, verbalising their own thoughts, listening to others and exchanging views in dialogue with each other and not just solely myself.

The ten women engaged in the process in two groups of two and two groups of three. Their ages ranged from early thirties to early sixties. Venues for the interviews were either in local public houses or in one of the participants' homes. Interviews lasted between fifty minutes and an hour and a half, depending on numbers in attendance and the dynamics of the group. The pre-interview time was spent firstly thanking them for their participation, telling them a little about myself, explaining the process and allowing them to clarify any concerns before we started recording. I brought with me my undergraduate thesis, to practically show them how qualitative research is presented and the use of direct quotes. In addition to the thesis, I referred to/brought with me the McCoole book and talked about why it was important to me to document their stories and for their own voices to be heard.

The interview itself was based on ten open-ended questions, which were really used as a semi-structured scaffold (See appendix B). The questions concentrated on their lives before their activism with the water issue; what they have been involved with before and during the campaign, the impact on them, and life after the issue is won or defeated. Once the women started talking, their own answers lead into many of the questions I had before me and to keep the interviews as relaxed and informal as possible, I was happy to let the women take the lead. Within a couple of minutes into the interviews, the group dynamics were evident, with the conversation flowing and the women opening up. While they were mindful not to talk over each other too much (for recording purposes), the conversation flowed and I found myself an observer with the odd need to interject to move onto another angle or question. At the first interview, while asking the women about what their children thought of their activism, they themselves initiated a reflection on what their parents thought or would have thought of their activism. This new insight prompted me to include this new question into the remaining interviews. The final question on my list was an invite to the women to talk about any other issue in relation to the water charges that had not been covered. This

proved to be very important and garnished a lot of new information which lead to the emergence of new themes. Once the interviews were concluded, the consent form was run through verbally and two copies given to each woman; one for reference purposes to be kept by the individual, and a signed copy given back to me. (See Appendix C)

Within one week of the interviews, transcripts were completed and emailed back to the individuals taking part in that particular interview, with an invitation to edit or omit any part of their contribution to the research. Two participants did come back with a couple of minor edits, but the remainder were happy with their contributions as recorded. During the process of transcribing, coding and writing, I returned to the women asking them to submit a small biographical piece under a pseudo-name which would give the reader a sense of each participant's circumstances, which they duly obliged. (See Appendix A)

3.9 The Reflexive Process

When I first started planning my research I was a member of a new emerging political party, whose core principle was structural change, moving from representative to participatory democracy. Although membership of a political party never sat easy with me, my frustration with the current political system resulted in my seeking alternatives solutions, and in the absence of an independent grassroots movement at the time, I reluctantly joined this particular party. I decided that the contribution I could make to the party was to carry out research with the female members (over 50 per cent of the membership) to identify the obstacles that were stopping them standing for election as a public representative for the party. I was steadily working through my research and was at a stage where completed questionnaires were being returned when due to internal difficulties in the party, I had to make an ethical choice. From my observation of how the internal structures were developing and the power-relations within it, I came to the conclusion that this party was about participatory democracy in rhetoric only and not in practice. Ethically I could not be a member of a party that verbally offered transformation but reinforced the same old system. I chose to leave the party, which in turn had implications for my research. While all my efforts could have been deemed as wasted, what happened did lead me to focus on another area I was passionate about and one which I think will produce more meaningful and useful research. The learning here was research is messy and the best laid plans do not always work out.

I had made a number of informal contacts with women in relation to the anti-water charges movement via Facebook, three of which were also ex-members of the political party I was involved with. They had left for similar reasons. The obvious research area for me was the growing grassroots activism that was taking place around the country independent of political parties. This was the movement I had been seeking and waiting for. I still wanted to focus specifically on women and their experience, and although the issue that was bringing them together was the introduction of water charges, I knew that it was much more than that. I wanted to capture their stories, their motivation and the implications of their activism on a personal level but what also emerged was a number of potential broader community and political implications. The learning for me in the whole process was to be open to the emerging issues beyond my own agenda and to know when to change focus towards something more meaningful.

When starting this new research I wanted to have a geographical spread of participants, from different neighbourhoods and who were fairly new to activism if at all possible. This meant seeking out other women who were strangers. As outlined previously in the research process, this was a time where activists were suspicious of others and their motivation in wanting to speak to them. Pre-interviewing, the building up of trust and a relationship was very important. For the interviews to take place, I had to hand over all power in relation to venue, time, location and attendees. Not only had they to trust me, I had to put my trust in them. I was not disappointed.

One quote I used in my undergrad thesis in relation to qualitative research was from Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) who argued that the importance of well collected qualitative data was focusing on naturally occurring events in natural settings, which exposed 'real life'. For me these women were extraordinary people doing extraordinary things. How could their activism or indeed the interviews been seen as natural events in natural settings? However, while reflecting on the venues chosen by the women and also the content of the interviews, what these women were doing had become the everyday normal routine within their busy lives. The interviews in local public houses were just like any group of women openly chatting over a few drinks in a social setting, with other punters passing by; glasses clinking in the background and the consuming of meals. The interviews in participants houses were conducted over the cuppa and cake, alongside children needing food and drink, siblings fighting, other household members

passing through, dinners being cooked and consumed, surrounded by protest banners and posters and other activist's texts and private messages coming in on mobile phones and being responded to. The interviews continued effortlessly while this multi-tasking of other regular domestic and caring duties were conducted, with all still engaged in the process, whether that was shouting in their contribution from the kitchen while cooking or from the back door while having a cigarette. This was real life, and this was natural everyday living for these women. The extraordinary was indeed to be found in the ordinary.

On a practical level, the challenges I faced in writing up the research have been time constraints (meeting academic timelines) and also the amount of information gathered. The interviews are abundantly rich and detailed, and contain so many themes and insights. In coding and collating the information into themes, I had wanted to include as much of the women's words and worldviews that I could, but there was so much information of high quality that this was impossible. In making a decision to produce a separate anthology, the pressure to cram everything in was lifted as all would be represented in full within that publication. On a personal level, meeting these women and listening to their stories has given me insight into my own activism. I know that I would not be as brave and physically present as these women are in their direct actions. I am just not made like that. What I can bring and contribute to my own activism is very much in my skills as a facilitator, researcher and educator. These are skills these women also possess. After meeting these women, I am heartened and hopeful for the future after years of frustration and feeling alone in my observations of life in Ireland in the recent past. I would be very proud if indeed this thesis contributed to their activism in some small way, as decided by the women themselves, and I would be also honoured to be part of the publication of their stories to a wider audience. It has been an honour to be allowed into these women's worlds and a rewarding experience in terms of my personal learning.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed in full the research process, and in doing so the findings and analysis in the next chapter can be judged by the reader for their objectivity and legitimacy within the context the how the research was approached and conducted.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction to Participants

This section provides quantitative information on the participant's geographical locations, age, marital status, number of children and employment status. This information is given to assist the reader in understanding the context of the diverse lived experience of each individual woman from whom the qualitative data has been sourced and is now being presented under a number of themes. An overall analysis is presented at the end of this chapter, integrating key research and theories from the literature review with the findings.

Table 1: Participant Details

		Age				Status			Employment Status				
Group No. & Participant Residential Locations	***Name***	***30's***	***40's***	***50's***	***60's***	***Lone Parent/Single***	***Married/Partner***	***No. Of Children***	***Self Employed***	***Employed***	***Unemployed***	***Student***	***Full time Mother***
Group 1: Dublin 3 City Suburbs	Abbie	✓					✓	2	✓				
	Una				✓		✓	3		✓			
	Maria			✓			✓	4		✓			
Group 2: Wexford Rural Village and Urban Town	Rachael			✓		✓		0			✓		
	Charlotte			✓			✓	3			✓		
Group 3: Tipperary 2 Large Urban Towns	Autumn					✓		2				✓	
	Caroline	✓	✓			✓		1	✓				
	Maisie		✓			✓		2					✓
Group 4: Kilkenny Rural Village	Sharon	✓				✓		3					✓
	Bernie	✓					✓	1					✓
Totals		***4***	***2***	***3***	***1***	***5***	***5***	***21***	***2***	***2***	***2***	***1***	***3***

Table 1 above provides personal information on the women who participated in four separate group interviews which were held in various venues in Dublin City and Counties Wexford, Tipperary and Kilkenny. In addition to a geographical spread, the participants who came forward for the research reside in both rural and urban locations. The women ranged in age from their early-thirties to early-sixties. Of the five who are single, four are lone parents. Nine of the participants have children ranging from three years of age to adults. In terms of their employment status, four women work outside the home in paid/self employment, two are unemployed, one is a student and the remaining three are full-time mothers, two with special needs children.

