

*Bodies of Change: Analysing the Embodied and Affective Movement for Abortion
Rights in Ireland*



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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any work that has already been submitted before for any degree or other qualification except as declared in the preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the Sociology Degree Committee.

Aideen Catherine O'Shaughnessy

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Abstract

In May 2018, the Irish public voted to repeal the 8th amendment of the constitution – an article which protected the right to life of the ‘unborn’ - thereby paving the way towards the legal provision of abortion for the first time in the country’s history. Adding to critical feminist studies of reproduction, and inspired theoretically by phenomenology and affect theory, this research offers an alternative perspective on (Irish) abortion politics, studying the intimate, embodied experiences of women and people living under Ireland’s constitutional abortion ban. Employing a qualitative research methodology based on in-depth interviews with abortion activists, this research attempts to locate activists in their embodied and affective experiences, to explore how they live, negotiate and mobilise against the (effects of the) country’s abortion ban in their everyday lives.

The thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapter One contextualises the movement to repeal the 8th amendment within Irish history and in relation to contemporary global trends in abortion rights, whilst Chapter Two clarifies the theoretical and methodological frameworks this research adopts. Chapters Three through Seven take a chronological approach, exploring activists’ experiences of growing up under the 8th amendment, their embodied and affective experiences as part of the movement for abortion rights in Ireland, and examines how the intimate, bodily, reproductive lives of Irish abortion activists have been transformed since the constitutional abortion ban was repealed in May 2018. Chapter Eight considers the limitations of this project and outlines several key areas for future research on this topic.

Overall, this research proposes the concept of ‘abortion work’ to illustrate how structures of reproductive inequality are inscribed and felt at the level of the embodied, reproductive subject. I put forward the concept of ‘abortion work’ as a form of invisibilised, reproductive labour which is unevenly imposed on women and other gestational subjects. With this concept, I aim to describe the emotional, psychological, and physical labour associated with planning for and navigating access to clandestine abortions both within and outside of the Irish State. Finally, this research introduces

the concept of the 'embodied consequences' of social movements for reproductive rights, to analyse the intersectional politics of 'cathartic breathing' and activist 'burnout' post-repeal of the 8th amendment, and to propose that social movements for abortion rights are motivated not only by a desire to secure legal access to abortion care but to transform hegemonic modes of gendered and reproductive embodiment.

Keywords: abortion, embodiment, reproductive justice, social movements, affect, 'pro-choice', activism, pregnancy, Ireland.

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List of Abbreviations

A4C: Alliance for Choice

AIMS: Association for the Improvement of Maternity Services

ARC: Abortion Rights Campaign

ASN: Abortion Support Network

HRTPA: Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018

HSE: Health Service Executive

IWASG: Irish Women's Abortion Support Group

MERJ: Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice

OAPA: Offences Against the Persons Act 1861

PLAC: Pro-Life Amendment Campaign

PLDPA: Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act 2013

SPUC: Society for the Protection of Unborn Children

TFMR: Termination for Medical Reasons

TFY: Together for Yes

WOW: Women on Waves/Women on Web

Chapter One: Introduction

Conceiving the Politics of Reproduction inside the Irish Nation-State

As a child, I often slept at my granny's house. Several times a week, my mother would scoop me up, full of sleep, from my own bed, bundling me into the car. Through the stiff winter frost, she drove, eventually re-inserting me under the sheets with her own mother before heading off to the hospital where my grandmother herself had also worked as a young woman. My grandmother Peg was born in 1932, ten years after the founding of the Irish Free State, which ended the Irish War of Independence between the Irish Republican Army, the National Army, and British Crown forces in 1922. Following 800 years of British rule, the *Anglo-Irish Treaty* would create a separate state in 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland, with the caveat that the country remains a 'dominion' of the British Empire. In 1937, when my grandmother was five-years old, a new Constitution would be ratified, creating the office of the President of Ireland, which would ultimately replace the colonial office of the Governor-General of Ireland, when the country transitioned to a Republic in 1948.

Co-authored by then Archbishop of Dublin, John McQuaid and President Eamon De Valera, the 1937 Constitution of Ireland 'enshrined the patriarchal nuclear family as the cornerstone' of the new Irish Free State (Martin 2002, 67). As anthropologist Angela Martin (2002) explains, at this time, Irish men were engaged in a project to 'establish a nationalist masculine identity in counter position to Irish colonial feminisation under British rule' (67). The Irish Free State had two key preoccupations then: re-masculating men (and conjointly, subordinating women) and repopulating the country after centuries of colonial decimation. Efforts to control women's sexuality were thus compounded by nationalist motivations, religious ideology as well as by economic developments, stretching back to the mid 19th century. The Great Famine of 1845-1852 (also a product of British colonialism in Ireland) wiped out the cottier class, shoring up the power of the landed farming community who, with the backing of the Catholic Church, imposed a strict code of sexual behaviour on women intending to be matched with rural landowning males (Ferriter 2009). Sexual morality came under increasing surveillance too with the Nationalist cultural revival of the late 19th and

early 20th century, which saw efforts to promote the unique virtues of Irish women (ibid) .

Article 41.2 of the 1937 Constitution formally established that the place of Irish women in the new state would be confined to the sphere of the home (Scannell 2007). As Irish legal scholar Yvonne Scannell (2007) argues, the legislature attempted to keep women in the home by 'foul rather than fair means' (73). Contraception was made illegal in the Irish Free State under the 1935 *Criminal Law Amendment Act*. In 1956, the government of the Irish Republic passed the *Civil Service Regulation Act*. This legislation obliged women previously employed in civil service or (semi-)state sectors to resign from their positions upon marriage (Scannell 2007). Having only completed her nursing training in 1954, my grandmother worked for four years before she was forced to resign her post after marrying my grandfather in April 1958. The 'marriage bar' as it was colloquially known, was gradually abandoned in various employment sectors before being conclusively abolished under the *Employment Equality Act* in 1977, the same year that my mother began her nursing training.¹

As a child, both of my parents worked long hours. My father, the eldest of a family of eight children, left school at age 9 to take up employment as a local farmhand. He would eventually establish his own business as an agricultural contractor, where he continues to work alongside my younger brother. My mother graduated from nursing training in 1984 and continued to work when my elder sister and brother were born in 1986 and 1989 respectively. As a consequence, my maternal grandmother took on a great deal of the caring responsibilities in my family, regularly looking after myself and my three siblings. As a result, I woke up in my grandmother's bed quite frequently. In her room, there were two beds - a double and a single; enough to accommodate her, myself and my brothers and sister. The vanity against the wall held her perfumes and powders, and a cross on which she hung her various rosaries. My

¹ The Employment Equality Act (1977) made 'unlawful in relation to employment certain kinds of discrimination on ground of sex or marital status' and established 'a body to be known as the Employment Equality Agency to amend the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act 1974 (*Employment Equality Act* 1977).

grandfather, an amputee with a prosthetic leg slept in a specially configured bed in a separate room.

Some mornings at my grandmother's house, I would wake up to a pool of blood in the bed beside me. The sheets would be thrown back, crumpled on the floor, the door of the bedroom flung open. I would hear voices on the landing, the hot press being opened. Gently, I would pull myself out from underneath the heavy wool blankets and jump onto the floor. Swiftly, I would move to the opposite wall of the bedroom, to where the hallway and bathroom come into sight. There I would see my grandmother, pulling sheets around her calf, twisting and tightening them methodically. The sheets would do their job, turning crimson, and then pink. Quickly, the voices would stop. Sometimes my mother would return, in her nurses' uniform. The bed would be stripped and cleaned. My mother explained that varicose veins were a professional hazard for nurses, who spent many hours every day on their feet. I would examine the bandages and the purple bruises on my granny's legs, as she danced around the kitchen, cigarette in hand.

A devoted Catholic, my grandmother went to mass every day and took communion. She lived in an era when, after giving birth, women were sectioned off to a particular portion of the chapel; where they would be housed until the priest declared them to be 'clean' again – a process known as 'churching'.² The days I stayed with my grandmother, mass was a requirement. We always sat in the pews on the left-hand side. I would pass the time examining the intricate plaster moldings of the Stations of the Cross which decorated the walls on either side of the Chapel. After mass, I would join my grandmother to light candles – two for her parents, and one for my elder brother who passed away in 1996. At the back of the Chapel, above the candleholders, was a statue of the Virgin Mary. She stood, head bowed, and arms outstretched, draped in her blue and white robes. Tears streamed down her face and a rosary hung

² Women who had just given birth were considered, according to guidelines from the Catholic Church, to be 'unclean' and thus had to be 'churched' for a period of four to six weeks upon their return to the community (Smyth 2019).

from her right hand. There she remained, all throughout my childhood; a silent, pitiful figure.

For centuries, Catholicism has acted as the 'religious signifier of Irishness'; constituting an integral element of the process of postcolonial 'disidentification' with Protestant Britain (Fletcher 2005, 378). In the early years of the Irish Free State, Catholic doctrine offered the 'ideological justification' for the conservative gender roles espoused by the new nation-state (ibid). The Irish Nationalist revival of the late 19th century (mentioned above) was informed specifically by the religious tenets of Devotional Marianism. The figure of the Virgin Mary, the suffering mother who sacrificed her only son, was perceived as mimetic of the Irish nation, for whom generations of sons (and daughters) had forfeited their lives for the cause of Irish freedom (Martin 2002). The bodies of Irish women would thus be disciplined to 'correspond to an ideal of femininity' embodied by the Virgin Mary (Martin 2002, 81). This 'labour of representation', Martin states, involved 'very real material consequences for the body, self and nation' (Martin 2002, 67).

Accompanying her on daily travails, I became increasingly interested in what I perceived as these curious contradictions between the idealized feminine embodiment that the figure of the Virgin Mary represented – stationary, passive, dolorous - and the reality of gendered bodily life that my grandmother exemplified for me. I began to wonder how these hegemonic conceptualizations of maternal embodiment – which centered around the figure of the Virgin Mary - acted as a disciplinary or regulatory force in my grandmother's life and in the life of other women around me. I would uncover the answers to some of these questions whilst conducting my PhD fieldwork. During a visit to my parent's home in the South-East, my mother shared a recent discovery about the reproductive politics of our own family. Piecing together marriage certificates and birth records, she discovered that when my grandmother married my grandfather in April 1958, she was already six months pregnant with my eldest uncle. Before my granny became pregnant, my grandfather had apparently been planning to emigrate to the U.S. to take up employment alongside thousands of his compatriots in the burgeoning construction sector. Instead, he married my grandmother, with whom he had four other children.

I wondered what would have happened if my grandfather had followed through on his emigration plans. What fate would have befallen my granny, as an unmarried mother in Ireland in 1958?

Historian Maria Luddy (2011) describes how with the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, the 'unmarried mother' became a 'symbol of unacceptable sexual activity and a problem that had the potential to blight the reputation not only of the family but of the nation' (110). Although the 'idealisation of motherhood' was a prominent feature of political rhetoric inside the Free State, the 'unmarried mother' was constructed as a 'social and political problem' and was 'categorised as part of the "undeserving poor"' (Luddy 2011, 112-113). From the late 20th century onwards, unmarried mothers would be systematically detained inside institutions such as the 'Mother and Baby Homes' or Magdalene Asylums in order to manage the risk of contagion of 'sexual deviants' and to prevent first-time mothers from potentially 're-offending' (Luddy 2007, 84). A moral hierarchy was applied to 'unmarried mothers' inside of these institutions; with 'first offenders' categorized as 'redeemable', whilst those with multiple pregnancies outside of marriage were often pathologised as 'mentally deficient' (Luddy 2011, 115).

Feminist theorist Clara Fischer argues that this 'vast system of institutionalisation' in Ireland was 'underpinned' by a 'gendered politics of shame' (Fischer 2017, 754). Adopting a postcolonial analysis, Fischer (2019) foregrounds the 'co-constitutive relationship between the gendered politics of shame' and 'women's occupation of space' (41). Institutions like the Magdalene Laundries and the 'Mother and Baby Homes' Fischer (2019) explains operated to hide the country's 'assumed national blemishes' (41). The postcolonial, nation-building project, Fischer (2019) argues, 'relied on shame', in its efforts to constitute the Irish nation as 'a particular, gendered place' (33). In other words, by systematically removing 'transgressive' women – the *objects of shame* – from the social and cultural landscape, the nation-state sought to preserve a version of 'national identity which was premised on the gendered purity and moral superiority' of Irish women (Fischer 2019, 38). From the founding of the Irish Free State until 1996, approximately 10,000 women were incarcerated in these institutions; forced to carry out unpaid labour (as part of these institutions'

commercial businesses), and subjected to sustained psychological, emotional and physical abuse (Justice for Magdalenes Research 2021).

Mary Gilmartin and Sinead Kennedy (2019) position the institutionalisation of unmarried women as one element of a politics of *reproductive mobility* which aimed to regulate and control women's reproductive capacities in Ireland. Institutionalisation, they argue, constituted a form of 'reproductive immobility' where women were forcibly 'removed from their family homes or incarcerated in institutions for the duration of their pregnancy or, in some instances, for significantly longer' (Gilmartin and Kennedy 2019, 125). Historical records from the 1940's onwards illustrate that many of the children of these incarcerated mothers were 'exported' to the United States, 'through an informal (and possibly illegal) overseas adoption scheme' (ibid). The second form of reproductive mobility identified by Gilmartin and Kennedy (2019) utilised to discipline female fertility in Ireland was the forced emigration of pregnant Irish women. As historian Lorraine Grimes (2016) explains, the legalisation of adoption in Britain in 1926 meant that Irish women could travel to the UK, give birth and place their babies up for adoption before subsequently returning home.

It is not unreasonable to assume then that, if my grandmother had not married my grandfather in 1958, she may have found herself being forced to emigrate or incarcerated in an institutional workhouse for unmarried mothers. If my granny had desired to procure an abortion, her options were equally limited. Abortion itself was illegal in Ireland under the 1861 *Offences Against the Persons Act* – a colonial law, which criminalised the 'unlawful procurement of miscarriage' (*Offences Against the Persons Act 1861*). 'Backstreet' abortions were common in Ireland, in the early 20th century, however, and increased 'in periods when travel to England was restricted, for example, during the Second World War' (Connolly 2002, 160). Gilmartin and Kennedy (2019) explain that the introduction of the 1967 *Abortion Act* in the United Kingdom made 'a third form of reproductive mobility' possible for Irish women (126). Between 1968 and 1989, an estimated 50,000 women travelled from Ireland to Britain to access abortions in the National Health Service (ibid). Whilst travelling may have allowed Irish women and pregnant people to exercise some agency within highly constraining

circumstances, the act of travelling is generally perceived as ‘a punitive and stigmatizing form of “banishment”’ (Sethna and Davis 2019, 10).

Since she died in 2002, when I was nine years old, I never had the opportunity to discuss with my grandmother what options she had considered when she became pregnant with my uncle in 1957. I never had the chance to ask her how she felt about the institutionalisation and forced emigration of her peers, who may have found themselves in similar circumstances to her own. Equally, I do not know how my grandmother voted in 1983, when a referendum was held on whether to insert the ‘Pro-Life’ 8th amendment into the Constitution. Whilst conducting research for my PhD, I came across an image of a *Society for the Protection of the Unborn* (SPUC) rally in 1982 (Barry 1988). The group of activists depicted carry a banner which reads ‘Enniscorthy Natural Family Planning. Pro-Life. “Billings”.’ After forwarding the image to my mother and her sister, they confirm that indeed, the women depicted hail from their hometown of Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. My aunt identifies Mrs. Hennessy and Mrs. Foley, the latter of whom, my mother contributes, had a “big family” of “9 or 10 children”.³

The *Society for the Protection of the Unborn* formed part of the ‘Pro-Life Amendment Campaign’ which had begun lobbying the Irish government in the early 1980’s to insert a ‘pro-life clause’ into the Irish Constitution (Connolly 2002, 160). Concerned by various ‘secularising trends’ including the foundation of the first *Women’s Right to Choose* group (in the late 1970s), the partial legalisation of contraception in 1979, as well as the opening of the first Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre in 1980 - the Pro-Life Amendment Campaign launched a ‘highly-organised countermovement’ which borrowed tactics and strategies from the Human Life Amendment Campaign in the U.S.A (McAvoy 2013, 51; Connolly 2002, 162). I imagined that my grandmother would have received several ‘pro-amendment’ (anti-abortion) pamphlets and leaflets from Catholic organisations such as the Knights of Columbanus and Opus Dei who systematically canvassed Sunday mass-goers in 1982 and 1983 (Connolly 2002). By

³ All names cited are pseudonyms.

contrast, sociologist Linda Connolly (2002) describes how involvement in the 'Pro-Choice' anti-amendment campaign involved 'high personal cost and alienation' for those involved (172).

On the 7th of September 1983, the Irish electorate went to the polls, opting by a margin of two-to-one to insert the 8th amendment into the Constitution (Connolly 2002). According to the 8th amendment (or Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution), the Irish State would henceforth "*acknowledge the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantee in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws, to defend and vindicate that right*" (Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act 1983). The 8th amendment effectively worked to 'copper fasten' the right to life of the unborn, which arguably, was already protected under the 1861 *Offences Against the Persons Act* (which outlawed abortion in all instances) (Connolly 2002, 163). As policy analyst Ursula Barry writes, 'the consequences' of the 8th amendment for Irish women 'have been severe' (Barry 1988, 59). With the insertion of the 8th amendment, Barry explains, Irish women were 'recategorized to be equal to that which is *not yet born*' (ibid). Barry (1988) forewarned the 'legal ramifications' of the 8th amendment, which now reconstituted pregnancy as a 'conflict between the life of a pregnant woman and her foetus' (59).

As legal scholars Fiona de Londras and Mairead Enright (2018) explain, the 8th amendment would treat the foetus as a 'constitutional person', entitled to its own 'legal representation' (1). Indeed, after the 8th amendment was inserted, there were several occurrences wherein groups intent on prohibiting access to abortion, initiated court proceedings against individual pregnant people, acting 'on behalf of the foetus' (de Londras and Enright 2018, 2). In accordance with the 8th amendment, any attempts to 'provide or access' abortion in Ireland would be criminalised (ibid). This produced far-reaching effects for the provision of health care to pregnant people, related or unrelated to their maternity. Under the *Health Service Executive* (HSE) National Consent Policy, an 'otherwise healthy pregnant person' could be 'subjected to unwanted medical treatment under the 8th amendment' (de Londras and Enright 2018, 9). Likewise, in cases where a pregnant person became ill and required, for example,

access to cancer treatments, this treatment would have to be stopped wherein it produced potentially harmful effects for the development of foetal life (ibid).⁴

Before I ever picked up a book, it was it was my grandmother who taught me that the *body is a bridge between the personal and political*. Observing her arduous, joyful and complicated intimate bodily life, my grandmother showed me how the gendered body is at once a site of labour, control and suffering, at the same time as it is a source of agency, joy and sometimes, even pleasure. Taking forward these lessons that my grandmother (perhaps, unknowingly) bequeathed me, this research endeavors to resituate the bodily in the political and the political in the bodily; deploying a *phenomenological* and *affective* analysis to investigate the embodied and affective experience of living under and mobilizing against Ireland anti-abortion regime. In short, this research aims to (re)focus the feelings, emotions, vulnerabilities and the everyday bodily experiences of the women and people at the heart of the country's abortion debate.⁵

With this research, I want to contribute to what Argentinian feminist sociologist Barbara Sutton (2010) terms a 'politics of visibility' - challenging the sparse but homogeneous representations of the (gendered) reproductive body which constitute an integral and affective element of anti-abortion discourse. With this research, I attempt to put forward an alternative portrayal of the intimate bodily life of women and pregnant people in Ireland. Taking the embodied and affective experiences of activists as a point of departure, this research seeks to demonstrate that reproduction – the reproduction of biological, social, cultural and political life – is something that happens *through* rather than *to* the reproductive body. As such, and inspired by the words of feminist anthropologist Emily Martin (2001), this research attempts to tell a

⁴ In 2010, Michelle Harte, who was receiving cancer treatment became pregnant and was forced to travel to the UK to receive an abortion. During the time she had to wait whilst applying for a passport and making the subsequent journey to the UK, she was forced to stop her cancer treatment. Ms. Harte subsequently died from her illness in 2011 (Roche 2018).

⁵ Throughout this thesis, I use various terms including women, pregnant people, gestating people and gestational subjects to refer to those individuals whose bodies were regulated under the 8th amendment. I use this range of terms in order to account for the fact that cisgendered women, trans men, non-binary individuals and other gender diverse people are subjected to reproductive violence under abortion laws and may require access to abortion care.

different 'story' about the body and reproduction and in doing so, to perhaps 'glimpse[...]a conception of another sort of social order' (200).

The first aim of this research then is to *investigate the complex, ordinary, embodied and affective experiences of activists living under Ireland's constitutional abortion ban*. In the first instance, by foregrounding the everyday bodily experience of women as well as trans and non-binary people who found their bodies regulated under the 8th amendment, I want to illuminate how systems and structures of reproductive inequality are *inscribed* and *felt* at the level of the embodied, reproductive subject. In this vein, I attempt to reinscribe the body as a site of power (and resistance) and to offer an alternative framework for understanding the *embodiment* and *temporality* of reproductive injustice and violence as it is wielded in the form of laws and policy relating to the provision of abortion.

Situating the Movement for Abortion Rights in Ireland

The 1990's and early 2000's saw a slew of referenda on abortion rights in Ireland. Debate was catalysed primarily by Ireland's signing of the Maastricht Treaty and its concurrent economic integration to the E.U. single market. Abortion became a 'national boundary issue', as Angela Martin (2002) explains, intimately linked with efforts to (re)define Ireland's moral and political identity 'within the transnationalist European Union' (66). Public attitudes towards abortion would begin to change in the early 1990's with the now infamous 'X Case'. 'Miss X', a fourteen-year-old girl, who had become pregnant as a result of sexual violence was prevented by court injunction from travelling to the U.K. to access abortion services. After declaring that she was suicidal, Miss X was eventually granted permission to travel but ultimately experienced a miscarriage on her way to England. As Martin (2002) claims, debate around the possible liberalisation of Ireland's abortion laws in line with E.U. standards 'played out across the terrain of Miss X's body' (76).

Following debate surrounding the X case, a referendum was held in 1992 to insert a further clause into the Constitution to protect the 'right' to travel abroad to access abortion services which were unavailable inside the State. With the passing of the 1992 referendum, abortion campaigners Carnegie and Roth (2019) explain, the country's 'exportation of reproductive healthcare was enshrined in law' (111). The right to access information in relation to abortion services abroad was also inserted into the Constitution by the same vote (de Londras and Enright 2018). In a 2002 referendum, anti-abortion activists attempted to have suicide explicitly excluded as possible grounds for obtaining an abortion under Irish law: this proposal was ultimately rejected by the voting public. The *Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Bill* 2002 also sought to increase the penalties associating with aiding the provision of abortion. The proposal was also rejected by Irish voters by a slim margin of 50.4% against (*Twenty-fifth Amendment of the Constitution Bill* 2001; Irish Family Planning Authority n.d.).

The movement for abortion rights in Ireland, though spanning several decades beginning in the 1980s, 'intensified significantly' following the death of Savita Halappanavar (Calkin, de Londras, and Heathcote 2020, 2). Ms. Halappanavar, a dentist who had migrated to Ireland from India, self-referred to Galway University Hospital on the 21st of October 2012. Ms. Halappanavar was 17 weeks pregnant at the time and was complaining of lower back pain. Ms. Halappanavar was sent home, but returned later the same day complaining of 'unbearable pain' (McCarthy 2016, 10-11). She was subsequently diagnosed with an 'inevitable/impending miscarriage' but because a foetal heartbeat was still detected, medical practitioners were unable to intervene to pre-emptively evacuate the pregnancy from her womb (ibid). Ms. Halappanavar went on to develop sepsis and died of this illness on the 28th of October 2012, aged 31 years. Ensuing reports into Ms. Halappanavar's death by the HSE identified 'gross inadequacies' in the 'basic elements' of her care (McCarthy 2016, 11).

The *Abortion Rights Campaign* (ARC) which had been founded in 2012, gained considerable support in the years following Ms. Halappanavar's death. In a highly effective move, ARC combined their objectives into one 'simple demand': to 'Repeal' the 8th amendment of the Constitution and legislate for abortion access in Ireland

(Calkin, de Londras, and Heathcote 2020, 3). In 2013, following intensified political debate surrounding abortion in the aftermath of Ms. Halappanavar's death, the *Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act* (PLDPA) was introduced, outlining for the first time a 'framework regulating abortion into Irish law' (Murray 2016, 667). This legislation maintained a 'two-tier' approach to abortion provision in Ireland however, permitting abortion only in the cases where 'the life of the woman is at risk' (ibid). The PLDPA was introduced, legal scholar Claire Murray explains, 'in an effort to comply with Ireland's obligations under the European Court of Human Rights' (Murray 2016, 668). Its practical application in terms of widening access to healthcare for Irish abortion-seekers proved meager, however. Only 26 abortions were carried out in Irish hospitals under this law in 2014 (Bardon 2015).⁶

Under increasing pressure both from domestic activist organisations, advocacy groups and international human rights organizations, the Irish government eventually called a referendum on the question of repealing the 8th amendment, to be held on May 25th, 2018. Grassroots abortion activist groups as well as various NGOs and political parties came together under the banner of *Together for Yes*, the civil society organization which would advocate for a 'Yes' vote in the referendum. After an arduous and divisive campaign, the pro-choice movement in Ireland secured victory when the electorate chose to Repeal the 8th amendment by a landslide margin of 66% (Griffin et al. 2019, 197). Following the referendum, the *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act* (HRTPA) was signed into law in December 2018 with abortion provision commencing from the 1st of January, 2019. In practice however, the *Health Act* allows for access to abortion in only a very limited set of circumstances; with abortion-seekers over 12 weeks of pregnancy, as well as those whose pregnancies have been diagnosed with severe foetal anomalies being forced still to travel abroad to access care (de Londras 2020).

The Irish campaign for abortion rights has historically been an all-island, as well as a transnational movement. Although the six counties of Northern Ireland form a part

⁶ By comparison, in the year previous to this, an estimated 3679 Irish abortion-seekers travelled to access abortions in clinics and hospitals in England and Wales (Murray 2016, 668).

of the United Kingdom, the *Abortion Act* 1967 was never extended to this jurisdiction. Until October 2019, both accessing and providing abortions constituted a criminal offence in Northern Ireland under the *Offences Against the Persons Act* 1861 (Bloomer and Fegan 2014). Statistics from 2012 illustrate that approximately 20 women per day were travelling from Northern Ireland to mainland Britain to access abortion services, encountering expenses of anywhere between £200 and £2000 (Bloomer and Fegan 2014, 111).⁷ Groups such as the *Irish Women's Abortion Support Group* (IWASG) operated to assist abortion seekers from Northern Ireland and the Republic navigating their journey to undergo procedures in the U.K. (Rossiter 2009). Members of the IWASG met Irish abortion-seekers at airports, accompanied them to clinics, and opened their homes, offering hot meals and couches to sleep on (ibid). As stalwart Northern Irish abortion activist Goretti Horgan wrote 'If you've never left Ireland before, having someone to meet you in London and, for example, help you negotiate the Tube, it is a huge relief' (Horgan 2009 in Rossiter 2009, 18-19).

The IWASG, whose activities also included 'running an information line, organising appointments for women at abortion clinics, negotiating with the clinics about price' were also supported since their inception by various health and welfare organisations in Britain as well as by international abortion activist groups, like the *Spanish Women's Abortion Support Group* (SWASG) which offered similar services to Spanish abortion-seekers travelling to the access services in the United Kingdom, and beyond (Calkin, de Londras, and Heathcote 2020, 8). The work of other abortion 'accompaniment' organisations such as *Need Abortion Ireland*, who provide 'material and emotional support to those self-managing abortions at home' have becoming increasingly important across the last decade with the uptake in the importation of illegal abortion pills in Ireland (ibid). *Need Abortion Ireland* borrows its strategies and tactics from the work of similar organisations in Latin America, specifically in Guatemala, Honduras

⁷ In July 2019, members of parliament (MPs) at Westminster passed legislation changing abortion laws and extending same-sex marriage rights to Northern Ireland. These changes would come into effect if devolution was not restored in Stormont by October 21st. Since devolution was not restored until early 2020, the new legal framework for abortion came into effect on March 31st, 2020, technically allowing for terminations in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and in cases of fatal foetal anomaly. To this day, the Department of Health in Northern Ireland has yet to commission full services across the State (McCormack 2021).

and El Salvador, who administer mifepristone and misoprostol and provide accompaniment to abortion-seekers in these states (where abortion remains criminalised and where the act of accessing an abortion carries the risk of severely punitive sentencing and incarceration) (Walsh 2020).

Another example of the important transnational connections which have strengthened the visibility and reach of the Irish abortion rights movement is the manifestation of the Dutch NGO *Women on Waves* who sailed their 'abortion ship' to Ireland in 2001 (Clifford 2002). Setting out on the maiden voyage of the *Aurora*, Dutch doctor and abortion activist Rebecca Gomperts intended for the vessel to act as a 'floating abortion clinic' (Clifford 2002, 385). Gomperts had been invited to Ireland by Irish reproductive rights activists but unfortunately was ultimately unable to administer abortions to Irish patients after being denied the relevant licence to perform abortions onboard the ship (Rosen 2016). More than 25 Irish activists did board the ship however, in a fervent display of international solidarity (Rosen 2016). Other transnational activist groups like the *Abortion Support Network* (ASN) – set up in London in 2009 - have played (and continue to play) a fundamental role in assisting Irish abortion seekers access services abroad (Duffy 2020). ASN caters to abortion-seekers from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Malta, Gibraltar, the Isle of Man and Poland, offering emotional, logistical and financial support (ibid).