4.2 Previous Community, Social and Political Activism

The majority of the women in this research have been involved in local community groups or fundraising activities for charities in a voluntary capacity. In a few cases this led to periods of paid employment. Most of these activities centred on children or young people including fundraising for children in Kosovo, involvement in a mother and toddler group, youth club, crèche, Youthreach and work with disabled children. While community activism was common, the majority have never been involved in any form of social or political protest before the anti-water charges campaign. Of the few who had previously engaged in protest activities and campaigns, the issues ranged from the objection to the erection of phone-masts and pylons in their local areas, opposition to the Governments Jobsbridge scheme, highlighting human rights violations in Tibet and raising awareness around additives in McDonald's global corporation foodstuffs. For one individual, a personal campaign for justice emerged from the death of her sister, leading her to describe herself as '...the driving-force for my parents for that [justice]' and this personal campaign the place '... where I've educated myself on systems' (Group 3: Autumn). A small minority had recently explored the possibility of structured political activism via a new emerging political party, but all left within a short period of time. None of the women are affiliated to any political party.

4.3 Current Activism within the Anti-Water Charges Campaign

All of the women who have participated in the research have protested at meter installations, organised or attended local community meetings, attended regional and national assemblies and actively use their personal Facebook pages as platforms for promotion of events, disseminating information, to research issues and for dialogue/debate with other interested people, not only in relation to water charges but other local, national and global issues. The majority of the women have delivered leaflets and canvassed local estates, making people aware of the protest movement and campaign. The majority are also involved in boycotting Topaz garages. A few women have set up local 'Say No' Facebook pages in the absence of there being one in their area, and the majority of the women are co-administrators on local Say No pages. A minority of the women have taken part in protests at events where government ministers/public representative are in attendance or at local council offices. One of the women has attended court in support of those being prosecuted for protesting. Some of the women also document and disseminate their own photos and videos of protests and

events, sharing them via social media. These women are fully committed activists and key movement members in their locality giving any free time they have to their activism:

> I'm never home. Never home. The kids literally, it's like a rota at the start of the week... the Monday night at the council offices. The Wednesday night I was at James O'Reillys[6] home. Thursday night... (Group 1: Abbie)

4.4 The Awakening

For the few who have been involved in other protest campaigns prior to the anti-water charges movement, critical consciousness of the root causes of social issues seemed to be present from a very young age:

> I have always been aware, politically aware what was going on. I've understood, I understand the systems, and I know exactly what it is that they are doing... And I have understood how, we are like dirt on their shoes. And eh, really basically all we are is an economic unit. (Group 1: Maria)

For the remaining activists who were new to protest movements, the development of their critical consciousness was unique and individual, arising from personal negative feelings including oppression, injustice, disbelief, anger or betrayal. For a very small minority, inability to pay the charge was the initial motivation for their involvement.

> I got a phone call from my brother... and he said, 'Did you check out that video online?'... It was the video of [names protester] getting pulled by the Gardaí and she was holding on to that barrier. And I was watching it and I was like, 'What is going on?' Sat there, sat with the laptop in front of me and I educated myself. [I] went back through everything. What's going on? There is actually people out there that don't want these meters in... I just couldn't really grasp it, but the more I sat and talked about it and listened to things and educated myself, I said, 'Oh my god, its, its madness what we've got into and I'm not going to stop until it's gone'. (Group 1: Abbie)

> For myself, the feeling of... 100% feeling of oppression and dictatorship, and just lost in the world... then I got involved with [name of local County councillor], and we did a Jobsbridge, hmm protest outside in Wexford Town. And hmm it basically freed me. That's how I felt. You know, empowered me and I felt free and that I had a say and an opinion, you know? And then I got involved with Right2Water in Wexford... (Group 2: Charlotte)

In all four group interviews the use of the words awoke, awake, awakening, and awoken were consistently used to describe the moment of critical consciousness. While their

[6] James O'Reilly is a Fine Gael TD and former Minister for Health

activism is targeted towards Irish Water and the political decision to introduce water charges, all groups acknowledged that this was not just about water;

> This water [resistance]... is the catalyst that opened the floodgates of everything. And the river is flooding onto the streets with people, and it's a river of people. Not only mad at water. They're mad [at] the absolute injustice, unfairness, corruption. (Group 3: Caroline)

> I woke up, first off. And the more I looked into things, the more sickened I felt about certain things, and, and cronyism and, and the lavish lifestyles and you know. Sure not only about that, but Enda Kenny[7], and the discontent towards the people that elected him. You know. That, that angered me a lot. (Group 3: Maisie)

In all groups, it was recognised that with this awakening came a self-imposed and driven obligation to act, even when at times it would be easier on them personally to be still unaware of reality. Over and over again people stated that once critical consciousness occurred, life could never be the same again. Although looking at the world through new eyes was life changing, it was also painful.

> I have to admit that are times when sometimes I say, 'Is there any way you could have blocked knowing about it and not have got involved in it?' Cos sometimes I do say now, it's probably when you're tired or something, or you're frustrated, or there's been something bad has happened. And you kind of just go, 'Oh yeah, I just want away from it. I just want to shut down from it. I don't want to, I don't want to be going to bed thinking about what else can I do, how can we do this?' (Group 1: Maria)

> You know, I'm not doing this for attention. If anything, there's sometimes where I wish I could go and take the blue pill and go back into the Matrix, ha, and be one of those brainwashed people so I don't have these issues on my heart every day. It's not something anybody would wish on themselves, to have this knowledge and be aware what's going on. (Group 3: Caroline)

In all the group interviews, the women were very aware that this awakening was also happening to many others which will be explored further under the heading of community. However on a personal level, not only does this growing awakening of a diverse range of people give them a great sense of joy, it also is personal affirmation for those who are long-term activists.

> I was so, was so happy to see so many people finally awake. And not only that, I was happy to see the diversity of the people, in that there was an older man who would sit on the stool and have a pint of Guinness, who I would have said, Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil... And then down to a posh person with her MK bag or you know her nice scarf

[7] Enda Kenny is Ireland's Premier, (An Taoiseach)

> and her manicured nails and what's coming out of her mouth. It's that finally I realised that it wasn't just me, the crazy little hippy, that was in the crazy little hippy group in the minorities, you know, who have been protesting for years. That now people were genuinely, their intelligence had been awakened, somehow. (Group 3: Caroline)

4.5 Activism and Self-Care

The amount of time that the women interviewed gave to their activism was extensive, with some on local water-meter installation protest lines from 5am in the morning. For those who were unemployed, they viewed their activism as their job, giving their full commitment and bringing their skills and knowledge to the campaign. For those in employment, their days off and free hours after work were devoted to organising and/or attending meetings/protests or on social media getting updates or disseminating information. Many described long hours checking in on social media, even taking their laptops to bed at night to keep abreast of developments. All of these women have incorporated their activism into the routine of their lives, organising around family, work and other commitments. In the main it has been a life-enhancing experience, with one woman when asked 'if she had a life?' because her activism took up so much of her time, stating; 'Actually, I do. This is a life'. (Group 1: Maria)

Such commitment takes its toll mentally and physically. The importance of self-care did emerge in two of the group interviews, but was raised only by the older women (those over fifty), who found their activism was 'overwhelming' at times and there was a need to pull back a little or you would 'shut-down' or 'burn out' (Groups 1 & 3). Their concern for the well-being of other activists also was raised. A role some of these women play is to provide a listening ear and support to other activists who are close to burnout or have personally suffered because of their activism. They are acutely aware that the drive and commitment people are giving to the campaign can come with a price.