Like many of the interviewees cited here, as a teenager in the late 2000's, abortion for me was something which existed in books and on television, but which remained 'unspoken' in daily life. It was a storyline in an English soap opera that elicited disdainful looks and derisive grunts. Abortion was a 'foreign' object, an object I associated with 'foreign' lands. It was not until my peer group became sexually active, that I became explicitly aware of the consequences of Ireland's reproductive health laws. From that point on, life would change to encompass clandestine trips to the pharmacy for overpriced pregnancy tests and consoling frustrated friends unable to get their hands on the morning-after pill. It was preparing to withdraw all the money in your bank account so that a friend could make the expensive trip to England. It was coming up with cover stories to placate your friends' parents when they disappeared

for a whole weekend. It was googling airplane and boat tickets, and names of clinics in the U.K.

I would not become aware of the movement for abortion rights until the 2010's, after the death of Savita Halappanavar. I recollect seeing pictures in the newspapers and reading about the various vigils for Ms. Halappanavar across the country. I remember walking around Dublin city center, as a student at Trinity College from 2011-2015, seeing groups of anti-abortion activists carrying graphic posters with images of aborted fetuses. I recall being struck, particularly, by a poster with a simple black and white outline claiming to illustrate in simple terms the anatomical make-up of the body of the pregnant person. It had an arrow which pointed directly to the abdominal area with a caption reading 'Not Your Body'. Examining this poster more closely, I reflected upon the fact that the woman in this poster was passive, inert, silenced. Her body was an object; closely scrutinized, spoken over, spoken about. What difference would it make, I began to wonder, to contemporary abortion politics, if we paid closer attention to the lived, affective, bodily experiences of women, pregnant people and abortion-seekers, as explained to us in their own terms?

With this research, I have chosen to examine the embodied and affective experiences of abortion activists because I wanted to focalise the agency of women and people in Ireland who have lived their bodies and lives under the oppressive force of the 8th amendment. I wanted to emphasise the ways in which these individuals experience, negotiate or resist the forces of reproductive coercion impressed upon them. To paraphrase sociologist Kathy Davis (2007), the task I have sought to undertake here is to 'link women's subjective accounts of their experiences' and 'their everyday practices', with 'an analysis of the cultural discourses, institutional arrangements, and geopolitical contexts in which these accounts are embedded' (57). Building upon Davis's (2007) argument and emphasising the capacity of the embodied subject to both act and be acted upon by various social structures and cultural forces, I operationalise the concept of 'embodied experience' here as the on-going process by which the subject is made and is making the world around them.

In this vein, foregrounding the location of the body at the intersection of the personal and the political, this research attempts to explore not only how the conditions of activist's bodily existence are shaped and formed by systems of reproductive inequality but how activists, through their embodied and affective experience, can transform political structures, in their own rite. As such, this research sets out to contribute to existing feminist theory on the role of the body and affect in politics (Parkins 2000; Sutton 2007). The second aim of this research then is to *examine the embodied experience of activism within the social movement for abortion rights in Ireland*. Examining the affective and embodied experience of activist mobilisation, as well as the role of the body in wider movement activity within the Repeal the 8th campaign, this research attempts to put forward a novel perspective on the significance of the gendered, reproductive body in processes of social and political transformation.

This research is based on in-depth qualitative interviews, conducted with Irish abortion activists. Forty-three interviews – including both face-to-face and online interviews – were conducted across 2019 and 2020. The activists who participated in this research were variously affiliated to abortion rights organisations, anti-racist and reproductive justice activist groups, disability rights campaigning, women's reproductive health advocacy as well as to the trade union movements, and to several leftist political parties. Participants ranged in age from early 20's to late 60's and came from all four provinces in Ireland, and from a range of urban as well as rural locales. Five participants were first or second-generation migrants, coming from Asian, Eastern European, and West-Indian backgrounds predominantly, whilst the rest were White-Irish. Fifteen of the activists identified as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Inspired by the work of feminist phenomenologists and feminist standpoint theorists, I have attempted throughout this research project to emphasise the status of activists themselves as epistemological agents whose unique, embodied perspectives of their own material reality can be deeply generative of critical, alternative forms of knowledge and resistance (Davis 2007; Hill Collins 1996). In ethical terms, by foregrounding the voices and lived experiences of women and people in Ireland who are variously subjected to the experience of reproductive oppression under the 8th

amendment, this research contributes to feminist testimonial politics. As feminist scholars Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (2001) explain, 'notions of justice have become bound up with witnessing, testifying and truth telling' (1). For women and marginalised groups, 'speaking out about injustice, trauma, pain and grief' constitutes an act of both resistance and survival and is integral to the process of subject formation (Ahmed and Stacey 2001, 2).

Outline of the Thesis and Chapter Summaries

Chapter Three explores activists' experiences of growing up in Ireland and examines their early understandings of and initial encounters with unplanned pregnancy, abortion and abortion politics. Illustrating how Irish abortion politics have historically been deeply enmeshed with the country's postcolonial identity, activists from different age groups recount the development of an affective attachment which associates abortion with England and 'foreign-ness'. Exemplifying the spatial organisation of reproductive politics in Ireland, activists describe being always already *oriented* towards England, the location where hundreds of thousands of Irish abortion-seekers have travelled to access abortion services since abortion was first outlawed in Ireland in 1861. Corroborating the proposal of feminist lawyer Mairead Enright (2018) who wrote that the experience of 'Irish womanhood' has long been shaped by 'that journey to England', I argue that Ireland's anti-abortion regime has instantiated in women and gestational subjects a phenomenological orientation towards 'travelling' which is both mental and physical (8-9).

Also, in Chapter Three, I trace the embodied transition wherein abortion ceases to operate solely 'in the mind' as the discursive signifier of 'foreignness' and where the prohibition of abortion itself comes to be felt *in the body* as an imposition or violation which itself instigates the assumption of a particular affective state. Living under the 8th amendment is characterised, I propose, by an *affective state of fear or anxiety* which ensues when activists first recognise themselves as (potentially) pregnant subjects within an environment where pregnancy instantiates – through constitutional mandate – a very specific form of gendered, bodily vulnerability. Analysing activist

testimonies, I theorise that this fear of (unplanned) pregnancy transforms the relation between the reproductive subject and their body. Activists describe their body as a vulnerable object, or burden which must be (sometimes forcefully) managed, and at the same time, safeguarded and protected.

Finally, in Chapter Three, I describe how the regulation of abortion politics in Ireland produces in the embodied reproductive subject a specific temporal orientation of *anticipation*. Activists explain how they develop contingency plans for dealing with unplanned pregnancy – including funnelling money away for accessing illegal abortions, devising methods for self-aborting in their own homes, or selecting clinics and accommodations in the UK where they intend to travel to access care in the event of an unplanned pregnancy. Moreover, I explain how having the ability to travel, and to travel by particular means (via air travel or boat etc.), influences how women and pregnant people make sense of their social status – and the various forms of *reproductive capital* to which they have access – and conceptualise the intersections of their gendered, racialised and classed identities.

Deliberating upon the idea of abortion ‘contingency plans’, I develop the concept of *abortion work* to encapsulate the emotional, psychological and physical labour activists describe undertaking as they plan for and navigate access to clandestine abortions inside and outside of Irish borders. Building upon Bertotti’s (2013) concept of ‘fertility work’, I propose the concept of ‘abortion work’ as a form of invisibilised, reproductive labour, unequally imposed upon women and gestational subjects. Borrowing from the work of Adams et al. (2009) on ‘anticipatory regimes’, I argue that the obligation to perform ‘abortion work’ functions as a mechanism to discipline women and gestational subjects (250). With the concept of ‘abortion work’, I offer an alternative framework within which to understand the subtle, unacknowledged and nefarious ways in which structures of reproductive inequality are inscribed and felt at the level of the embodied subject.

Chapter Four develops a framework for what I term the ‘embodied infrastructure’ of the Irish abortion rights movement; investigating how the assemblage of specific

embodied encounters, events and *affective constellations* catalyse greater levels of activist mobilisation. Citing the publication of the 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart' billboard campaign, launched by the anti-abortion group *Youth Defence* in 2012, I posit that the publication of this particular campaign redrew the boundaries in terms of what could be seen, heard, spoken about or felt in relation to abortion politics in Ireland, ultimately materialising the possibility of speaking about, or mobilising around abortion rights. In short, the publication of the *Youth Defence* campaign was a significant 'event', I argue, playing an important role in the development of the abortion rights movement by permitting a cohesive collective identity to take root in opposition to the 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart' billboards (Sewell 1996).

Taking the *Youth Defence* campaign as a case study, this chapter explores a previously unexamined subject in abortion politics; the *embodied encounter* with 'Pro-Life' or anti-abortion imagery. Describing their encounters with posters depicting foetal imagery, activists explain how they experience these images both as an emblem and as a material manifestation of the systematic surveillance and control of their reproductive bodies and lives. Activists take issue both with the representation of the reproductive body these posters depict; often almost completely erasing the pregnant person who becomes 'just' a burgeoning belly or womb. Moreover, engaging more explicitly with the materiality of these objects, activists cite the literal placement of these posters – which often hang atop lampposts or electricity poles – as “*looking down*” on them, emanating judgement and shame. Building upon the work of Lentje, Alterman and Arey (2020) as well as Lowe and Hayes (2019) on anti-abortion clinic activism, I argue that the everyday encounter with anti-abortion posters and imagery can be experienced as a form of violence, by women and (potentially) pregnant people.

Additionally, in Chapter Four, I discuss the death of Ms. Savita Halappanavar – a migrant woman who died after being denied a life-saving abortion in Galway University Hospital in 2012 – to explain how particular negative affects played a role in shaping the 'emotional habitus' of Irish abortion activists and in opening up new political horizons for the campaign to Repeal the 8th amendment (Gould 2009, 31). Occurring only four months after the publication of the *Youth Defence* campaign, Ms.

Halappanavar's death served as a 'moral shock', fostering a deep outrage which propelled activists into direct action (Jasper 1998, 409). Deborah Gould (2009) argues that 'moral shocks' have an 'interpretive quality', fostering a process of reconceptualization of one's position in the world (38). Following Ms. Halappanavar's death, middle-class women, in particular, were confronted suddenly with the extent of the government's abandonment and betrayal of pregnant and abortion-seeking people, I argue. Middle-class indignation, as well as anger, thus served as important mobilising affects, paving the way for more confrontational forms of direct-action.

Finally, in Chapter Four, I interrogate the politics of White, postcolonial shame, as an adhesive affective force in the consolidation of the Irish abortion rights movement. I explain how anxiety around the perception of Ireland as a progressive, multicultural European state was amplified following Ms. Halappanavar's death. Whilst Ms. Halappanavar's death 'jeopardised Ireland's contemporary national identity' by illustrating the country's 'backwardness' (or non-Europeanness) through 'its inability to provide basic healthcare services to pregnant people', public expressions of anger and shame in particular worked to recover Ireland's virtuousness and its multicultural identity on the world stage (O'Shaughnessy 2021, 10). Ms. Halappanavar's case attracted particular attention and public sympathy, I argue, based on her status as a middle-class, heterosexual, married woman whose wanted pregnancy typifies a type of 'good abortion' (Lowe 2016, 68).

In Chapter Five, I continue my analysis of the role of the gendered, reproductive body in the social movement for abortion rights in Ireland. Here, I discuss the meaning of 'coming out' in relation to the Repeal the 8th Campaign – foregrounding how the use of 'coming out' remains undertheorized in social movement scholarship on abortion rights. Drawing upon the history of queer theory and sexualities studies, I explain how the terminology of 'coming out' implies a process of *revelation* whereby people disclose their sexual identities (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014). As a social movement strategy, 'coming out' works to allow the individual to 'feel a sense of ownership over their own experiences' and on the collective level to transform external perceptions and definitions of a social group (Whittier 2012, 7). In relation to

the Irish abortion rights movement, I explore how the double movement of activists publicly disclosing their abortion experiences, at the same time as campaigners took to the street, *en masse*, constituted integral elements of a 'politics of revelation' which worked on both the discursive and material levels.⁸

Activists explain how it was the embodied vulnerability of those campaigners who first shared their 'abortion stories' - thus exposing their bodies to 'national inquiry' as Irish writer Orlaith Darling (2020) describes it - who began moving to public body to consider voting yes (para. 16, 4). By disclosing their abortion experiences to friends and family, those who have had to travel or who had to secure illegal abortion pills, made abortion a tangible and irrefutable reality of reproductive life in Ireland. The 'coming out' strategy thus allowed the movement to mobilise what Rosalind Pollack Petchesky (1990) terms a 'practical morality' which focalises the intractable or 'real' material and social conditions in which abortion takes place (331). Conceptualising 'coming out for' abortion as the *physical or embodied movement of activists in space*, I explain how, by coming out into the streets, activists dispense with the hiding behaviours previously expected of 'shameful' aborting bodies and move instead towards engagement with more prideful, expansive, bodily behaviour. 'Coming out' for abortion thus represents, I argue, an embodied act of vulnerability and solidarity, as well as a bodily practice of affective (self-) transformation.

This chapter also explores the practice of dress as a form of situated bodily resistance; investigating the relationship of Irish activists with the 'Repeal' jumper or sweatshirt, launched in 2016. Activists describe the transformative, consciousness-raising effect of the Repeal jumper, and explain how, through wearing the black-and-white jumper, they could use their bodies to convey political meaning, to enact solidarity and to create additional spaces for embodied protest. Building upon Elva Orozco's work on

⁸ With the concept of the 'politics of revelation', I am borrowing both from Whittier's (2012) 'visibility politics' and Sutton's (2010) 'politics of visibility'. I distinguish between 'visibility' and 'revelation' however, through a distinct focus on the quality of *movement*, inherent to the act of 'revelation'. The 'politics of revelation' then invokes the radical effect of identity politics and reaffirms the political salience of representation but foregrounds these acts and activities in the need to pose the political challenge in corporeal terms, through the transition and 'presencing' of the protest body in(to) public space.

‘disobedient’ protest objects, I argue that the Repeal jumper functioned as an *incendiary object*, operating as the material manifestation of a radical, political, feminist consciousness (Flood and Grindon 2014 in Orozco 2017, 357). Additionally, in this chapter, I develop the concept of ‘gestural dress’ to illustrate how the wearing of the Repeal jumper worked as a specific form of embodied protest which operated to foster new forms of intimacy and sociality which strengthened the collective identity of the movement to Repeal the 8th.

Finally, inspired by the work of Latin American feminists who have explored the concept of *poner el cuerpo* or ‘putting the body on the line’ in women’s political campaigning, Chapter Five concludes by considering the *physicality* of the body in collective protest activity (Sutton 2010, 161). Analysing activists’ testimony surrounding the Strike 4 Repeal event in 2016 and the annual March for Choice in 2017, I argue that the largely unexpected crowds which brought Dublin city centre to a standstill worked in favour of the pro-choice campaign to promote the idea that the abortion rights movement was, both literally and figuratively speaking, a force to be reckoned with. Expanding on the importance of massed bodies in space, I explicate how these particular mass gatherings worked to produce a ‘collective feeling of unusual energy, power and solidarity’ (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001, 289). Similarly, oratory practices such as chanting functioned as a means for activists to ‘encourage each other’ (ibid). These explicitly ‘embodied’ aspects of campaigning – including taking up space and making noise – not only served as a mode of catharsis for activists but worked to transform activists’ conceptualisations of their own bodily capacities.