> ...I know one, one young man, who, they (the installers) went to his boss ... and complained that he was out [protesting]. His boss has put him on his first warning. He's out of work sick with stress. They are sending him to a counsellor... he talks to me about it, because he says he can't talk, you know [to others]. But he'll talk to me about it. Hmm, I do see it and I see it in (names another activist), she's lost so much weight... You have to step away from it sometimes. You have to, you have to make yourself cos it's day in, day out. It keeps happening. (Group 1: Una)

While the younger women interviewed did not raise the issue of well-being or self care directly, some of them valued the importance of providing sustenance for protesters in their area who came out in support:

Sharon: Oh I've a pot.
Bernie: Oh the Vincent de Paul pot.
Sharon: And we filled it up with soup for them (fellow protesters) when we were out in the rain, it was like, right come on round and feed everybody.
(Extract for Group 4 Interview)

4.6 Gender Characteristics, Roles and Power Relations

When the participants were directly asked what they thought women specifically brought to their movement there were some common replies around ability to organise, negotiate and be peacemakers. Individual answers included being kind, patient, broadminded and softer in how they communicated. Some felt that women did not have a power-ego and could sit in the shadows or background. Although not asked about male characteristics, some offered comments about their male counterparts which were in contrast to the female characteristics they had identified; sloppy at times when organising, can lose the head, can come across very harsh in their words, have a lack of patience. These assessments on their male counterparts were all individual comments with no common answers among groups other than male egotism. On a more positive note, two groups did describe some men in their local movement as very politically informed and passionate. However, in other parts of the interviews, the women gave indirect insight into how gender roles and power operated within their local area:

> And I have never seen so many middle-aged men stand up and talk in my life...I was hopping, because the information coming from the top-table was not the full information... And in the end, I stood up and I [said], 'Can I just say something?'... And by the end of the meeting, I could sense the hostility from the top-table from the couple of things I said. ...they were actually like, looking at me as though to say, 'Shut her up'. And I didn't imagine that... And you are talking about an attitude where a woman, a woman with an opinion is a nut. And, and that, the least is, you're a nut. And always the attitude is, shut her up. Belittle her in some way. Call her menopausal, hormonal, hysterical. You might as well go back to the Victorian ages and lock you up in Bedlam you know, because you had a moment. (Group 1: Maria)

> (Referring to a male activist) He's brilliant. He is politically mindedly brilliant.... But he's kind of like, he drowns you in it at times as well, and it's like, enough is enough...And then when you'd, you'd walk into the room with him, and he'd be like 'It's me. I'm, I'm this'. Where I'd always stand back... like it got to a stage where

people were going, 'Do you know that page [name of area]?' (Facebook page Abbie admins) And I'm like 'Yeah'. 'Isn't he doing a great job on it?' [Abbie replies] 'Ah yeah, grand'... He wouldn't post on the page for five weeks. And I'd keep the page going every day, and every day, do this, and this, yeah, and then next of all like, he's have a meeting and like, he'd put up two chairs for the two, whichever political parties, and he's in the middle, and I'm like, 'How did you get up there? How've you swung this?' (Group 1: Abbie)

Charlotte: ...apart from (names male activist) there would be women that are taking notes.
Rachael: Yes, it's unusual in fact that somebody and I mean, let's face it; there are a majority of men in that group. Hmm, who does the work?
Charlotte: Yep.
Rachael: Women. That's the truth.
Charlotte: (Sarcastically) I was thinking about bringing a cake with me [to the next meeting]
(Extract from Group 3 Interview)

In the remaining two groups, the conversation on gender was more focused on women's position in society with women seen as being 'suppressed' and 'victims of society' (Group 3: Caroline). In one rural location women were 'second-class citizens' and '... an awful lot of men are old fashioned... [and] they still think women should be tied to the kitchen sink'. (Group 4: Bernie)

4.7 The Generational

When reflecting on how their parents would have viewed or do view their activism, the majority of women said that their fathers would have been or are proud of them. These women describe their fathers as people who were less compliant to authority, on the rebellious side or people who had a strong concept of right and wrong.

... my father would not have been as compliant as my mother. And he would have shown us that side from very young, insofar as he never went to mass. He would say he got it on the radio, and I know that he always had a very healthy disrespect for the Gardaí. (Group 1. Maria)

None of the women identified their fathers as disapproving, although one woman felt both her parents were initially fearful of her activism. Of the remaining women, a couple were unsure how their fathers felt about their activism, with one describing her father as resigned to the fact that the meters would be installed and there was no point in going out protesting. In contrast only a few felt their mothers would have been, or are proud of them, although a greater number felt that they would have been or are supportive of their activism. Of those with mothers still living, a couple did describe

their mothers making some form of protest when the meter installations were at their door, identifying one mother as being 'a bit of a rebel' (Group 4: Bernie) and another mother making a stand after her daughter educated her on the issue (Group 3: Autumn). A few of the women in the older age group did state that their mothers would disapprove of their activism;

> Like my mother would be mortified... one of the other things she would say is 'Don't make an umbrella out of yourself'. Which means, don't get noticed. And I didn't. I would be that lady, like we are talking about. But now I get noticed. (Group 1: Una)

In these cases their mothers would have been described as compliant and that within their families there was an expectation for 'lady-like' behaviour, not drawing attention to oneself, and not bringing trouble to the door. Even when women said that their mothers were supportive, some pleaded with their daughters to make sure their grandchildren were safe. This was put down in one case to the stigma that has been attached to protesting (from media coverage) and also a worry and sense of shame that their daughter is an activist.

In terms of the impact on the women's children, there was a distinct difference in how the women engaged with their children about their actions, depending on their child's/children's age. The majority of women with children 12 years old upwards found their children were supportive, either standing with them in direct action, going to marches, making posters, providing IT assistance and engaging in dialogue on the issue. A smaller proportion of children in this group were either indifferent or embarrassed about their mother's activism, but still showed signs of being influenced: 'My oldest son, who I said was quiet apathetic, he did say to me one time, "You know what Ma, if you win this, I'm gonna be so proud of ya".' (Group 1: Una)

With the older children, all the women accepted their personal position and views, whether they were supportive, indifferent or embarrassed. There was a sense of maternal pride when their children decide themselves to get involved and displayed their own agency. The women appear to encourage their children to do their own research, come to their own conclusions and form of their own opinions:

> And it's like, even now when the kids are asking me questions, I am, like there's sometimes I do look at them and I do go 'I have not got a clue what I'm talking about, but this is what I feel. And this is my knowledge of it. I think you need to go look at it yourself.' (Group 4: Sharon)

All the mothers who have children in the younger age group talked about wanting their children to grow up informed, but also being mindful of their age. None of the women wanted to discourage younger children from being part of their activism if they showed signs of wanting to be included. How they talk to their children and frame their actions is very important to them and thought through.

> I was talking to the Guards the other day and they informed me how they had my photograph down there and I, [a] few things I haven't been, have been doing is a bit on the risky side and I said, 'That's no problem'. So I sat kids down and said 'Just letting yous know, if the Guards do ever knock at me door, and they do that whole 7 in the morning knock, take the baby out of the room, and bring him into another room, and it's grand'. I said, 'I'll see yous later on, they're just bringing me down for a cup of tea, for a quick chat and that's it'... they don't grasp everything just yet... I don't want them to grow up ignorant; I don't want them to grow up going 'Ah she's just out there doing it for the fun of it because everyone else is.' I want them to grow up and go this is what we are doing it for. We are doing it for yous. (Group 1: Abbie)

With the younger children, their expression of what they are seeing and hearing was contextualised through language and imagery that is in keeping with their age and understanding of their world, even if political issues are alien to most of their peers.

> I did bring (names child) out [to protest marches] and eh, he is, he's got his people power as he calls it. He is a four year old who believes in people power... He completely embraces it, he loves it. He goes out and he wants to be the person at the top of the protest shouting 'No way' and everybody shouting after him and I, he, you know with our neighbours for example, who got the meters in, he approached them of his own accord and said 'Why didn't you use the people power?', like we as the people power, he thinks is a superhero thing and we don't have the government here. (Group 3: Caroline)

> ...the older boy (10 years old) has often made up songs about them (protests) and he refers to them like as if eh, they're something out of Star Wars. You know, 'The rebels are the good guys Ma, and the rebels are the people and the, and the, Darth Vadar is Irish Water Mum'. (Group 3: Maisie)

For the women with non-adult children, they are mindful of the influence and impact their activism is having on them. The main focus of their parenting is to rear children who have the ability to question and the confidence to go against the grain.