Chapter Six discusses the ‘politics of concealment’ of the transition from the grassroots abortion rights movement to *Together for Yes* – the national civil society campaign which advocated for a Yes vote in the 2018 referendum on the 8th amendment. Both during and after the referendum campaign, the politics of *Together for Yes* came under intense scrutiny from researchers, activists and organisers who critiqued the conservatism, Whiteness, and Eurocentrism of the organisation and its message (Weerawardhana 2018; Chakravarty, Feldman, and Penney 2020). Instead of advocating for ‘free, safe, legal, local’ abortion without limits (as the *Abortion Rights*

Campaign had demanded in its activism over the previous years), *Together for Yes* towed the line of the government's proposed bill which would allow for abortion on request only until 12 weeks and thereafter, only in a very limited array of circumstances (De Londras 2020). In this chapter, I offer a critical interpretation of activists' embodied and affective experiences of campaigning with *Together for Yes* in relation to literature on 'respectability politics' as put forward by Black feminist scholars studying the US civil rights movement in the 20th century (Higginbotham 1993).

Explaining the 'respectability politics' framework, Tanisha Ford (2013) demonstrates how clothing and dress became important tools in the repertoire of civil rights campaigners who chose to adopt a uniform of 'Church clothes' in order to 'publicly articulate their moral aptitude' through the performance of 'respectable womanhood' (630). In Chapter Six, I clarify how the launch of *Together for Yes* necessitated the casting aside of the Repeal jumper in favour of a more traditional aesthetic. Activists explain how wearing "good shoes", a "good coat" and having their "hair and make-up done" allowed them to foster meaningful dialogue more easily, particularly with rural voters who, they explain, might have been 'put off' by "blue-haired feminists in Repeal jumpers". Likewise, adorning the body with signifiers of maternity or 'professionalism' allowed activists to elicit additional social capital by presenting themselves as sharing similar traits, values and morals as what activists described as the heteronormative, middle-class, rural Irish communities.

Following the 'respectability politics' strategy of *Together for Yes*, activists were also regulated in terms of the language and tone of voice they were encouraged to use on the campaign trail. Activists explain their conflicting feelings around the campaign's buzzwords of 'care, compassion and change'. As I argued elsewhere, the discursive focus on 'suffering' and 'tragedy' in relation to abortion worked to mobilise Catholic and postcolonial gender norms which link the suffering Motherland, the Virgin Mother and the notion of an inherently 'sacrificial' ideal of maternity and femininity (O'Shaughnessy 2021, 12). In spite of their personal feelings surrounding this strategy, activists explain how, for the most part, they heeded to the call to "skirt around the

issue", agreeing that a 'softer' approach was likely necessary to achieve the ultimate goal. Assimilating to the 'respectability politics' strategy required not only dressing and speaking in particular ways, but activists were required to mediate their feelings and emotional expressions; with the TFY campaign encouraging activists to approach their work in a 'positive, non-reactive, confident and informative' tone (Carlow Together For Yes 2018b).

Additionally, in Chapter Six, I argue that the *Together for Yes* campaign exemplifies the need for rethinking the politics of 'respectability' as it relates to contemporary feminist activism. Putting aside debate surrounding the radical or concessionary nature of *Together for Yes*, I pause instead to consider how the fear of anger within the 'Yes' campaign may have been motivated by a desire to distinguish itself from the activism of women of colour reproductive justice groups who, as several activists described to me, were castigated as being 'unable' to represent the campaign. In this sense, I posit that the affective bonds of Whiteness played an important role in securing mainstream political backing for the Repeal movement. Indebted to Audre Lorde's (1981) work on the uses of anger, I contend that the anger which now ensues amongst and between feminist activist groups in Ireland, following the referendum, constitutes a hugely important source of knowledge and should be studied and respected in the interest of building a truly intersectional abortion rights movement.

In Chapter Seven, I explore the embodied and affective experience of the referendum victory. Activists explain how the physicality of the celebration itself became important for campaigners, both to throw off the yoke of 'respectability' which they had been compelled to embody throughout the campaign; and to cast off the feeling of 'restriction' which came with having had their bodies "*written into the Constitution*". Campaigners explain how "*having a space to dance and celebrate*" was important in allowing them to finally redefine their bodily experience in their own terms as a source of pleasure, joy and pride. In this chapter, I explore how activists experience the 'breathability' of their lives differently since the 8th amendment was successfully repealed (Górska 2016, 23). Here, I draw upon the work of Black, decolonial and queer feminist scholars to clarify how the ability to experience 'cathartic breathing' is a

matter of privilege and how the capacity for some Irish women to breathe freer, post-Repeal, is 'contingent on the concealment of the breathing needs of women of colour' (Moraga 1985 in Tremblay 2019, 95).

In addition, this chapter explores the 'sores' of the protest body; the analysis of which serves to complicate the temporality of the Repeal victory. Revealing the bodily risks, investments and demands of their commitment to the cause, activists reveal the physical toll on their bodies of participating in the campaign. They explain the experience of exhaustion or burnout which ensued after the referendum, with some describing how they had "*lost weight*", became "*gaunt*" and felt like "*physical wrecks*". Inspired by the work of activist-academic Hannah Quinn (2018, 58) I explore the need to analyse our protest bodies 'in relation to one another' such that we might appreciate how reproductive violence and social suffering continues to be embodied under the *Health (Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018* in distinctly different ways. Finally, borrowing from Sara Ahmed (2017), I explain how the bodily 'costs' of organising have been unequally distributed between and across activist groups.

Finally, Chapter Seven concludes with a discussion of the *embodied consequences* of the campaign to Repeal the 8th amendment. I explore how, through their political activity, activists have successfully transformed their everyday, embodied, and affective experiences, and specifically, the literal movement of their bodies-in-space. Activists describe how, following the referendum, their embodied experience was characterised not by a sense of constriction and capture (as had previously been the case), but by an openness, expansiveness, and intentionality which they had not formerly experienced. I explain how Irish abortion activists reconstruct their relationship to their bodies through their activist practices; specifically, increasing their confidence or their awareness of their ability to harness their labour to achieve social and political change.

Finally, I explore how, through their activism, abortion rights campaigners in Ireland have managed to challenge and transform norms in relation to gendered embodiment and reproduction; specifically, countering the idea of the sacrificial body of women

and feminised people. To conclude, this research demonstrates how abortion activism itself comes to be experienced a 'reparative act' by which campaigners reconfigure the social relations which structure the conditions of their embodied, affective experiences in the world.

The body has long been regarded as a critical object of inquiry for feminist theorists. This is due largely to the fact, as sociologist Carla Pfeffer (2017) explains, that particular forms of embodiment have historically been 'denigrated' and 'used to both justify and fuel racist and sexist sentiment' (210). Pfeffer (2017) clarifies that while there is 'no singular theoretical, empirical, or methodological approach' for the study of the body and embodiment in sociology, scholarship in this area has been variously influenced by postmodern theory, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism, as well as by queer and feminist perspectives (210). In what is arguably one of the first in-depth philosophical expositions on the gendered body, and the first book to pique my interest in the politics of embodiment, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* explores the relationship between the historical maltreatment of women and societal interpretations of 'female biology' (Beauvoir 2011 [1953]). De Beauvoir determines that, indeed, 'the woman's body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in the world' (Beauvoir 2011 [1953], 49).

Often read as a biologically deterministic interpretation of the body and gender, a close appraisal of *The Second Sex* will demonstrate that while she does ground sexual difference in biology, De Beauvoir does not take the significance of the 'biological body' itself for granted. De Beauvoir agrees that there is a 'female body', but that the 'female functions' have no inherent meaning except 'those values the existent confers on them' (Beauvoir 2011 [1953], 48). For example, de Beauvoir argues that whilst 'the relation of maternity to individual life is naturally regulated in animals', for women, this relation is societally defined (Beauvoir 2011 [1953], 47). De Beauvoir's analysis then advances a theory of the body as 'socially-inflected' (Hughes and Witz 1997, 49). In her earlier writing, philosopher Judith Butler (1986) tows a similar conceptual line, arguing that the female body is only the 'arbitrary' locus of the gender 'woman' (35). Butler (1988) explains that 'the material or natural dimensions of the body' should not be 'denied but reconceived as distinct from the process by which the body comes to bear cultural meaning' (520).

Analysing the complex phenomenon of gendered embodiment, Butler (1988) describes the body as a 'cultural sign', engaged in the 'sustained and repeated corporeal project' of gender (522). Butler's argument then is that the gender 'woman' does not ensue from the cultural interpretation of a 'natural' sexed body, rather the production of the body('s sex) is incessantly taking place through the volitional enactment of gender. For critics of Butler, this focus on *performativity* necessarily elides the 'material realities' of life and the body which is so central to our gendered experience in the world (Nussbaum 1999). Butler accounts for this criticism in her book *Bodies That Matter* (2011 [1993]), explaining how 'the regulatory norms of 'sex' work in a performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies' (xii). In this vein, Butler (2011 [1993]) offers a rather compelling theorisation of the body, as 'a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the *effect* of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter' (xviii).

Butler's early work follows directly from de Beauvoir, and borrows as well as from French historian of ideas, Michel Foucault who, in Volume I of his four-volume study *The History of Sexuality*, offers a revolutionising vision of the relationship of power to sexuality (Foucault 1978). Rather than an innate property of the body, and an object of the exercise of power, Foucault (1978) describes sex as the *result* of power, or as *constructed through* power relations. Refuting the idea of the prudery of the Victorian era, Foucault (1978) explains how the deployment of sexuality became central to processes of social regulation in the 19th century. Rather than 'castrating itself', the bourgeoisie was 'occupied', Foucault (1978) argues, with 'creating' sexuality which it subsequently constructed as 'identical with its body' (124). Butler's (1993) conceptualisation of the materiality of the body itself as discursively constituted can thus be understood through the framework of the performativity of citational practices, and also in relation to Foucault's theory of the regulatory power of sexuality.

Returning to the historical neglect of the body in sociology, feminist philosopher Leticia Meynell (2009) argues that this disciplinary disinvestment with the question of embodiment in sociology is a legacy of classical European theory and its hierarchical binaries between mind/body, reason/emotion, and culture/nature. Within this

framework, Meynell (2009) explains, women (and their bodies) have been constructed as 'antithetical to the ideal autonomous agent' (the 'legitimate' subject of social science) and have simultaneously been systematically excluded from the social, economic and political spheres (5). Feminist theorists intent on dismantling these oppositional dualisms – upon which theories of female inferiority have been constructed - have drawn heavily on Butler and Foucault to illustrate how sexuality is 'not an innate or natural quality of the body, but rather the effect of specific power relations (McNay 1991, 125). By contrast, feminist theorists have heavily criticized the 'gender blindness' of Foucault's theories and have critiqued the tendency of the French scholar to omit any consideration of the lived experience of embodiment from his analysis (McNay 1991, 131).

Feminist scholarship from the late 20th century onwards has largely converged around the idea that the medicalisation of women's bodies and the devaluation of women's own embodied testimony has eroded the authority of women, menstruating and birthing people to make decisions surrounding their own reproductive bodies and health (Katz Rothman 1987; Duden 1991). Illustrating the historically and discursively constructed nature of embodiment, feminist social historian Barbara Duden (1991) points to the second half of the 18th century as a key turning point in the history of the medicalisation of the (gendered) body. Duden (1991) highlights the role of medieval 'witch trials' as the point where the 'female' body was 'demonized, de-atomized on the scaffold' in the name of scientific progress (10). During this period, Duden (1991) explains, the 'modern' body became 'evident' through the act of dissection (4). Modern medicine would henceforth be premised, Duden (1991) clarifies on a specific 'anatomicophysiological grid' or sensory hierarchy in which the 'reality' of the (gendered) body is understood as that which can be seen, observed, and described by the physician themselves (104).

Furnishing her analysis of the status of the 'female' body in modern scientific medicine, anthropologist Emily Martin (2001 [1989]) critiques the encroachment of capitalist logic into the modern medical lexicon; the result of which, Martin (2000 [1989]) maintains, women have become increasingly alienated from their reproductive

functions. Exploring how women from diverse social backgrounds respond to medical metaphors around menstruation, birth and menopause, Martin (2001 [1989]) theorises that it is the sociocultural organisation of these experiences which contribute to the 'loss of unity' in the body which many women feel during these stages of the reproductive lifecycle (75). Martin (2001 [1989]) contends that the contemporary tendency of scientific medicine to conceive of the gendered body as a 'factory' or 'machine, without a mind or soul' is politically consequential in that reproduction comes to be understood as something that *happens* to women, rather than being understood as something that women *do*, through, as and with their bodies (30).

The political ramifications of this 'fragmentation' of the feminised reproductive body within modern medical science, and the potential significance of the re-prioritisation of accounts of the lived experience of gendered embodiment within scholarly and scientific inquiry becomes increasingly evident then when we turn our attention to contemporary political debates in relation to reproductive rights and abortion. As Barbara Duden (1993) explains, the conceptualisation and experience of pregnancy in modernity has been dramatically transformed by the 'public image of the fetus' which, Duden (1993) describes, as an 'engineered construct of modern society' (51, 4). The development of ultrasound and fetoscopy technologies has permitted medical science to bypass the testimony of women and pregnant people themselves who have become spectators in the reproductive narrative (ibid). By contrast, intrauterine 'life' which was once an 'object of faith' has become 'operationally verifiable' (Duden 1993, 25, 81).

Critical feminist studies of the body and reproduction have thus clearly illustrated how the historically contingent and culturally diverse ways in which we conceptualise and represent the (gendered) reproductive body have social and political, as well as symbolic effects (Martin 2001 [1989]; Duden 1993). Applying this theoretical framework to the analysis of contemporary abortion rights struggles, anthropologist Rosalind Pollack Petchesky (1987) determines that the use of foetal imagery in anti-abortion campaigning is part of the 'Pro-Life' mission to 'make fetal personhood a self-fulfilling prophecy by making the fetus a public presence' (264). In response,

Pollack Petchesky (1987) calls for 'new images' of reproduction which 'recontextualize the fetus, that place it back in the uterus, the uterus back into the woman's body, and her body back into its social space' (287).

Anthropologist and reproductive studies scholar Sarah Franklin (1991) describes the contemporary abortion debate as 'an explicit struggle over the definition of a key set of "natural facts", the so-called "facts of life"' (191). A particular ontology and teleology of the foetus has become 'naturalised', Franklin (1991) argues, through recourse to genetic determinism. Inside of this patriarchal epistemology, Franklin (1991) contends, biological discourses have 'displaced' the significance of the social and the 'individuality' of the foetus has become paramount (191). Franklin (1991) explains how the 'mother' as well as 'society and kinship' have been invisibilised alongside the contemporary construction of 'fetal personhood' (200). Moving forward, Franklin (1991) calls for the creation of more 'woman-centred' narratives of reproduction which 'reclaim' reproduction as a 'social process involving social persons' and heralds the importance of carving out space for a 'non-patriarchal account of the reproductive process' (203).