> I do worry that when he becomes a teenager he will say 'Why? You made me a weirdo'. You know, that worry is there. 'Why?' Instead of, should I just let him conform you know, and then find out for him, himself? But then in my opinion, no, I'm going to have to give him [freedom not to conform] and hopefully he will take

> that with him into adulthood and not resent it, because of the backlash he will receive for his opinions. (Group 3: Caroline)

> I've got one son who questions everything I do, which I love. Fair play to him. Don't conform because you feel like conforming... we are actually rearing children to question everything, so you know. You wonder what kind of generation we're bringing up. You know, are they going to be rebels or activists or you know? There's interesting times ahead. I, I don't think the big picture has been painted just yet. I think that will come in, in generations to come... I think we will be all activists and rebels. (Group 3: Autumn)

4.8 Social and Mainstream Media

All of the women use social media on a daily basis to organise and keep up-to-date with events, to disseminate information, research issues and to educate themselves, with some stating they would spend five to eight hours daily online. The central role social media and mobile phones have played in building resistance were recognised by all groups with one person stating;

> Well I think it (social media) has been probably the strongest part of our tools... There's so much more. You can [also] text. You know? It's not just about being active out there physically. You don't have to be out there physically to make noise and say what you want to say. (Group 3: Autumn).

Most of the groups referred to other historic protest movements in Ireland, including the water protests in 1997 and the Dunne's Stores strike in 1984, recognising the value of now having an alternative media source for organisation and raising awareness:

> We have other ways to fight back now. Where's, I mean, I often wonder how did they do it years ago? How did they organise protests? Because most of the stuff has come, for me anyway, it came from being online. (Group 1: Maria).

There was also recognition that historical protests were more contained to specific areas, often not moving from outside of Dublin, but social media was enabling the creation of this bigger movement on a national level: '...to me, the internet has been monumental, the way this protest has taken off.' (Group 2: Rachael).

Social media is also a platform they all use to not only to disseminate information, but to research and educate themselves and others. There is no evidence that this is done in an indoctrinating way, but is conducted through peer education and learning from their mistakes.

Charlotte: I've learnt... hmm, to not post things before [checking], because I was one to post everything. And then people would comment on my post and run me down and say 'Well this is' and they, they'd give me the link that takes me back to the original source and show that I was a liar. It was like, so I've learnt.

Rachael: I've been caught a few times as well. And hmm, you get caught. First time, okay... Second time, the third time you think, I'm a right gobshite now. I should have checked that out.

(Extract for Group 2 Interview)

Over and over again women talked about how they educated themselves and were doing what they could to educate others. The only regret alluded to within all of the interviews was around self-education:

> Educated yourself before. I wish I'd done that too because it's only now, every day is a learning curve and it's like, 'What the hell? What did I miss? How did that happen? How did that pass me? (Group 4: Sharon)

The use of social media however, was not the 'be all and end all' of the movement and the importance of physical connection, rather than just virtual connection was also noted on a personal level by one woman:

> In my case, because I live by myself, social interaction has been very important to me... I mean the internet is great and maybe the younger generation can see that as being real chat and real, I don't. It's certainly informative, but it's not the bonding that two people make, when you come into company... (Group 2: Rachael)

None of the women involved in the research had any faith in mainstream media (state or commercial) as a source of independent or factual information with one women stating; 'I don't listen to the news. That's why I find out off Facebook... You don't believe anything on the news'. (Group 4: Sharon) Words that regularly came up when talking about media coverage and content were lies, spin and propaganda, referring both to how the mainstream media portrayed the protests and how media was used as a vehicle for the Governments negative portrayal of the protesters/protests and the promotion of water charges. The realisation that the National State Broadcaster, RTE, was not covering serious protest against government policy had such a profound impact on one individual; it was the moment of her awakening and the development of her political critical consciousness.

> I was on Facebook one day, and a friend of mine... put up, 'Do you know there is a man on hunger strike outside the Daíl and he is on day 15?'... This was about

> property tax... And I put up a message, 'Don't be ridiculous, I listen to Joe Duffy[8] everyday and there was not a word about it. It couldn't possibly be'... so I looked into it and there was a man on hunger strike... so I just began to question everything, particularly the media... I can't believe that I was so gullible at the time, I really thought, if it wasn't on Joe Duffy, it wasn't happening. (Group 1: Una)

All of the groups were acutely aware of Denis O'Brien's[9] business interests beyond the contract for the water-meter installations, in particular commercial media. Connections were made between these interests and the Governments political agenda, and how media was facilitating both their positions.

> ... Denis O'Brien has a, a big influence on the way that the media here is portraying things. I've had experience of it myself with both Denis O'Brien and his independent newspaper and RTE. And I see that the, the, they're gonna, they're targeting certain people and the media are targeting certain people. And the, they're more concerned over a silly little name call (reference to the President being called a midget) then what they are of the six hundred and four people that day that were lying on hospital trolleys. And, and there was other stuff that was going on eh, to do with Irish Water that was really important and, and it was like 'Wow, let's create this story to take the emphasis off what's really going on.' (Group 3: Maisie)

4.9 Personal Gains and Losses

> I have a lot to thank Irish Water for. My life has changed so much, and so much for the better. (Group 3: Maisie)

When asked what they have gained on a personal level from their activism within all groups there was emphasis put on how their activism was not about them it was about others. For many their activism was for their children and future generations; '...even the bloody unborn' (Group 4: Bernie), and for others, it was to give something back and help other people. The general feeling was 'We don't do this for gain' (Group 1: Abbie) and 'We have nothing to lose' (Group 1: Maria & Group 3: Maisie). However as a consequence of their activism, on a personal level, the ability to speak out, to have a voice and an opinion were the most stated gain in all groups. This was closely followed by gaining confidence which allowed them to stand up and not fear authority. The majority of groups talked about the friendships they have gained, the development of closer relationship with family members and a sense of camaraderie. For many of the

[8] Joe Duffy is a popular presenter of a talk show on RTE Radio 1
[9] Denis O'Brien also has business interests in the Independent News and Media Group who publications include most of the national and regional newspapers and also other interests in mainstream TV and Radio stations.

older women, being able to use their skills and knowledge for others gave them a focus and made them whole again. Other stated gains were a sense of achievement, knowing they were no longer alone and gaining new skills. Overall there was a great sense of empowerment and liberation from their activism and the courage to be disobedient and non-compliant.

> Well for me, it gave me the vehicle for the voice I have always had and it has always been stunted. I find it very liberating. Extremely liberating... it has actually broken down that wall that my parents would have; the doff your cap and be compliant and the obedience. Like, it's like... what have you got to be afraid of? You've faced it. No big boogie-man came along and struck you down ... But for me, the water protest has just said, 'Well now I can be the person that I always was'. But I can do it without having to apologise for it (Group 1: Maria)

> I think I've gained confidence and I've met a lot of new people that I wouldn't have met [before]. (Group 4: Sharon)

Negative reactions to some women's activism have included the odd 'dig' from a work colleague or a local business and a feeling that some neighbours were thinking 'Get a fucking job, get a life.' (Group 4: Bernie) These negatives were not taken to heart but laughed off. However, when it came to the reaction of other family members, there was a sense of personal loss. A small minority of women did state that family members either thought they were mad, had given them the cold shoulder or had directly challenged them on their activism.

The most striking loss within the whole group interviews was when family members were in opposite roles when it came to protesting, in this case, one being an activist and the other being a member of An Garda Síochána. The majority of women in the research had encountered members of the force during their protest. These encounters varied from good-hearted banter, indifference to conflict. However for one particular woman, her experience had long-term personal implications:

> ... there's a couple of things that we've lost, in a kind of a negative way. I've lost all respect for the Gardaí. And I, I was one of those people reared by default, that the Gardaí [were to be respected], yeah. My mother just said... do not get pregnant, and do not bring the Guards to the door. So I didn't do either of those things... I was assaulted by an inspector if you don't mind. They (The National Citizens Movement)[10] asked me to go along to one of the, to a meeting with Chief Superintendent (surname) in (names specific Garda Station). And when they asked me about it... I just said, 'Look, I've had a paradigm shift with the Gardaí.' I said,

[10]The NCM hosts an Internet platform against Austerity policies including water-charges

> ‘You couldn’t shock me more if I had seen the fire brigade turn up and spray petrol.’... and my nephew is a Garda. He can’t look me in the eye, and I can’t look at him. We avoid each other. (Group 1: Una)

4.10 Community

In the majority of group interviews local issues did emerge. These included housing for older people, limescale in the water, the impact of youth unemployment and emigration on the local community, and the need for traffic lights. These issues did not form any part of in-depth discussion, but were passing references to local needs. However what came up in all groups repeatedly was how the campaign against the water charges had impacted positively in building a sense of community, community spirit and unity. This was seen as one of the biggest positives of the campaign and not only felt by the women being researched, but recognised by others in their community:

> ‘It has brought back community spirit... Very much so. And again, you see it again and again on the Facebook page as people saying, “Thank you, thank you Irish Water for bringing this to us”.’ (Group 1: Una)

Within geographical communities, the organisation of community meetings on the street, on the greens, in community centres etc, and participation in communal action brought strangers together:

> Cos, now before all this, I would have only spoken to, like that, a handful of people down here. And now I’m going through the village and I’m like ‘Hi Catherine, what’s the story?’ (Group 4: Sharon)

> The community thing now, that’s the biggest thing for me. It’s to bring everybody back together and talk about things. That was missing for so long. You know. So, yeah, to me, that’s a massive part. (Group 2: Charlotte)

All of the groups commented on how Ireland had lost a sense of community which had once been present. There were a number of references and reflections on old traditions and values that were once present in communities. An explanation for the loss of this sense of community was offered at two group interviews in addition to how activism is changing that.

> Yeah, there is a much deeper sense of community [now]. People joined the Celtic Tiger, were out working all hours. They were enjoying the, the, their money. They were socialising. There was, there was a big loss of community. People were strangers. You didn’t know your neighbours. You might see them coming and going,

saying hello, but you never knew them. And I think that the, the water protest has brought communities together. People now know one another by name. I'm saluting people in (names town) that I wouldn't [have before]. I am only living there four years, but I'm saluting people I would have passed up on the street, and I wouldn't, wouldn't [have] even recognise their faces. Whereas now it's the case, 'Hi, how are you?' and you got a hug and you know, you chat and yeah, I think there's a lot of old fashioned morals coming back as well that were lost during the Celtic Tiger... people, they're doing more as a community. They're doing way more. It's not just about water anymore. (Group 3: Autumn)

But there has been a concerted effort over the last few years to make people be individuals, to stop the community spirit...Go [now] into O' Connell Street, sorry, go into O' Connell Street (at the assemblies), you are walking by somebody and next you say, 'This is a great day, this is a great turn out'. You are talking to people, and, and funny enough, you might meet them on another march. Which is hilarious. (Group 1: Maria)

This sense of community and connection with others does not just lie within the geographical confines of these women's rural and urban communities, but has translated into a sense of a wider community, beyond familiar personal social relationships. In reference to actions outside of their local community, which included support to other communities and bigger national assemblies, there is also a sense of unity and community spirit:

The country has literally pulled together, we've united. We go into Town (Dublin City) now and like you're literally walking past people and saying 'Hello, how are you?' Where, where's as before we all had our heads down and kind of lived in that kind of dreary town where nobody really cared. But I think we are, we're taking it back. We're literally taking it back now and I think we won't give up until we have it, what we want. (Group 1: Abbie)

Sharon: Ah I find [there is] great spirit in Dublin. Great spirit in Dublin. The marches are great up there.
Bernie: Everybody's heading the same direction.
Sharon: Everybody's on the same page.
Bernie: Like everybody laughing and joking. Everything.
Sharon: I just find them great when you go up.
Bernie: That's one thing I can safely say, it's a horrible way to have to go about uniting in this country. But I think it's fantastic that it has happened. I really do. I think it's absolutely amazing.
(Extract from Group 4 Interview)

Abbie: But we went up to Drogheda, and we got out of the car and it was literally the evening and next thing they came out and they were all like, *'Fair play'* and hugging and shaking your hand. And these are people you've never met before. And from there we went to Stamullen.
Una: You see, you are on a wavelength with them immediately, when you turn up at that protest.

Abbie: Yeah, absolutely, you might as well have known them 10 years the way they, they greet you like. It's like, it's like, *'Ah yeah your here'.* Straight away it's like, *'We have tea, coffee, biscuits all here, what's you want?'* Do you know what I mean? It's, it's strange, it's very strange. Its, it's just I've never seen it before, do you know what I mean? Never, never seen it before.

(Extract from Group 1 Interview)

Many of the women talked about how they do not feel alone anymore but were part of something bigger. Being with people who are like-minded and having the same feelings was affirmation; empowering people to help each other.

> You look around, and you are part of something. You're not just standing over there on your own. It's reaching out... and somebody putting their hand back in... like a baby cries, somebody reacts. For too long there has been people crying. (Group 1: Maria)

In two of the groups, the emergence of the anti-water charges resistance was referenced to historical national struggle, with this new activism being compared to the 1916 Rising against the English, successful resistance against Cromwell's onslaught and Mna na hEireann coming together.

4.11 The Political

For many of the younger women in the research, being political was new to them. As one of them put it, she was 'a political virgin', but her 'halo slipped' (Group 4: Bernie). When asked if they felt their activism was political all women agreed that it was, with one stating;

> It's political and it's personal... they're the two words I would, would actually use to describe any form of protesting. It is [political]. When politics becomes personal you have no other choice but to get out and protest. (Group 3: Autumn).

When asked what would they do after the campaign is won or lost, the majority of the groups made statements to the effect that it was not a case of losing, it was a case of 'when' they won. One woman even suggesting that 'we should actually have a national day of celebration when [we bring] these water charges down.' (Group 4: Sharon). The determination of all the women to continue in this campaign and beyond are best captured in these quotes:

> ... I am going to go down fighting and I'm not going to stop...We've committed to doing this and we're not going anywhere. The Government seems to think it's, it's

> going to fall flat. But I don't think so. I don't think so. There's, there's people still waking up as we're talking, you know. It's taken people a lot longer than some of the rest of us (Group 3: Autumn)

> ... even when we do abolish Irish Water, I don't think that we're all going to go, 'Right that's grand now see ya now', and we go on now back into our house and we'll close the doors again. I think we are out there for good until we, we sort this country out. (Group 1: Abbie)

In discussing what was next in their activism, the issue of TTIP[11]) was of utmost urgency for all the groups: 'We have to stop it (TTIP). It's as simple as that. And you know... hopefully people will gain confidence from beating Irish Water and say, "Look, this is what we, the people want.' (Group 2: Rachael). Stopping evictions, the fluoridation and the privatisation of water, vaccinations, GMO's and bees were also mentioned but more on an individual basis rather than a common concern.

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While some of the women did seek out structured political alternatives with one new emerging political party, their involvement was short lived:

> ... I was trying to seek out anything. First off, politics wise... I didn't want to vote. I didn't want to do anything. But I'm like, obviously that's not working... So I started to do my research and I see DDI (Direct Democracy Ireland) and IDP (Irish Democratic Party) and all of those. And one looked [good] in particular, you know? ...Sadly I realised that although their vision was good, they didn't have any idea what they, the idea they were seeking, at all. And I was gutted by that. (Group 3: Caroline)

But this journey into the political was not a waste of effort: '...although that went all pear-shaped but that was, that was actually very good for me to do that. Because that's kind of what got me brain thinking.' (Group 4: Sharon) With one exception, none of the women indicated that they themselves would like to go forward for election. For the one person that did, she recognised that it was not going to be easy:

> I personally would like to get involved in politics. I really would, but it's trying to find, I don't think I could do it on my own, say in (names her location) because I wouldn't have the manpower behind me. (Group 3: Caroline)

What was common to all groups is a distain for the present Government and a desire for change:

> I'm not being rude or disgusting, the Government are raping us. That's basically the way I see it. And they're taking the goodness, they are trying to zap whatever ounce of dignity that the Irish people have left from them by incurring more. They are just

[11] The Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership is a proposed new trade agreement currently being negotiated between the EU and the USA.