As sociologist Meenakshi Thapan (2009) argues then, there is a 'complex relationship between embodiment, gender and identity' and the study of embodiment is 'imperative to understanding women's struggle and position' (xiii). Inspired by this corpus of feminist scholarship on the body from the fields of sociology, anthropology, social history, and philosophy, I endeavour here to engage a queer, feminist phenomenological approach to the study of embodiment. Phenomenology is the study of experience, consciousness, and perception (Merleau-Ponty 2014 [1945]). It considers 'consciousness and the body together as aspects of an integrated and projective unity' (Dolezal 2015, 13). The aim of phenomenology is to thematise aspects of our 'taken-for-granted' daily life that are 'standardly overlooked' (Zahavi 2019, 1, 33). As feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2006) writes, phenomenology 'emphasises the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance or nearness of what is ready-to-hand and the role of repeated and habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds' (2).

Attempting to develop a critical, queer, feminist framework for phenomenological analysis, I borrow here from Butler and Foucault, and endeavour to pay particularly close attention to the ways in which discursive structures and power relations frame and inform embodied experience.⁹ My theoretical approach is equally indebted then to the ground-breaking work of Sara Ahmed (2006) and particularly to her idea that 'spaces are not exterior to bodies' but are 'like a second skin that unfolds in the body' (9). As Ahmed (2006) writes, 'the skin that seems to contain the body is also where the atmosphere creates an impression[...]bodies may become orientated in this responsiveness to the world around them' (7). In this sense, and following Ahmed's line of inquiry, the model of queer, feminist phenomenology I put forward here integrates strands of affect theory and pays close, intimate attention to the 'capacity of the body' to be '*affected*' (ibid).

As feminist security studies scholar Linda Åhäll (2018) explains, the study of affect 'moves beyond a focus on single emotions to explore our ability to affect and be affected in more depth' (39). Åhäll (2018) describes affect not as an object but as a 'flow of resonances, a form of emotional communication between body and mind that influences us' (39). Contesting the distinction between affect and emotion as purely 'analytic', Sara Ahmed (2014) offers an analysis of 'affective economies' or the 'sociality of emotion' to illustrate how 'feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation' (8). Challenging the 'inside-out' model of emotion - which conceptualises emotion as originating 'in' the individual and spilling outwards into the social world - Ahmed (2010) explains how affect can 'pass between bodies, affecting bodily surfaces or even how bodies surface' (36). Through the study of emotion or affect then, Ahmed (2014) argues, we can uncover precisely how 'power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds' (12).

⁹ Sonja Mackenzie's (2013) concept of 'structural intimacies' has also been useful in helping me to think about the power of testimony or 'stories' to illustrate the 'meeting of interpersonal lives and social structural patterns' (7). The framework of 'structural intimacies', Mackenzie explains develops a 'rhetorical space at the nexus of large-scale social forces, local cultural worlds, and their embodiment in the sexual' (Mackenzie 2013, 8).

It is important to note that feminist phenomenology ‘has a clear social, political and ethical agenda’, seeking to ‘redress long histories of discrimination’ which have devalued the ‘lived experience of women and minorities’ (Weiss 2021, 5). As philosopher Gail Weiss (2021) declares, feminist phenomenology is a ‘critical phenomenology’ which refutes the ‘alleged universality and value-neutrality of traditional phenomenological accounts’, putting phenomenological studies into conversation with ‘critical race theory, prison studies, trans studies, queer theory, and disability studies’ (1). In this way, feminist phenomenology does not simply entail the addition to the philosophical canon of phenomenological studies of women’s experiences, but instead challenges the theoretical and methodological perspectives or the ‘phenomenological project’ in a much more fundamental way (Oksala 2004, 15).

In epistemological terms, feminist phenomenology can be understood as a ‘bottom-up’ model of knowledge production and is indebted to feminist science and technologies studies and particularly, to Black feminist (standpoint) theory; which were among the first areas of social science scholarship to highlight the ‘situatedness’ of all knowledge production as well as the gendered and racialised specificity of embodied perspectives (Hill Collins 2009; Haraway 1988; Pitts-Taylor 2014). In this vein, this research does not set out to assume the ‘uniformity of either the body or epistemic experience’ but seeks to find ‘the particularities in how minded bodies and worlds fit together’ (Pitts-Taylor 2014, 23). The model of queer feminist phenomenology I attempt to put forward here seeks to return to the ‘things themselves’; that is, it proposes to take the gendered body itself as the point of departure for analysis, whilst recognising that ‘first-person perspectives’ are always ‘developed in and through our everyday relations with others’ (Weiss 2021, 2).

To conclude, by deploying a queer, feminist phenomenological approach, this research seeks to explore the embodied and affective experiences of women, as well as trans and non-binary people as they are *subjected* to (and through) hostile systems of reproductive coercion. With this research, I attempt to expand our understandings of the complex ways in which reproduction can be used as a vector for the exercise of

power and how this oppressive power relation is *felt* and *experienced* by the gendered body-subject. Finally, by focalising the embodied experience of *activists* who negotiate and rally against the forcible regulation of their reproductive bodies, this analysis attempts to contribute to the reconceptualization of the gendered body not as ‘docile’ but as actively engaged in and affecting the social and political worlds around them (Foucault 2020 [1977]).

The Body in Politics: Outlining an ‘Embodied Approach’ to the Study of Social Movements for Abortion Rights

Existing scholarship provides for the analysis of social movements according to two dominant frameworks; the ‘organisational’ perspective, which posits collective action as contingent upon the mobilisation of particular resources and political opportunities and the ‘cultural’ perspective, which explores the role of identity, emotion and ‘subjective’ experience in politicising social movement actors (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000; Reed 2015). Even after the ‘cultural turn’ however, questions relating to the role of the body or embodiment have remained largely ignored in social movement theorising (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003). Examining two Israeli-Jewish Leftist protest movements, sociologists Orna Sasson-Levy and Tamar Rapoport (2003) put forward their framework for categorising the body as either ‘instrument’ or ‘message’ of the social movement. In the first instance, the body remains largely ‘unmarked’ as a ‘vehicle’ for the dissemination of political ideas (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003, 388). In the second instance, ‘body politics’ (for example, reproductive rights) are the ‘main cause’ of social protest (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003, 398).

Emphasising the importance of recognising the body as ‘an agent of social and political change’, Sasson-Levy and Rapoport (2003) argue that any attempt to understand the ‘cultural outcomes and consequences of social movements’ must include an analysis of the ‘role of the acting body’ in protest (379). They continue to explain how even those studies concerned with ‘gender issues’ have failed to account for the ‘power and impact’ of the gendered ‘protesting body’ (Sasson-Levy and

Rapoport 2003, 382). Arguing that 'one of the most important effects' of social movements is to challenge existing cultural codes, Sasson-Levy and Rapoport (2003) insist on the revolutionising impact of protest expressed through 'the female body' (379). By inserting their feminised bodies into the public sphere of politics, the women protesters in the movements under study radically challenge 'the discursive fields within which the female body is constructed in society' and in doing so, contest existing ideas about who is 'entitled' to act as a political agent (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003, 397).

Thinking about embodiment in relation to political agency, in her research on the British suffragette movement, Wendy Parkins (2000) deploys a phenomenological approach to examine the 'importance of embodiment to feminist agency' (59). Citing Merleau-Ponty (1962), Parkins argues that we cannot think agency apart from the body. The body, Parkins (2000) explains is the 'locus of intentionality' from which/through all 'meaningful' action is made possible (60). Parkins (2000) describes how 'traditional liberal accounts' have presumed that political subjects derive agency from a 'legal entitlement to political participation' (63). She continues, clarifying how it was 'proprietary rights based in the self which established the subject's status as self-governing' (Parkins 2000, 63). Within this framework, only citizens, that is, those who possessed property, could be recognised as political subjects.

Explaining the strategies of the suffragette movement then, Parkins (2000) contends that the 'problem' for feminists was 'how to intervene in the political domain' where 'they were not recognised as political subjects' (63). Their response, Parkins (2000) outlines, featured 'spectacular and daring feats' involving and engaging their gendered bodies (63). Recounting the activism of Mary Leigh - a working-class suffragette from Lancashire - Parkins (2000) explains how Leigh effectively deployed her 'unconventionally athletic' body in a myriad of protest activities including smashing windows, climbing buildings to occupy rooftops and heckling male politicians with megaphones (67). Whilst mainstream society during this period pathologized suffragette bodies as 'sites of criminality, madness and disorder',

Parkins (2000) illustrates how activists like Leigh in fact successfully 'refigured political agency' as based on *corporeal performance* 'rather than entitlement' (63).

Sasson-Levy and Rapoport (2003) as well as Parkins (2000) offer important analyses then which refocus the embodied nature of (political) agency as well as the capacity of the gendered body in political activity to disrupt hegemonic notions around feminine embodiment. Canadian anthropologist Hannah Quinn (2018) combines theories and methods from feminist phenomenology and affect theory to illustrate how the study of 'embodied experience' or the 'affected body' can contribute to our understandings of 'how and why people engage in political activism' (51). Quinn (2018) provides an (auto-)ethnographic exploration of the Quebec student protest movement, bringing into dialogue 'a political economic analysis of the proceedings' with an analysis of her 'phenomenological and deeply affected experience of the protest movement' (51). Critiquing the 'decontextualized, limp body' of traditional phenomenology, Quinn (2018) brings forward an approach which highlights how 'personal intensities' are 'related to larger structural forces' (52).

In the context of increasingly neoliberal policies, Quinn (2018) argues that it is the 'embodied experience of the system' and the 'felt intensities' of the economic structures which work to draw students into political activity (58). Describing affective experiences as 'received meaning', Quinn (2018) argues that phenomenological analyses are integral to understanding 'the situation my body is anchored in' (53). Quinn (2018) advocates for the exploration of one's bodily experience 'in relation to' other bodies, in order to illuminate how 'we embody social suffering and violence in distinctly different ways' (58). Coming back to the study of the 'protest body' itself, Quinn (2018) argues that the role of the activist body is to act out alternative ways of being. She concludes, clarifying how the protest body is 'profoundly changed' through political activity, engendering and illuminating 'different embodied inscriptions' (Quinn 2018, 58).

The important work of feminist sociologist Barbara Sutton (2007; 2010) on women's embodiment and political resistance in Argentina has been deeply formative to the

theoretical development of this research project. Returning to her country of origin during the citizens uprising after the economic collapse of 2001, Sutton's (2010) ethnographic research offers an 'account of the operations of power on the body that starts from Argentine women's bodily experiences and ties them to social processes embedded in the Argentine context' (8). Conceptualising women's bodies as 'embattled sites' which are simultaneously 'actively engaged in the construction of a new society', Sutton (2010) poses the question of what can be learned 'about Argentine society, and about the interplay between global and local forces' when the 'bodily worlds' of women are taken as the starting point for analysis? (2). Citing Dorothy Smith who advocated for the 'everyday experiences' of women as the point of departure for sociology, Sutton (2010) describes 'bodily worlds' as 'women's varied, overlapping and context-related bodily experience - including both every day and extraordinary events - marked by the gamut of human emotions' (Smith 1987 in Sutton 2010, 6; Sutton 2010, 2).

Sutton (2010) is careful to emphasise that whilst each woman's narrative around her bodily experience might be treated as 'individual event', participants narratives can be taken together and conceptualised as 'part of a social pattern' (6). Exploring what she describes as 'five fields of power', that is, the effects of neoliberal globalization, beauty and femininity norms, reproductive politics, violence against women and women's bodies in political protest, Sutton (2010) explores how women experience these social changes 'in the flesh' (8). By exploring the testimony of both activist and nonactivist women, Sutton (2010) demonstrates how 'powerful ideologies and institutions' in Argentina during this period work to 'regulate and control women's bodies', whilst at the same time, illustrating how women 'cope, negotiate, and resist these forces' as 'embodied beings' (2). Sutton (2010) situates her analysis of women's 'bodily worlds' as part of an attempt to encourage 'a closer approximation to social suffering' (11).

Contributing to a rich corpus of feminist literature on embodiment and political agency, Sutton explains how the female body in Argentina becomes both 'vehicle and agent of resistance' (Sutton 2007, 129). Sutton (2007) elaborates five ways in which the

body is important to political protest: firstly, activism happens 'through' the body which marches in the street, carrying banners and waving flags; secondly, describing the function of protest objects like scarves, clothes and signs, Sutton (2007) explains that the protest body can be deployed as a political argument or text. Thirdly, Sutton (2007) expands on the 'material' needs and vulnerabilities of activist bodies which eat, sleep, and care for each other, as inseparable from activist practices. Fourthly, Sutton (2007; 2010) maintains the significance of 'embodied emotions and passions' which can 'sustain or undermine' movement activity. Finally, Sutton explores the importance of 'massed bodies', where the existence of large crowds 'makes it harder for the state to downplay the existence of social problems' (Sutton 2010, 174; Sutton 2007, 141).

Sutton's (2007; 2010) conceptualisation of how women construct embodied subjectivities through activism, as well as how embodied activist practices disrupt or contest hegemonic norms around feminine embodiment constitute specifically pertinent theoretical frameworks which I attempt to carry forward into my own study. Similarly, inspired by Sutton's (2007) findings in relation to the concept of '*poner el cuerpo*' – a term Sutton's (2007) interviewees used to describe how the exercise of political agency requires them to 'put the whole embodied being into action...to assume the bodily risks, work, and demands' of such activity – I seek here to explore the specific ways in which the embodied practices and investments of Irish activists contribute to the fruition of their political aims (130). Finally, I am indebted to Sutton's (2007) definition of social transformation as an 'embodied collective project' and endeavour here to build upon her conceptual framework which refocuses 'social policy, economic systems, cultural ideologies, and political resistance' as 'fleshly matter' (143).

To conclude, inspired by the work of feminist anthropologists, sociologists, social historians, critical phenomenologists and affect theorists, this research attempts to prescribe an 'embodied approach' to social movement scholarship, which is applied in this case to the study of the campaign for abortion rights, in the Republic of Ireland. Taking Ireland as a case study, I endeavour to explore the embodied, affective

experiences of activists, living within this state-mandated regime of compulsory pregnancy and birth. With this work, I seek to investigate how systems and structures of reproductive injustice are inscribed and felt at the level of the embodied subject, and to interrogate the potentially consciousness-raising effects of these bodily and affective experiences. Consequently, this research attempts to analyse the role of the gendered, reproductive body inside of the movement to Repeal the 8th amendment and to investigate how the intimate, bodily lives of women and gestational subjects in Ireland have been transformed since the constitutional abortion ban was repealed by popular vote in 2018.

Accessing Activist Participants: Ethical Considerations and Challenges to the Research Design

Like many of those I interviewed over the course of this research, I became more explicitly engaged with abortion politics in Ireland following the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012, the same year that the *Irish Choice Network* - which would go on to become the *Abortion Rights Campaign* (ARC) - was formed. When I moved to the Netherlands in 2015 to begin a master's degree in Gender Studies, I reached out to a number of Irish students I met there and together we set up the Utrecht Repeal the 8th Campaign, which would go on to become an official affiliate of ARC under the name of the *Dutch-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign*. Throughout my time in the Netherlands, the *Dutch-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign* organised a number of consciousness-raising workshops and manifestations including one where activists gathered to write and send postcards to Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny demanding that he call a referendum on the 8th amendment. Static demonstrations were also organised to coincide with the annual March for Choice in Dublin in September 2016 and 2017 as well as during the Global Strike 4 Repeal in March 2017 (*Irish Times* 2017).