> grinding us down, down, down, down, down and down. Until we can't take anymore. (Group 4: Bernie)

> ... from what I see of the Government, I think that they're liars, they're manipulators, eh, they're, they're trying to portray things as one way when it couldn't be further from the truth. Hmm, and I just hope that enough sheep wake up in time before the 2016 elections. That they're not going to buy into this. (Group 3: Maisie)

There was also commentary on the abilities of those in power, and the 'stupidity' and 'incompetence' of the political elite were making people question why they thought that to get into power '... you had to have a certain level of intelligence'. (Group 1:Maria)

Not only are the women distrustful of the current Government, all four groups demonstrated a distrust of all party politics, including those involved with the Right2Water Movement with one women stating 'I've left Right2Water because I felt it was unduly influenced by party politicals'. (Group 2: Rachael) When discussing these anti-water charges political parties, there was scepticism about their motives, seeing their involvement as using the movement for their own political gain. There were also stories of political affiliates secretly negotiating with Irish Water at local level, while publicly stating they were 'standing with' the protesters. Most felt they were being used by these political parties who only showed up at meetings and assemblies for potential votes and photo opportunities but were not to be seen actively participating at the day to day protests and nor were they wanted there; '... all the [local] groups are great. [Party] Politics has nothing got to do with it like no politicians or anything got to do with it. This is us, the people.' (Group 4: Sharon) Any party political involvement in the 'Say No' pages was also dismissed by one group; 'I don't think anybody that's in an elective position should be running any Says No page.' (Group 1: Abbie)

The anger towards previous governments and the women's observations about opposition and emerging political parties has lead to a situation where 'People have no faith in politics anymore or the system in which they work in' (Group 3: Autumn) and questioning as to 'who do you trust?' (Group 4: Sharon). There was a strong desire for unity among opposition groups, but there was doubt if it was achievable:

> I wouldn't be with the triple A or the Socialist Party or anything, Éirígí or Sinn Féin or anything, or any of them. But you do have to put all that aside, and just say, we have to come together ... but you see them sniping at each other, it's bad. (Group 1: Una)

In all groups a longing for something different was evident, with discussions around Independent TD's and political parties both in the Irish and European context:

> One thing that does worry me and it's around politics. We don't have a Syriza or a Pedemos. I don't see Sinn Féin as that. And they're probably the nearest thing. And unfortunately we don't. We've loads of fabulous independents, but then maybe we should try some new thing with a load of independents. (Group 1: Una)

In all groups there were various ideas put forward in relation to what needed to be done both on policy and system levels including leaving the EU, getting our natural resources back, decentralisation of power, abolition of the whip system, reduction in the number of TDs' etc. There was also discussion in one group in relation to people being more politically active and informed now because they have woken up:

> I think people are going to stand up and they are going to really, really, really, really, really think who they are going to vote in next. A lot of it is done out of loyalty. 'Me fathers say a Fine Gael supporter. I always go with me Da.' I think people are actually going to sit down and get more into politics and more into the people of, that are representing these parties. And they are going to ask more questions. Yeah, and they are going to demand more from them, our politicians. (Group 4: Bernie)

While there was no uniformity in specific political ideas among the groups, there was a full agreement that the political system had to change and be more inclusive of the people in a meaningful and participatory way:

> The whole Irish Government needs to be brought down and a whole new system brought in ... I think when we win this whole campaign about the water charges, which is not about the water charges anymore, it's bigger then that. But when that's won, I think there's going to be a whole different ball game. I don't know what it's going to be yet, because I can't see the future, but I reckon it's going to be a whole different ball game. And I think when we win that, people are actually going to go 'We've done it.' And you are going to get people who haven't even been involved, who are sitting at home behind their doors going 'I can't believe they've done that.' And I think, I think the whole momentum of Ireland is going to change then. People are going to open their eyes, as their eyes are already open but they are going to see things in a whole new light. They'll have more belief in themselves, 'God, we can do that. We the people are stronger. We are the power.' (Group 4: Sharon).

4.12 Analysis

The women's age-profile (early 30s to early 60s) would suggest that the Irish Movement is attracting an older demographic than the M-15 Spanish movement, (majority between 19-35 years old). In relation to the employment status of the women, there is also a suggestion that the Irish movement is mobilising a broader socio-economic mix (self-employed, employed, unemployed, students and social welfare recipients) with M-15 having a large number of unemployed university graduates and students as it core membership. As this research has a small participant base and contained no question on educational attainment, a definitive comparison cannot be made with M-15, however, on the face of it, it would appear the Irish movement is attracting an older and broader socio-economic cross-section of society than M-15.

Similar to M-15, the anti-water charges movement has given people a 'vehicle for showing their indignation' against 'the establishment' (Calvo, 2013). The female activist in this research articulated their objection to government's austerity policies and political decisions/appointments that favoured the elite (bankers, bondholders and personal/business associates). The manner in which Irish Water was set up, the awarding of meter installation contracts and the reasons behind the introduction of water charges are the embodiment of all these issues and representative of all that was wrong with the establishment. The women's activism in relation to Irish water was '...the catalyst that opened the floodgates of everything' (Caroline).

The critical role emotions have played in mobilizing people into action cannot be underestimated, with anger and moral outrage behind mobilization in Spain, and feelings of oppression, injustice, disbelief, anger and betrayal behind the women's activism in this research. It was these emotions that led to the moment when as individuals; these women became aware of what Freire (1996) calls, their own 'situationality' and through reflection were challenged to act. This is the moment the women refer to as their 'awakening'. They all sought out the support of others in similar situations and critically reflected on the situation collectively; a process of 'conscientização'. In this collective, the motivation for them to act to change their reality emerged and their activism began and developed. But in order to move from reflection to action for some of the older women, potentially prohibitive psychological frames of reference in terms of their gender have been carried from their childhood into their adulthood (Mezirow, 2007). This is seen most strongly in the expectation to be

'lady-like' and not to bring attention to ones-self. Ironically, these expectations came from their mothers, and not from their fathers. In order to become activists, these frames of reference were refined or rejected, but obviously linger in their consciousness because they themselves raised the issue. With the younger women in this research, prohibitive expectations in relation to their gender and behaviour was not evident; instead a gender-neutral 'people-power' discourse was pre-dominantly used, with the odd reference to the power of women working collectively. They were confident in demonstrating what Allan (2009) calls the neo-liberal notion of 'girl-power'.

Similar to M-15 members in Bilbao, the majority of the women had never been involved in protests action before, but most had previous community activism experience, mainly relating to children, teenagers or disability. This would confirm Baldez's (2010) contention that it is easier for those who have previously engaged in groups to organise collectively and also concurs with Miraftab's (2006) observation that community activism, mainly undertaken by women, is often fuelled by their gendered responsibilities as care-givers. As care-givers in the family unit, the influence of women on their children is also another aspect that needs consideration. In forming psychological frames of references for their own children, there is evidence that the women encourage their children to question everything, research, and draw independent conclusions, especially the women with children old enough to make their own decisions. For younger children, their mothers are performing a balancing act between what is age appropriate and allowing their child's own consciousness develop creatively in a safe environment. The psychological frames of references forming within these families in relation to behaviour appear to be more empowering than prohibitive, and have the potential to create a younger generation that is more politicised, non-conformist and active through their mother's direct and indirect consciousness-raising. By combining the influence women have on their children, their domestic survival and management skills, and the organisational and interpersonal skills gained from their community activism, a huge resource in terms of knowledge and expertise is brought into the anti-water charges movement by these women and also the potential resource in terms of new informed activists for the future.

In the process of moving from emotion, to reflection, to action, these women were 'awoken' and in doing so have, 'come to voice' (hooks, 1994). Having critically reflected on self and their identity in relation to their political circumstances, they all see

the world around them differently and are prepared to use their voice strategically to transform that world, even though sometimes it would be easier and less painful to go back to being 'brainwashed' (Caroline) or go to bed not wondering 'what else can I do?' (Maria). The amount of time given to activism by these women does take its toll mentally and physically and perhaps reflecting their roles as care-givers in the domestic sphere and also their previous community activism, they are fully aware of the need for self-care and the care of other activists, especially around physical and mental health. I would argue this is another resource these women bring to the movement. While getting things done is important, keeping activists healthy in body and mind is equally so.

This research in seeking out the personal implications for women placed huge importance on their 'experience', believing 'what truly matters is how the mental structures of those who have participated in all this have changed' (Alvaraz, 2011,p.22). There is strong evidence that all these women are more confident in speaking out on political subjects, standing up to authority and saying 'NO'. There is a huge sense of liberation and empowerment and a feeling of belonging. Similar to the research on M-15, the formation of new friendships was also a valued gain. On a personal level these were positive life-changes or as one woman put it 'my life has changed so much, and so much for the better' (Maisie). The few negatives identified were around strained family relationship, but that did not deter them from their activism.