When I returned to Ireland in April 2018, *Together for Yes* - the official civil society campaign which would advocate for a Yes vote in the 8th amendment referendum in May 2018 - had already been launched. I initially contacted organising groups in two

counties – my home county of Carlow and its neighbouring county of Kilkenny, which together form one political constituency – before deciding to concentrate my efforts in Carlow, a smaller, more rural county with decidedly less resources. Throughout April and May 2018, I canvassed almost daily with my co-campaigners in Carlow. Following the referendum, I continued working for a short period of time with *Carlow Choice and Equality Network* before leaving to join the Research Working Group of the *Abortion Rights Campaign* who were preparing to conduct a study to evaluate the experiences of abortion-seekers attempting to access abortion services in Ireland in the first year since the introduction of the *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018* (Grimes et al. 2022). The results of this study would form the basis of ARC's 2021 submission to the government's review of the 2018 legislation (Grimes and ARC 2021).

When it came to recruiting participants for this research, my 'insider-outsider' status - being born and raised in Ireland but having lived for the past six years in the Netherlands and the U.K. – facilitated easier access to the group in question (Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009). In anticipation of a small pilot study which I carried out in September 2019, I created and disseminated a call for participants which I shared on social media and emailed directly to several activist groups including the *Abortion Rights Campaign* (ARC), *Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice* (MERJ) and various *Together for Yes* regional groups (many of which had remained active since the 2018 referendum) (Appendix A). I made a concerted effort to try to include the voices and experiences of those outside of the 'mainstream' activist circles, which tended to be predominantly white, settled and cisgendered. I also contacted many rural activist organisations in order to avoid a 'Dublin-centric' bias in the participant group. The pilot study included five interviews; four of which were carried out face-to-face and one which was carried out online via Skype.

It quickly became clear that my affiliation as an activist in the Irish abortion rights movement facilitated more 'rapid and complete acceptance' by research participants and provided activists with a degree of safety and comfort which was demonstrated by the openness and transparency with which they engaged in the research process

(Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, 58). On the other hand, my insider status as an activist meant that, during interviews, participants sometimes got caught up in discussion of campaign dynamics – in relation to the inner workings of the referendum, for example – and gave less scope to the articulation and analysis of their personal thoughts, feelings and experiences. Reflecting on the advantages and disadvantages of my insider-outsider positionality, I agree with Corbin Dwyer and Buckle who argue that ‘there is no neutrality...only greater or lesser awareness of one’s biases’ (Rose 1985 in Corbin Dwyer and Buckle 2009, 55). After the pilot study, I further honed my interview guide to centralise questions which would focus more specifically on activist’s lived experiences of living under and mobilising against Ireland’s abortion laws (Appendix B).

The official fieldwork period began in November 2019 and continued until March 2020. Prior to interviews being conducted, participants were forwarded the research information and consent form (Appendix C) for their perusal. Via email or telephone correspondence, I arranged to meet participants to conduct the interviews face-to-face or by scheduling an appointment for an online or telephone interview. Out of the interviews conducted during this period, nineteen were conducted in-person and three interviews were conducted over Skype or telephone. For both the pilot phase and official fieldwork period, I travelled from my base in the South-East of Ireland to meet participants in various locales. Interviews were conducted in Dublin, in the South-East, the South and South-West, and in the West and North-West of the country. I met interviewees in hotel lobbies, cafes, restaurants, and activist spaces. One interview, in the North-West, was conducted in a shop the participant owned on the main street of a small, rural village. The backroom of the shop - which the participant entitled the ‘war-room’ - had been converted into a shrine to the various Repeal and *Together for Yes* memorabilia she had gathered over the years.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ireland and the U.K. between March and April 2020, data collection for this project was halted. At this point, I had already conducted twenty-seven, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with research participants across the country. From April to November 2020, during the first two COVID lockdowns in

the UK, I focused on transcribing and analysing existing interview material. In November 2020, after consultation with my supervisors, I decided to extend data collection until February 2021. This time, to safeguard my own health and the health and safety of research participants, I decided to conduct interviews exclusively via online methods. After re-circulating the call for participants, an additional sixteen interviews were carried out during this period, bringing the total number of interviews conducted as part of this research to forty-three: twenty-three face-to-face interviews and twenty online interviews. Both face-to-face and online interviews lasted on average between forty-five minutes and two hours, thirty minutes.

In terms of the demographic make-up of the participant group, activists ranged in age from early 20's to late 60's. Fifteen of the forty-three activists interviewed identified as members of the LGBTQ community. Whilst information on socio-economic background was not explicitly elicited, more than half of participants identified themselves as coming from a professional background. At the same time, there was substantial representation in the participant group of individuals from urban working-class and rural land labouring classes. Five participants were first or second-generation migrants, coming from Asian, Eastern European and West-Indian backgrounds predominantly. Despite attempts to reach out to Traveller activist groups, this research does not include any participants from an Irish Traveller background. The majority of research participants were from a White-Irish and 'settled' population; a fact likely correlated with my own positionality as a White, middle-class, Irish woman and my decision to engage a 'snowball' sampling method, the 'referral process' of which often brings with it a degree of 'selection bias' (Parker, Scott, and Geddes 2019, 4).

In terms of their activist affiliations, participants were attached to various campaign groups including socialist feminist groups, trade union movements, anti-racist and reproductive justice organising, reproductive health advocacy and LGBTQ rights networks, amongst others. All of the participants interviewed had been active as part of the 'Yes' campaign during the abortion rights referendum in 2018. In terms of accessing activist groups, it appeared that my Whiteness and my status as a university

researcher allowed me access to the upper echelons of Irish pro-choice activism, permitting me to interview a number of high-profile figures involved in government-funded NGOs working on reproductive health and rights in Ireland, as well as people involved in the inception and operation of the *Together for Yes* referendum campaign itself. On the other hand, my being known in Irish activist circles as a queer, rural woman, permitted me access to groups outside of the mainstream, many of whom described themselves as sceptical to approaches by researchers and journalists alike.¹⁰

In terms of ethical considerations, participants' privacy and confidentiality as well as their emotional experience of the research process was a primary concern. These interviews touched upon a range of sensitive topics such as childhood, family relations, experience with the healthcare system, abortion, miscarriage, sexual violence, and issues in relation to birthing experiences, amongst others. We also discussed at length, individual experiences of abortion activism in Ireland as well as activists' experiences of the 2018 referendum campaign more specifically. This proved emotionally challenging for participants to recall, with many explaining how they hadn't "*opened the book*" to analyse their referendum experience since the referendum campaign concluded in 2018. I was aware that speaking about these experiences entailed a risk of re-traumatisation for participants. While acknowledging and working actively to safeguard participants against this, it is important to note that sharing their testimony was also a hugely cathartic experience for many of the activists I interviewed.

I was aware that allowing myself to be available to participants for the purposes of follow-up would be an important aspect in safeguarding participants emotional well-being both during and after the research process. At the conclusion of each interview session, I asked participants how they were feeling and informed them that they could stay in touch with me if there were further issues they wished to discuss. I was forced,

¹⁰ The 'urban/rural' divide in Ireland speaks not simply to differences in terms of demographic constitution - with urban areas having a 'younger' and perceivably more 'liberal' population but invokes contestation regarding the centralisation of national politics in Dublin and the systematic underfunding and underinvestment of rural areas in terms of public infrastructure and economic development (CSO 2016a; Ryan 2015).

early on, to consider the financial and logistical barriers that some activists might face in terms of participating in the research. Many activists lived in extremely rural areas, with patchy internet access and with little existing public transport networks. To interview one participant in the rural North-West, I took a car, a train, and two buses to reach the isolated village in which she lived. The historical underfunding of rural transport networks continues to cause substantial problems for rural abortion-seekers, post-repeal of the 8th amendment. Wherein local GP's have not signed up to provide services, women and pregnant people must travel substantial distances at great financial and logistical cost, in order to access abortion care (Ryan 2015; Grimes and ARC 2021).

Data Collection and Analysis: Feminist Narrative and Phenomenological Interviews and the Importance of Storytelling

This research employs semi-structured qualitative interviews as the primary data collection method. Qualitative interviews have long been a favourite of feminist researchers for their propensity to allow the 'active involvement of respondents in the construction of data about their lives' (Reinharz 1992, 18). Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful for feminist research in so far as they allow an organic approach, wherein interviewees guide the topics at hand. Feminist interviews are, characteristically, 'flexible, iterative and continuous' rather than 'locked in stone', aiding the development of theory directly from the interviews themselves, rather than from mere comparison of the interview material with existing academic research (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 43). Feminist interviewers are encouraged to adapt to speak to what the interviewee knows and feels; interviewer and interviewee thus become conversational partners, together involved in the embodied activity of sense-making (Reinharz 1992).

Borrowing broadly from the principles of feminist qualitative interviewing, I draw more specific methodological directions from phenomenological and narrative interviewing protocols in conducting this research. Narrative research in sociology is

interested in the experiences and voices of those who have otherwise been marginalized in mainstream research (Fraser and MacDougall 2017). Feminist narrative research may take as its object of analysis 'a single event, an experience or an entire life' (Fraser and MacDougall 2017, 243). It is concerned with 'story-telling' as a 'tool for meaning-making' (Fraser and MacDougall 2017, 240). Proponents of feminist narrative interviewing techniques have specified that storytelling itself is integral to the 'process of co-construction' of meaning (Fraser and MacDougall 2017, 244). Narrative interviews aim to provide insight into alternative ways of seeing, and in this case, alternative ways of 'being' in-the-world.

Phenomenological interviews understand human experience as 'complex[...]grounded in the world which is experienced intersubjectively' (Bevan 2014, 136). The phenomenological interviewer is interested in 'describing a person's experience in the way he or she experiences it, and not from some theoretical standpoint' (Bevan 2014, 136). In phenomenological interviews, the interviewee describes and reflects on the 'givenness' of their embodied experience as the 'primary interpretation' (Bevan 2014, 137). It is through 'thematized verbalisation' of their reflected experience that the researcher gains access to the experience in question (ibid). Contingent with the principles of feminist and phenomenological interviewing principles, I take the accounts and testimonies of interviewees at face value (Bevan 2014). Again, embodied experience is understood here as being given and perceived in many ways, meaning there is no considered 'objective' reality. Acknowledging that there is no 'pure perspective', I understand embodied experience as involving 'clusters of commonality' in 'shared intersubjective experiences' (McIntosh and Wright 2019, 147).

All interviews conducted as part of this research were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Before beginning each interview session, I notified interviewees that I would be recording the interview and that the recording device could be paused or stopped at any time to allow for breaks. I explained that the recordings would be held in my personal possession and stored on two separate hard drives in my home and be destroyed upon completion of my research project. I clarified to participants that they

could withdraw their participation from the research at any time, during or after data collection. All interviews were transcribed manually. I chose to forego the usage of transcription software to further safeguard the confidentiality of the research material. Bearing in mind the privacy of the research participants, I chose to anonymise each interview as I transcribed it. All participants were afforded pseudonyms and any potentially identifying information was replaced with fictitious alternatives.

Data analysis was guided by the principles of ‘grounded theory’ and was completed with the assistance of qualitative data analysis software NVivo (Glaser and Strauss 2017). In terms of the analytical process, I first read through each transcript once in its entirety. On the second reading, I made preliminary notes, highlighting key quotations or passages of conversation. On the third reading, I examined each of the highlighted passages, attempting to formulate specific codes which could then be collated into analytical categories. By examining all of the interview transcripts together, I was able to surmise the most common codes and categories occurring across the interview material. It is important to remember that whilst I set out to conduct the analysis with a set of flexible but somewhat preconceived research questions which directed my coding of the interview material, my analysis was primarily ‘grounded’ in and directed by the interview data itself (Glaser and Strauss 2017). A large number of codes and categories emerged more organically from the analytical process. Reflecting on the epistemological and political implications of this methodology, I remembered the words of Norín, one of the last activists I interviewed:

This is pretty cool, ‘cause we’ve been written out of history in a way and here you are writing women into history and acknowledging the process and what’s involved. What you’re doing is quite shamanic.

I met Norín, a yoga teacher, in her late sixties, in March 2020. After we concluded our telephone interview, I wrote the above words on a piece of paper which I stuck to the wall to the side of my writing desk. Meditating on Norín’s words, I realised that my research was not only gathering accounts of embodied and affective experience; it was collecting the *testimony* of women and people living under Ireland constitutional

abortion ban. The 'proliferation of testimonial forms' in contemporary culture, Ahmed and Stacey (2001) describe signifies 'the extension of the legal domain into other realms of politics and culture' (1). Their concept of 'human rights', they explain, 'is bound up with the duty to report rights abuses...to close the gap between witnessing and speech' (ibid). In this vein, struggles for justice everywhere have become 'bound up' with efforts to uncover 'the truth' and thus, as Ahmed and Stacey (2001) clarify, with the requirement to bear witness, to testify (1).

As described above, phenomenological interviewing is about taking accounts of lived experience at face value (Bevan 2014). In Ireland, the patriarchal Church-State regime has historically operated to silence the voices of women, specifically in relation to their experiences of reproductive injustice in this context, and to dispute, invalidate or devalue their testimony where it has been put forward. In 2013, historian Catherine Corless published an article detailing her research into the living conditions inside the Tuam 'Mother and Baby Home' in Galway, in the West of Ireland. The institution at Tuam was, Corless explains, 'a home for unmarried mothers' run by the Bon Secours Sisters (a 'nursing congregation') from 1925 until 1961 (Corless 2012, 4). Corless's article recounts high infant and maternal mortality rates and unorthodox adoption policies at this 'home' and questions the lack of publicly available records regarding the burial of the deceased infants and mothers here (*BBC News* 2021a). In 2015, in response to Corless' work, the Irish government launched an investigation into practices at Irish Mother and Baby Homes between 1922 and 1988 (ibid).

The 'Homes' investigated by the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation accommodated '56,000 unmarried mothers' and 'about 57,000 children' during the period under analysis, with the 'overwhelming majority' of these women being 'maintained' there by their 'local health authority' (Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes 2021, 2-3). The Commission's report (2021) cites 'appalling physical conditions' in these institutions and describes that the women held there were subjected to 'physical' and 'emotional abuse' (2-3). In the Tuam Mother and Baby Home, an unmarked, mass grave of approximately 800 children and babies was discovered in 2017. Whilst former residents of these institutions came forward to

contribute to the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation, documents relating to the commission's investigation were subsequently sealed and made unavailable to those who had given their testimony to those compiling the report (Harrison 2020).

Given this history, it is difficult to ignore the politically contentious nature of women's testimony, particularly in the Irish context. As Ahmed and Stacey (2001) write, one testifies 'when the truth is in doubt (when it has yet to be decided) and when an injustice has occurred' (2). The use of testimony remains an integral part of feminist politics, Ahmed and Stacey (20001) argue, as it is 'about women becoming subjects of their lives, and speaking rather than remaining silent about trauma, injustice or violence' (4). Silence has historically been a key feature of the abortion debate in Ireland (Quesney 2015). By gathering the testimony of Irish activists living under the country's abortion laws, this research attempts, in part, to break this silence, and to shed light upon the relations and experiences of reproductive inequality and oppression which have historically and systematically been refuted and obscured.