Within the interviews there was some evidence that women were stereo-typed by men into particular subservient gender-roles both within their groups and society in general. Most of the women were currently content to quietly work away within the movement; however there was also some evidence that when politically confident and authoritative women tried to engage in dialogue, there were negative and dismissive reactions from men in leadership positions. There was also evidence that some males self-appointed themselves into leadership positions and were prepared to take credit for work undertaken by women. These examples echo how women in the AEC were treated and used within their campaign, a movement made up in bulk by women, although few women were in leadership roles (Miraftab, 2006). In references to any formal meetings the women have attended, it would appear that there is a male-dominated and hierarchical organisational structure in operation, which is in contrast to the horizontal, non-hierarchal, and participatory organisational structures within M-15; this organisation having a healthy balance of men and women with no identified gender

issues (Calvo, 2013). In dealing with gender-inequality, the women in the AEC used an organisational crisis to challenge for change, demanding a more accountable, transparent and participatory approach to decision making as a means to ensure greater female organisational participation. This brought about some recognition of the significant role the AEC women played, especially in an organisation where the male-dynamics saw men 'fight' among themselves, and women 'jumping in' to sort it out. The women in this research alluded to similar gender characteristics when they described women as good negotiators, peacemakers, softer in how they communicated and not having a power-ego. In contrast they said men can lose the head, come across harsh, do not have patience's and have egos. . The absence of women from the political stage, as Reilly (2015) puts it, in part may be due to this type of male-dominance and dynamics in the masculine world of politics. It also could be partly due to the contention by Fox and Lawless (2010) that women have lower political ambition, and for those that do have ambition, their lack of self-perceived qualification to speak on political matters hinders them. While some of the women in this research may have started out with the attitude of: 'I was the one that sat at home kind of going, 'I'm not into politics, I don't follow politics. I don't understand it so I don't think I should have an opinion on it'...' (Group 1: Abbie), there was strong evidence that this is not the case anymore and these women have the confidence and the ability to take their place alongside men at all levels within the movement, but the movement culture and structure has to change.

Similar to M-15, the women use social media as a platform, seeing it as a key tool for organising events, political debate, participation and consciousness-raising. However, M-15 also conduct these activities in public spaces face-to-face, in regular open participatory forums. The lack of similar participatory spaces within the Irish movement and the organisational structure and culture that exists, are probably some of the reasons why social media is so central to the Irish campaign. Another reason for the prominence of social media in these women's' lives is around their lack of faith in Irish mainstream media to be independent and balanced. Therefore social media is practically the only alternative they have for the production and consumption of media, and to promote movement activities. While the M-15 has young 'digital natives', these older women activists have adopted the digital age with gusto and use technology profusely. However the importance of physical interaction rather than just cyber interaction is also crucial and recognised, and this is evident in how they value community.

While the women referred to their local campaigns and facebook pages geographically, it was the physical social relationships within these spaces that had given rise to a renewed 'community spirit'. This was evident in both rural and urban locations, challenging Tonnies (2002) argument that community of mind could not be found in urban areas. Those in rural areas also commented on the loss of community prior to the campaign, which again contradicts Tonnies assertion that community of mind exists there. The two explanations given by the women on this loss concur with Tonnies (2002) and Bauman's (2001) theories, one being the impact of capitalism (the Celtic Tiger years) and the other neo-liberalism (a concerted effort to make people individuals). All the women felt that as a result of the campaign there has been a renewed sense of community and community spirit stemming from the formation of new face-to-face social relationships especially when public spaces were used and reclaimed for meetings and protest action. This challenges Wellman (1999) theory of a transformed community operating only in private houses between small grouping and public spaces just for passing through. Where the women confirmed Wellman's theory was in their use of social media and telecommunication to create virtual online communities around shared political issues beyond their neighbourhoods, but again in contradicting Wellman, they also used social media for building community within the area. This would confirm Murray's (2007) theory that community life in Ireland is still very much around place and locality and rejects Tomlinson's (1999) and Beck's (2003) arguments that globalisation, trans-nationalism and the emergence of cosmopolitan urban spaces has led to community being formed around shared values and identities rather than the 'local' or the 'national'. Similar to Murray's case-study research, the women while valuing the local, are not closed to national or global influences and discourses, nor are they insular, selfish and only looking after their own patch. There is evidence from the women that they are engaged in boarder issues and are supporting other communities in their activism. They also have a sense of the national community reflecting Anderson's (2006) 'Imagined Community' which is evident when the women talk about attending the national assemblies. In their imagination lives this desire to be a sovereign and independent nation again, in control of its own resources and political decisions for the good of the people of Ireland, a people bound together with a shared history and culture. The good of the people does not only refer to the generation of today, but similar to Murray's case-study participants, for the generations to come, even the 'bloody unborn' (Bernie).

None of the women, no matter what the outcome of the water issue, are going back to life as before. Their activism has politicised them and they have connected the personal to the political. There is a strong feeling that the political elite have violated and deceived them, and that no political parties, even those supporting the anti-water charges movement can be trusted. This scepticism of politics has produced a longing for a change in the political system, but similar to M-15, there is no coherent solution as to how to do that. They want active citizenship that is more reflective of how Pedemos and Syriza operate on a participatory and democratic level; but have no faith in the 'left' parties in Ireland moving beyond their own personal or party agendas to form a credible alternative. There is also a feeling that these left parties are using the movement for their own political gain, but for them, the ownership of the movement is with 'the people' at the grassroots level, not with political parties. There is also a strong desire to keep the movement independent of political party influence. The structural and political issues outlined above are not new to movements and have led to organisational crisis in both the M-15 and AEC. For M-15, the 'hybridization' process with unions and political associates produced internal conflict; fear the movement's goals were being moderated and that some political associates were using the movement for access into the existing political system. For the AEC women, the crisis was an opportunity they could exploit to push their own agenda for democratic participation and internal organisational change. I would argue that women within this research reflect the concerns of the grassroots. They are confident and capable enough to ensure the movement stays autonomous and true to its goals, but need to push for meaningful participatory structures and strategies within the movement so it is driven and controlled by the people on the ground, and not hi-jacked for political gain either by ambitious individuals or political associates. This movement is more than about water, it is about radical political change, and if political associates and ambitious individuals do not understand that and reflect that in their own agendas in a meaningful way, they are not tackling the real issues behind the mobilisation of Irish people in this movement. The question is do such people really want a change of political culture and system or are they just using the movement in the hope of accessing the existing system to gain personal and party political power? Is their involvement really about 'the people' or is it about power? If the women fail to have their concerns addressed, an alternative strategy would be to look at the example of the women in Brazil, Chile and Germany, who through organising as women's-coalitions and movements built enough momentum to

have their own agenda (with varying success) incorporated and implemented at political level from outside the system.

There is no significant evidence from this research that female activists in general have any ambition to stand for election. In examining the five 'C's' (childcare, confidence, cash, candidacy and culture) O'Reilly (2015) identified as stopping women entering the political arena, I would argue there is only one of significance, and that is the male-dominated political culture. If elected women would have the financial resources to access good childcare. As we have seen from this research, women have political confidence. Cash is an issue for anyone, male or female who wants to enter politics as an independent, with no big party machine behind them. In relation to candidacy, the gender quota bill is only relevant for women who are prepared to conform to the existing political culture and are in a political party. None of the women in this research are affiliated to any party, and for those that did explore this avenue, it was not for them. It is what Byrne (2015) describes as 'the old-school boy network and cronyism' culture in a male dominated institution, facilitated by the current political system that is the real problem. While Byrne is accurate in stating that gender quotas are a tokenistic gesture that does not ensure the best candidate will be selected, the real issue is, how do you attract good female candidates to enter politics in the first place? As Fox and Lawless (2010) have found, women are less likely to even consider a candidacy then men, however, they are twice as likely to turn that consideration into action if they get encouragement from others in political and non-political spheres, and have the same chance as men in getting elected. I would argue that building on from the confidence, skills and political awareness these women activists have gained, a change of political system and culture would result in more of them considering running for election. In time, within a system and culture that these women could endorse, they would take their place in numbers by default. I believe this will not happen under the current system with a contrived tokenistic gender-quota that makes for good equality 'spin' that in practice is meaningless.

Finally, the research indicates a growing optimism that there is a sea-change in how people are thinking politically as they are 'awakened'. While political alternatives are still unclear, what is evident is the growing belief that 'We the people are stronger. We are the power' (Sharon) and solutions have to be found.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Through their activism in the anti-water charges campaign, these women have been empowered and motivated to act for political change in Ireland. In their journey they have come to voice and found the courage and self-belief to over-come fear of authority through actions of non-compliance and disobedience. The personal gains have outweighed any losses, and they are committed to long-term activism. No matter what the outcome of the water issue, unlike their female counterparts in the 1916 Rising, they are not returning to their lives as before. This is just the beginning. Not only are they protesters, they also assume roles as educators, carers, counsellors and organisers, building on their existing skills and knowledge. They have become confident in themselves and their abilities. On a personal level the implications of their activism has been life-changing.