Chapter Three: Living under the 8th Amendment – the Politics of Reproductive Mobility inside the Anti-Abortion Regime

Finding Your Way (To England): Spatial Orientations and Reproductive Directions

Starting out on my fieldwork journey, I was eager to collect activists' stories about growing up and living as subjects of (or as *subjected to*) Ireland's abortion laws. This chapter is dedicated to the exploration of these stories. Analysing activists' testimonies, it explores how the regulation of abortion politics in Ireland works to produce (with)in the feminised, reproductive body a particular *spatial, affective, and temporal* orientation, which cumulatively operate as an assemblage of *disciplinary* forces. In the following sections, I examine how the organisation of abortion politics in Ireland mandates the spatial regulation of gendered bodies which are oriented always already towards 'travelling', as well as how the 8th amendment instantiates a particular affective state of fear and vulnerability for the feminised, reproductive subject. Finally, examining the temporal orientation of the potentially pregnant body, I develop the concept of '*abortion work*', to exemplify the additional forms of reproductive labour imposed on women and gestating people under Ireland's anti-abortion regime, as they work negotiate and plan for unplanned conceptions.

Beginning with the exploration of the spatial regulation of (potentially) aborting bodies, I introduce and analyse the testimony of Eabha, a single mother-of-two in her early forties. I met Eabha the week before Christmas 2019. We arranged to meet at a bar in the centre of the city where she lived. I remember seeing her come over the hill at the top of the street. She waved enthusiastically as though greeting an old friend. She was warm and welcoming, and asked me about my trip. We commiserated about the weather, and I remarked that I wasn't used to the Irish wind anymore. The bar where we were supposed to meet and conduct our interview was closed for the holidays. Eabha suggested a hotel, about a mile away, as a decent alternative. As we walked, she told me all about the city, which she clearly loved, pointing out interesting landmarks along the way. At the hotel, we sat down and ordered coffee. After the waitress laid the coffee pots on the table, I asked Eabha how she got involved in abortion activism.

So, I suppose I made a name for myself and because of that, students came to me who may have needed information. And there would have been some staff who would have sent students to me, if they needed information. 'Go to Eabha' was a thing, I suppose...crisis pregnancies and so on. So, that would have been the start of it for me.

Eabha worked as a lecturer in a higher educational institution in the South of the country, in a place she described as having *"a very conservative ethos"*. She became involved in debate and activism around abortion when she noticed other staff members removing posters from the female student's bathrooms with information about pregnancy counselling services. Although, according to her own admission, it *"wouldn't really qualify as activism"*, Eabha described how she found herself staging *"a little protest"* in her workplace to demand that senior management reinstate the posters for 'Positive Options' – a British-based pregnancy advisory service – in the female students' bathrooms. She *"went back again"*, she says, after noticing *"internet blocks"* on the college computers, prohibiting students from accessing abortion referral websites.

On and off over the years, students would have been coming to me for a variety of reasons and I would have supported them in whatever way I could...I know the one thing I often think about was one student who had to travel on her own. She couldn't take time off work, she couldn't tell anybody, she had to get a ferry. So, she travelled for, I can't remember, was it 18 hours to get there? Had the procedure done and then had to turn around and come back overnight on a ferry. On her own, on the ferry, bleeding. And nobody knew except me. So, I was messaging her and then she had to come straight back and into work, bleeding and in distress. Couldn't tell anybody...It was one story but it's one of so many stories.

As she explains here, Eabha's early activism centred around facilitating the mobility of aborting bodies – in both the online and offline space. Her *"little protests"* (as she described it) led to the removal of the *"blocks"* which had previously prohibited students from accessing abortion referral websites.¹¹ Eabha also supported students

¹¹ The suppression of information in relating to abortion is a long-established trend in Ireland where, under the 1861 *Offences against the Persons Act*, supplying an individual with 'the means to procure a miscarriage' was criminalised. It was only after the passing of the *Regulation of Information Act 1995* that doctors, medical providers and counsellors were permitted to share information about abortion

who had ‘to travel’ to access abortions in the UK. In Ireland, the verbiage of ‘travelling’ is so synonymous with abortion that it is often deployed without any explicit reference to pregnancy or abortion-seeking, as Eabha demonstrates above. In the early 20th century, to avoid social stigma and incarceration in institutions like the Magdalene Laundries or the so-called ‘Mother and Baby Homes’, it was common for pregnant, unmarried Irish women to travel to England, where they could secretly give birth and place their children up for adoption, before returning home (Grimes 2016). Since the introduction of the *Abortion Act* in 1967, droves of Irish abortion-seekers have made the same journey to access abortion care on the British National Health Service (Gilmartin and Kennedy 2019). The terminology of ‘travelling’ entered more colloquial usage in 1992 when, after the now infamous ‘X case’, Irish women were awarded the ‘right to travel’ to access abortion services outside of the jurisdiction (Sethna and Davis 2019).¹²

As described in Chapter One, scholarship on abortion travel in Ireland has focused heavily on the ‘co-constitutive relationship’ between gender politics and ‘women’s occupation of space’ (Fischer 2019, 41). Postcolonial theorists studying abortion in the Irish context have argued that, after gaining independence from the British Empire, ‘nation-building’ in Ireland was premised largely on the idea of ‘the superiority of the Catholic Celts and their reproducing women’ (Fletcher 2005, 376). Ireland constructed itself as a bastion for the veneration of motherhood and as a protector of the sanctity of ‘unborn’ life; in opposition to England which, it was argued, used abortion as a colonial weapon against Irish women (Fischer 2019). Women in Ireland were held responsible for the ‘labour of representation’ of the nation, wherein the ‘mimetic links between women and the nation’ were constructed around the figure of the Virgin

with pregnant people. Even then, information about abortion had to be shared alongside information about other ‘options’, like adoption (Irish Family Planning Authority n.d.).

¹² In 1992, a teenage girl (Miss X) who became pregnant because of sexual violence was prevented by an injunction from the Attorney General from accessing an abortion in the UK. The Attorney General’s ruling was based on the ‘right to life’ of the ‘unborn’ under Article 40.3.3. After Miss X became suicidal, an appeal to the Supreme Court granted her the right to travel to the UK to access an abortion. Miss X experienced a miscarriage whilst travelling to the UK. In November 1992, following the X case, a referendum was passed providing the ‘freedom to travel’ outside the State to access an abortion and the ‘freedom to obtain or make available information’ on abortion services abroad (O’Carroll 2012).

Mary (Martin 2002, 67, 69) Within this framework, abortion travel can be conceptualised as part of a system of 'excising' transgressive women – those considered incapable of upholding the religious and moral standards required of them as symbols of the nation - through their 'gendered displacement' (Fischer 2017, 754 ; Fischer 2019, 33).

Geographer Sydney Calkin (2019b) describes the Irish tendency to 'offshore' abortions as 'part of a larger geopolitical narrative to perform state power through the control of reproduction' (2). The 'political fiction' of an 'abortion-free Ireland', Calkin (2019b) argues, 'signals more than a conservative attitude to abortion' and 'enforces a broader claim to the geopolitical position of Ireland as a bastion of moral conservatism' (8-9). Calkin's (2019b) work reinforces how the spatial organisation of gendered bodies is critical to reproductive politics in Ireland, and conjointly, to the Irish nation-building project. Through her analysis of abortion travel, Calkin (2019b) illuminates the connection between 'the intimate and the geopolitical', demonstrating how geopolitical power structures are experienced in/by the body of the aborting subject (7). The numbers of Irish abortion-seekers travelling to the UK and elsewhere has declined substantially since 2001, a fact which can be correlated with the rise in volume of people obtaining illegal abortion pills online (Calkin 2019a)¹³.

As of the late 1990's, estimates indicated that upwards of 6,000 people per year were travelling from Ireland to the UK or elsewhere to access abortion services (Connolly 2002, 160). As Canadian and Scottish historians Christabelle Sethna and Gayle Davis (2019) argue, whilst the Irish case is peculiar for the quantity and consistency of abortion travellers it produces, travelling for abortion is not unique to Ireland. As far back as the 1960's, women were travelling from Eastern Europe to Russia, and from the U.S. to Canada or Japan to access abortion services which were not yet legally available in these respective states (Sethna and Davis 2019). Sethna and Davis (2019)

¹³ The work of non-profit organisation Women on Web, led by Dutch doctor Rebecca Gomperts has been integral to this trend. Recent studies show that between the 1st of January 2010 and the 31st of December 2015, approximately 5,650 women in Ireland and Northern Ireland requested mail-order abortion pills through this service (Aiken, Gomperts, and Trussell 2017, 1208).

argue that abortion travel as a ‘subset of “medical tourism”’, can be conceptualised as ‘one of the most salient commercial outcomes of globalization’ (5). Listening to Eabha speak, I wondered why she emphasized the fact that the student in her story was “bleeding” on the ferry home. Political geographer Cordelia Freeman (2020) argues that bleeding serves as an ‘incriminating marker’ that increases the ‘potential of being caught’ in contexts where abortion is illegal (5). Perhaps, through her emphasis on bleeding, Eabha seeks to confront us with the inevitable ‘leakiness’ of the aborting-body struggling against the societal indictment to ‘contain’ itself (Shildrick 1997). Through her blood, the student carries out an act of subversive resistance: bringing (the products of her) abortion back into Irish geographic space.

Cordelia Freeman (2020) defines ‘abortion mobilities’ as ‘the movement or fixity of people and things that shape abortion access’ (1). Freeman (2020) contends that whilst abortion scholarship emphasizes the fact that women travel, ‘scant attention’ is given to ‘the journeys themselves and how these journeys are undertaken’ (1). Freeman (2020) deploys the framework of ‘viapolitics’ to re-center the ‘vehicles, roads, and routes’ of abortion travel, describing vehicles as ‘sites of power and contestation’ in abortion politics (2-3). As Eabha alludes to above, the ferry or boat has historically been an important figure in Irish abortion politics. In 1995, Irish country music band Sawdoctors released a song entitled ‘Everyday’ (which they re-released in 2018 ahead of the abortion referendum), which tells the story of ‘a woman taking the boat to England for an abortion’. Songwriter Davy Carton describes how the song is intended to ‘give voice’ to Ireland’s ‘deserted women’ and to emphasise the ‘human point of view’ of abortion travel (O’Donoghue 2018). Contemporary artistic interventions have similarly attempted to refocus the ‘sensory experience and emotional burden’ of abortion travel, to underscore the agency of those have had to make this journey (Calkin 2019b, 19).

One of the peculiarities of pro-choice activism in Ireland then is that early iterations of the reproductive rights movement focused on securing access to abortion travel and to information or referral services (which would facilitate their accessing services outside the state), instead of systematically confronting the government to repeal the

8th amendment and legislate for the provision of abortion within the Irish health service (Connolly 2002). From the early 1980's onwards, numerous pregnancy advisory and referral organisations were set up including the *Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre* (which would later become 'Open Line Counselling'), the *Women's Right to Choose Campaign*, the *Well Woman Centre*, as well as the *Irish Women's Abortion Solidarity Group* (IWASG) (ibid). IWASG was a UK-based organization, run primarily by Irish emigrant women living in London which functioned to support abortion-seekers with the logistical, financial and emotional obstacles associated with travelling (Rossiter 2009). At the time of the naissance of IWASG, the costs associated with 'travelling' were estimated at between £500 and £2000 – a large sum of money to which many abortion-seekers found it difficult to avail (ibid).

Not content with having secured constitutional protection for the 'right to life' of 'the unborn' in the 1983 referendum on the 8th amendment, anti-abortion groups in Ireland set their sights on dismantling the information networks which existed to support women and pregnant people in travelling to the United Kingdom and elsewhere, to access legal abortion services. In 1986, under the Supreme Court's 'Hamilton' ruling, the *Society for the Protection of the Unborn Campaign* (SPUC) was granted an injunction against various pregnancy counselling services which, it claimed, operated in contravention of the 8th amendment by offering information to Irish women on abortion services abroad (Connolly 2002). Despite the results of the Hamilton ruling, information networks continued to operate underground throughout the 1980's and into the early 1990's. 'Travelling' has thus been endemic to reproductive life in Ireland over the past half a century, with pregnancy advisory services playing a hugely important role in helping Irish abortion-seekers to navigate this journey, as Eimear, another activist I interviewed, explained:

I had an abortion myself. And I had gone to the...eh...the Open-line counselling...which was just a room in Mountjoy square, all very grim. I think the Wellwoman Clinic gave me the number, so I went in and spoke to a counsellor. But it was very difficult, the information. You were going to England really, you know, with a map and the name of the clinic and so on. It was a difficult journey anyway, but the circumstances made it even more difficult. So, I

obviously then was very aware of the campaign because this had been prior to 1983 that I had an abortion.

Eimear was in her early sixties and had two adult children. We first met almost a year previously, at a meeting for the *Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment* in Dublin where we shared a pot of tea and bonded over what we felt was the erasure of rural women in abortion rights activism, particularly within the official referendum campaign in 2018. We ran into each other again at another event later that year, and I asked her if she would be interesting in partaking in my PhD research. I finally interviewed her late on a rainy Friday afternoon in mid-January 2020. She told me about her mother, who she described as “*a feminist*”, despite the fact that “*she would have had no theory of feminism herself*”. She talks about her excitement at the “*new generation*” of abortion activists, after what she described as a relative silence around the issue in the late 1990’s and 2000’s. She explains how, after travelling to England herself for an abortion in the early 1980’s, she began volunteering for one of the telephone hotlines which provided Irish abortion-seekers with information on accessing services abroad:

The community of women that were in the group, we reinforced each other, because it was illegal what we were doing. There was that sense that nobody else was doing it. We had little stickers that we put up and little booklets that we gave out to community groups. But it was that sense that, if we’re not doing it, there’s nobody doing it. I mean, you can’t go to the paper. Back then, there was no mobile phones. Where would you go in the phone book? Back then you had to go into the GPO to get the English phone book. There was no other phone book. The desk in the GPO. But it wasn’t going to say ‘A for Abortion’. Where would you even go for information? Maybe you might have a doctor who would put you onto us or put you onto doctors in England.

The GPO or the General Post Office sits on the middle of O’Connell Street on the North side of Dublin city center. It holds huge historical significance for Irish people as it was this building which served as the headquarters for the leaders of the 1916 Easter Rising – an armed insurrection of Irish Republicans against British Rule in Ireland.