Moving beyond the personal, the potential implications for communities, society and politics are even greater. Within their families and communities these women are educating and organising others, and encouraging active participation and collective action. By awakening others, a sense of community and community spirit is building in virtual and geographical locations. There is reclamation of community spaces and the foundations of new networks and relationships arising from the anti-water charges campaign. In these lie the potential for on-going consciousness-raising that could produce more community activist to affect social change locally in a meaningful and participatory way.

On a societal and political front, there is a growing demand for meaningful democracy, active citizenship and a participatory political system. People are demanding that they are listened to and heard so the needs of the people can be met, especially the most vulnerable. The movement is potentially moving from an 'anti-austerity' to a 'pro-change' movement. Opposition political parties and ambitious political individuals are viewed with suspicion, perhaps because while their rhetoric is supportive and they have incorporated the abolition of water-charges into their agendas, they have not addressed fundamental issues behind why people have mobilised on this issue; a demand for real democracy where there is meaningful participation of 'the people' in decision-making

and a desire for political transparency and accountability through radical systemic and cultural change.

The anti-water charges movement is at a critical stage in its development. Equally I would argue that the women involved are also at a critical point in terms of their role. The movement if it can sustain itself can go in three directions. It can grow and strengthen as a people's movement, independent of party-political influence and be an autonomous force against the Government from outside the political system. It can incorporate opposition political parties and hope that they can collectively further the movements agenda from within the political system. Or it can become a new independent political force within the system representing the people and not any particular ideology.

I believe the women in the movement are one it's most powerful forces and resources and they have the capacity to effect radical political change. The question is how they achieve this with so little evidence of an ambition to run as candidates. Is there a way that these women activists can ensure their demands for system and cultural change are met? Is that achievable inside a male dominated and patriarchal political system, or from the outside against the same gendered system? Is there a case for considering women organise collectively, separate from men? Would they be more effective as a force for cultural and systematic change in this form outside or inside the political system? During the interviews there was no sense that women needed to organise separately, but this still may be a viable option in the future if they are not allowed to take their place politically in any meaningful and participatory way, including within the movement.

The road that led to austerity has been pre-dominantly paved by elite men in power-suits (politicians, bankers, speculators), with their economic actions during the 'Celtic Tiger' era leading to huge social injustice and inequality in Ireland. Perhaps arising from the anti-water charges movement, a new road can be constructed by ordinary women in marching-boots (workers, carers and activists), and a 'Celtic Lioness' era can emerge, where real democracy, social justice and equality for all can prevail in Ireland. One thing is for sure; the lionesses have awoken and are teaching their cubs and prides

well. They have come to voice, and if their male counterparts do not listen in a meaningful way, I suspect they will also hear their roar.

Since conducting the research, I am aware through deepening personal relationships with the ten women that many have been involved in organising and attending forums that are seeking solutions to the political issues of today, further developing their political consciousness and giving me hope that women one day will take their place equally in the Irish political arena. As for where this research goes next, I look forward in re-engaging with the women and working on the proposal to have their interviews contained in an anthological publication. Beyond the academic, there is a need to get their serious, funny and at times heart-tugging stories out to the wider public; to give affirmation to other activists, to awaken more people and to show the real side of female activism within the anti-water campaign where the extraordinary happens within the ordinariness of each day.

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APPENDIX A: Research Participant Biographies

Please note: All participants' names are changed but the additional information is factual and contributed by the participants in their own words.

Maria Flanagan lives and works in Dublin. She is 50 years old, married with four children Michael, Bridget, James and Anthony. She works in Education.

Abbie Byrne has lived in Dublin all her life. She is in her early thirties, married to Jessy and has three young children, Beth, Adam and James. She currently owns her own retail business and is also involved in a lot of community work.

Una Murphy is a 60year old adult education/literacy teacher, married for 36 years. She has 3 grown-up adult sons. She was involved in very little activism prior to the Water protests, but is totally dedicated to seeing these charges done down....and then - who knows?

Rachael Kelly is originally from Dublin but has lived in rural Wexford for the past eight years. She is in her early fifties, divorced with no children. Rachel has lived and worked in Australia (having emigrated the last recession), USA and UK. Although delighted to finally have made it home in 2007, she has been unemployed for most of her time back in Ireland.

Charlotte Harvey is originally from the UK but has lived in rural Ireland (Counties Kerry and Wexford) for 17 years. She is 50 years old and has three children and two Grandchildren also living in Ireland. Most of her life she reared her children while working in the evenings doing parties at people's homes. She went back into part time work in 2006 until 2008 when she became unemployed. She is now an active activist.

Caroline White is in her 30's and a single mother of 1 child. She works in performing arts and although well travelled, now lives in her native county Tipperary.

Autumn Dawn is a 40 year old single mother of 2 children. She is currently attending college. She hails from the wonderful kingdom of Kerry but has lived in Co. Tipperary for the last 5 years. Her children are her life and have defined the woman she has become. It is for them that she wants to change all that is wrong in this world, while nurturing their wonderful minds and not allowing the systems which are in place, to change their very essence.

Maisie Lynch is in her early forties and a single mum of two boys. She hails from Tipperary and lives in one of its county towns.

Sharon Suffin is in her late thirties. She is originally from Dublin but living in Co. Kilkenny the past 3 years. She is a single mother of 3 children and of course her two dogs. She left Dublin to give her children a better way of life

Bernie Doyle is in her late thirties. She is a native of Dublin but lives in a small rural village in Co. Kilkenny with her partner and ten year old son.

APPENDIX B: Interview Questions

Q1: Before any involvement in your Anti-Water Charges activities, were you involved in any other community, social or political groups or activities? (if yes, tell me about what you were involved in?)

Q2: Tell me about the activities you are have been involved with in relation to the Anti-Water Charges

Q3: What was the reason or reasons that made you decided to get involved?

Q4: What have you gained from the experience?

Q5: What would like to achieve?

Q6: In what way do you think women specifically have contributed to these activities?

Q7: Do you have any children, and if yes, what do they think about your activism and water-charges?

Q8: If tomorrow, IW was abolished and charges dropped, or it was conceded that the water charges were here to stay and the Anti Water Charge activities stopped, what happens next for you?

Q9: Do you see your involvement with the Water Charges Campaign as political?

Q10: Is there anything else you would like to add in relation to your experience of being a social activist that we have not covered that you would like to talk about?

An additional question was added after the first interview took place. This was a theme the women themselves brought up in that interview.

Q 11: How do your parents view your activism? Or if parents are deceased, what do you think your parents would have thought about your activism?

APPENDIX C: Consent Form

Research Topic: Women and Social Activism
Researcher: Catherine Jane Lynch
Contact Details: Rathimney, Gusserane, New Ross, Co. Wexford.
Email: catherine.j.lynch@nuim.ie

Supervisors Name: Dr. Michael Murray
Contact Details: The Department of Adult and Community Education, Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.
Email: michael.j.murray@nuim.ie

Purpose of the study: The research is a feminine reflection in relation to Anti-Water Charges activism

Requirement of Participant: To participate in an interview on the research topic.

Confidentiality of Data: All individual recordings and transcripts will be viewed only by the researcher. The only exception to this is if validity of the documentation is required by the University, when Dr. Michael Murray, Research Supervisor, will also have access to these items. Both the recordings and transcripts will be kept secure at all times.

Selected elements of your interview **may** appear as quotes within the research Thesis submitted to the University. All quotes used will have no identifying information attached to them, and any personal information within the quotes that could identify you will be omitted.

You will be emailed or posted a copy of the transcript of your interview. After reading the transcript, if you wish to change or omit any part of the interview, please contact me immediately. You are free to withdraw your interview from the study at any time up until the work is published/submitted (early June 2015).

The study results will be contained in the submitted Thesis to Maynooth University, and will be openly available to other students/academics. It is hoped that the results will also be available to organisations/groups etc interested in the area of women and social activism.

If during your participation in this study, you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of Maynooth University's Ethics Committee at research.ethics@nuim.ie . Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

I, the undersigned have read the consent form, and I am happy to proceed with my participation in this study.

_____ _____

Signature Date