The Easter Rising is regarded as the first armed conflict of the revolution which ended in 1922 with the establishment of the Irish Free State. Today, tour guides can be seen feeling out the bullet holes which remain on the six iconic columns of the GPO's façade. I thought about the idea of a young Eimear, or other women like her, walking through those columns and into the building's still rather ornately decorated main room. How big would the English phonebook have been in those days, I wondered? When questioned about the first time they remember being aware of abortion or abortion politics, many the activists I interviewed referred to travelling, to England, or to an early association they had made between abortion and "going abroad", as described below by Roisin, a project coordinator in her early thirties:

I didn't think anything about abortion. It was really bizarre. Like, I knew you went to England. I thought it was wrong, but I also knew that if I needed to go to England, I'd think about the story that I would need to have and all of that. But I don't think I really thought about it in terms of the wider context of how restrictive it was, how degrading it was...As I said, until I was 21, I didn't think that Ireland was anything unusual. I would have thought that England was more progressive or more liberal. But it really fascinates me that I did not question those ideologies, that they were just...they weren't even invasive in the sense of being shoved down my throat, they were just there, and I just didn't question them. It was just like the norm. People went to England if they needed to go to England and it was just a common euphemism that nobody thought about. And I guess the idea of changing it was never on the cards for me. I knew so little about politics; I probably didn't understand how policy change worked or if it was even possible.

Roisin arrived at our interview head-to-toe in abortion rights garb; a Repeal jumper, 'Repealed' necklace, 'Free, Safe, Legal' tote bag and a hairband which looked almost like a crown, and which spelled out 'pro-choice' in various bright colours. I remember thinking to myself how the loudness of her outfit contrasted strongly with her personality; she was quiet, reserved and reflected rather nervously upon each question I asked her before offering her assessment. Roisin had come to abortion activism as a student in 2016, when a friend invited her to a demonstration outside

the Dáil.¹⁴ It was a show of support for TDs Mick Wallace and Clare Daly who had brought forward a bill (which would later be defeated) proposing provision of abortion in the case of fatal foetal abnormality (*Protection of Life in Pregnancy Bill* 2013).¹⁵ Roisin explained how she had listened to Mick Wallace read out a letter from a couple who travelled to England to access an abortion after receiving the diagnosis of a fatal foetal abnormality. Hearing that couple's testimony, she says, she realised that the current abortion laws in Ireland constituted what she understood as a "*violation of human rights*".

I was intrigued by the many apparent contradictions in Roisin's statement. On the one hand, she explained to me how, as a child, she "*didn't think anything about*" abortion. In the same breath however, she recalls that she "*knew you went to England*" and that she herself had thought about "*the story*" she "*would need to have*" if ever she ended up 'travelling'. In similarly contradictorily terms, she recounts how whilst she thought abortion "*was wrong*", she knew that 'travelling' was "*the norm*" and that "*people went to England if they needed to go to England*". Interestingly, Roisin explains how she "*didn't think that Ireland was anything unusual*" in its outlawing of abortion, rather that abortion-providing England was simply "*more progressive*" or "*more liberal*". Without having had any of these ideas "*shoved down (her) throat*", Roisin had created the idea of abortion as somehow antithetical to Irishness; as a practice which belonged in more liberal or progressive countries, like the U.K.

Roisin's statement points to the complex ways in which abortion politics in Ireland are entangled within and complicated by Ireland's postcolonial identity, as well as its contemporary identity within the European Union (O'Shaughnessy 2021; Fletcher 2005). The original law which criminalised abortion in Ireland – the *Offences Against the Persons Act* 1861 – was an English, colonial law. Despite this, 'Pro-Life' activists in Ireland have long constructed abortion as a 'violent colonial tool of population control' with 'pro-amendment' posters in 1983 bearing slogans such as 'The Abortion Mills of England Grind Irish Babies into Blood that Cries out to Heaven for Vengeance'

¹⁴ The 'Dáil' is the original Gaelic term for the Irish Parliament.

¹⁵ 'Teachta Dála' is the Gaelic terminology for Members of Parliament.

(Fletcher 2001, 565). In spite of the fact that it was an English law which first criminalised abortion in Ireland, activists like Roisin apparently espouse the idea of abortion-providing England as “*more progressive*” or “*liberal*”; a symptom perhaps of internalised coloniality wherein the culture of the colonial dominator is ‘transformed into an aspiration’ (Quijano 2007, 169).

Moreover, Roisin explains how it was the framing of abortion as a human right which had spurred her to become involved in direct action (Benford and Snow 2000). The concept of human rights has its history in European constructions such as the Magna Carta, The English Bill of Rights (1689) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (1789). These documents were based on an ideal of ‘the human’ as ‘citizen, rights-holder, property-owner’ (Braidotti 2013, 1). The category of the ideal ‘liberal subject’ excluded women and was created in opposition to specific racialised populations (who were constructed as entirely ‘non-human’) (Weheliye 2014). Despite this history, activists like Roisin appear to find great meaning and an impetus for political action by situating abortion in a human rights framework. In fact, several Irish women who have had to travel to the UK to access abortion have taken cases against Ireland to the European Court of Human Rights; illustrating how Ireland’s abortion law has long existed as a ‘sticking point’, preventing the country from proving its ‘liberal’, ‘modern’, ‘developed’ European identity (O’Shaughnessy 2021, 10).¹⁶

Writing in the aftermath of the referendum in 2018, feminist legal scholar Mairead Enright (2018) wrote that pregnant people in Ireland would now be spared ‘the trauma of that journey to England’, which she says ‘has shaped our sense of Irish womanhood for generations’ (8-9). Indeed, the idea that this journey to England has been historically formative to the experience of gendered socialisation in Ireland

¹⁶ In my paper entitled ‘Triumph and Concession: The Emotional and Moral Construction of Ireland’s Campaign for Abortion Rights’, I analysed the emotional and moral discourses constructed and mobilised by the official ‘Yes’ campaign during the referendum on the 8th amendment in 2018. I concluded that the ‘Three C’s’ campaign – which focused on the concepts of ‘care, compassion and change’ constructed the moral feasibility of abortion along very conservative lines. By focusing on legalising the provision of abortion for cases of rape and fatal foetal abnormality, I contended, the ‘Yes’ campaign effectively reaffirmed abortion as a ‘negative affective object’ and re-entrenched the ‘suffering’ Irish maternal figure (O’Shaughnessy 2021).

appears to have reached the status of common sense and yet, little has been done to explain the mechanisms of this process, in sociological terms. Smith-Oka's (2012) concept of 'reproductive habitus' (2275) is potentially useful here. Defined as 'modes of living the reproductive body' or 'largely unconscious bodily practice and orientations that reflect structural relations of categorical inequality', the reproductive habitus 'exists in the hazy, gray realm between consciousness and unconsciousness' (Smith-Oka 2012, 2276; Fleuriet and Sunil 2015, 103).

Thinking about the idea of the reproductive habitus as ways of living or (unconscious) practices associated with(in) the relationship between structural inequalities and the reproductive body, perhaps then, it can be argued then that 'travelling' is constitutive of the 'reproductive habitus' of women and pregnant people in Ireland? Whilst activists like Roisin might not remember exactly how or when they learned about 'going to England', these internalised thought-patterns are symptomatic of how structural power relations infiltrate the mind and memory of the embodied reproductive subject to replicate patterns of social, and specifically, reproductive inequality. To situate this argument in queer phenomenological terms, perhaps this mental association between abortion and 'travelling' is illustrative of the ways in which the geopolitical power structures which serve to regulate the feminised reproductive subject 'unfold in the folds of the body' of women and gestating people (Ahmed 2006, 9).

Whilst Smith-Oka's (2012) concept is helpful to understand this mental inclination towards travelling as emblematic of the ways in which abortion policies and regulations are internalised by women and pregnant people in Ireland, it is less useful perhaps in helping us to understand this embodied 'orientation' towards England in terms of its function as part of the 'spatial' organisation of reproductive politics in Ireland (Ahmed 2006; Calkin 2019b). Espousing her theory of queer phenomenology, Sara Ahmed (2006) explains how the way the body is positioned in social space, as well as the proximity of the body to certain objects is contingent on and connected to systems of gendered and racial inequality. To be 'oriented', Ahmed (2006) explains, is to be 'turned towards certain objects, those that help us find our way' (1). For women,

and gendered others subjected to Ireland's anti-abortion regime, the phenomenological orientation towards travelling is both mental *and physical*. For those subjected to the 8th amendment, the experience of reproductive embodiment means to be always already *turned towards* England, always already turned towards the boat.

Even for those who never have and potentially never will have to make that journey to access abortion services abroad, the ferry or 'boat' is fundamental to the processes of gendered socialisation and of the experience or *orientation* of reproductive embodiment for women and gestational subjects in Ireland. The boat sits on our collective horizon, imbued with complex meanings. In turning towards, and reaching out for the boat, for England, our reproductive, gendered bodies take shape. The boat is not simply a mode of transportation, a mechanism to get from point A to point B. Instead, both England and the boat function as both catalysts and emblems of reproductive exile *and* resistance. The ferry is, what Ahmed (2006) might term, a 'sticky object'; as it comes in to the dock, it carries with it 'the histories of contact' of the many abortion-seeking bodies who have passed through its cabins (90).

Mediating on the concept of 'directions', Ahmed (2006) argues that the ways we are directed, the directions we 'face as well as move' are 'organized rather than casual' (15). Ahmed's (2006) framework provides us with tools to think about how the injunction to travel, or merely to 'orient' oneself towards travelling, might constitute a *disciplinary* force, which operates exclusively upon the feminised, reproductive body. That is to say, whilst travelling has historically functioned as a life-line for Irish women and abortion seekers, providing a way for those with the financial means and mobility privilege to access abortion care, the 'orientation' towards England is simultaneously a 'direction' that women and gestational subjects in Ireland are 'asked to follow' (Ahmed 2006, 17). Returning to Roisin's testimony, it can be argued that Ireland's abortion laws have historically produced within the feminised body a set of mental inclinations which lead us to associate abortion with England or travelling, and moreover, these laws have invariably shaped the experience of our 'situated dwelling' so that we come to inhabit the reproductive body *out of space-and-time* as always already oriented in a particular direction (Ahmed 2006, 6).

The embodied experience of living under the 8th means always already being oriented towards England, always already oriented towards the boat. This begs the question then of how the feminised, reproductive subject can ever truly 'belong' within the project of the Irish 'nation'? Even now, after the repeal of the 8th amendment and the introduction of the *Health (Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018*, hundreds of abortion-seekers continue to travel from Ireland to England to access services not available to them in the North or the Republic (Ryan 2020). If 'travelling' is a both a 'line of discipline' we are asked to follow, and simultaneously conceived as an anti-nationalist movement against the 'pro-natalist' postcolonial State, as well as a mimetic failure whereby Irish women neglect to uphold the feminine and maternal ideals embodied by the Virgin Mary, what *space* can there ever truly be then for the gestating subject or aborting subject inside of the Irish national imaginary?

Preparing for Flight: Affective States of Fear, Vulnerability And the (Gendered) Burden of 'Abortion Work'

Sadbh was a teenager in the late 1990s, a period she describes as a "*fraught time*" for abortion rights in Ireland. Referencing her memories of the X case and the C case, she professed that "*the same traumas which had always been happening*" were becoming "*a bit more visible*" during this period.¹⁷ Coming from what she described as a "*middle-class, professional*" rural family, Sadbh told me how her parents were "*probably more old-fashioned than most*", with respect to relationships and sexuality. When I asked her to explain this further, she went on to elucidate how "*the class aspect was very important*" in terms of how she "*understood the dynamic*" in her own family. Sadbh told me how "*the ideal situation*" for women, as she learned it, was "*to be vaguely virginal*" until marriage. When I asked her about her first encounter with abortion politics, she explains that whilst the topic was never engaged with directly in her home growing up, she had a "*very strong sense*" of how her family would respond in the event of an unplanned pregnancy and that they would "*want the issue resolved*". Interestingly,

¹⁷ A 13-year-old girl in the care of the State became pregnant as a result of rape and was granted court approval to travel to the UK for an abortion. Her family sought to prevent her from travelling and subsequently took a case to challenge the court's decision (*Irish Examiner* 2009).

Sadbh described her earliest memories of abortion as being couched heavily in religious and racializing significations:

I think I would have had that kind of feeling...rhetoric about countries like China and India and it would have been like, they are 'Godless' and that there's too much of 'it' there. Sort of an idea of like, population control and I think maybe I was getting a subtle message that, sort of like, maybe there was something bad and communist, in that area. I wouldn't have known how to articulate that, but I think that was the message I was getting: Godless, somewhat vaguely communist-ish societies are trying to control populations in a sinister way and abortion is somehow part of that. So, I think I would have sort of had a vague feeling that it 'doesn't happen' here, and of course that wasn't true...So, yeah I do remember picking up these vague ideas from the ether about what an abortion was - something vaguely bad, vaguely communist-ish, vaguely foreign and not like us, us God-ly people.

Like many of her activist colleagues, Sadbh describes learning at an early age that abortion was somehow a 'foreign' practice. Interestingly, she does not associate abortion primarily with the United Kingdom but instead correlates it with "*countries like China and India*". As alluded to above, in response to centuries of colonial domination which saw the Irish population decimated through famine, war and forced emigration, abortion regulation in Ireland has historically been informed by a 'pro-natalist' framework within which the Irish State has functioned to evaluate and encourage the reproduction of those deemed 'appropriate carriers of pro-natalist Irishness' (Fletcher 2005, 367). Sadbh's testimony illustrates how this postcolonial, 'pro-natalist' ideology continues to inform understandings of abortion politics contemporaneously by reinforcing the idea of abortion as a weapon utilised by nefarious governments to subordinate specific populations. Interestingly, describing abortion as a product of "*communist-ish societies*", she names China and India as opposed to Russia. I was curious to know more about what Sadbh meant when she said that, if she had gotten pregnant as a teenager, her parents would want her to 'resolve' the issue. She explained:

*When I was old enough to understand pregnancy and my own risk of becoming the same, it was very much-it wasn't intellectual then, it was more emotional. It was, I'd need to be able to access this if I needed it, it's not an intellectual thing...I think the strongest feeling-because I always had this morbid fear of pregnancy anyway, thought it was the most awful concept, still do *chuckles* I was so afraid of the very idea, yeah, I think I thought very strongly that it would have to just be ended, I would have to make it stop. And whatever had to be done, to do that, you know...I do remember reading stories about people having hot baths or throwing themselves down the stairs, and I do remember thinking that I would do that if I had to.*

We were sitting across the table from one another in a small, forgotten café when Sadbh made this statement. I remember being struck with the straight forwardness of her profession. She had just told me, without flickering an eyelid, that if she had an unplanned pregnancy, she intended to throw herself down the stairs in order to induce a miscarriage. I thought about the stairs in my parent's house, where I was staying during my fieldwork. I meditated on the jagged wooden steps and the cold, unforgiving, tiled floor below. After I left her, Sadbh's words continued to swirl around my mind. I thought about how the *fear* of pregnancy as she experienced it had changed her relation to her body, to her world. I was struck with her apparent willingness to throw her body around. I couldn't quite decide whether the body she described was a 'fragile encumbrance', or the site of expression of an insurgent agency which, in refusing coerced pregnancy, rejects the violence or vulnerability imposed upon it (Young 1980, 141).

Another significant detail in Sadbh's testimony was her description of having experienced a particular transition in her understanding of and relation to abortion. Initially, she identifies how as a young woman, she picked up ideas "*from the ether*" about abortion being something "*vaguely bad, vaguely foreign and not like us*". In this vein, Sadbh's testimony echoes that of Roisin, wherein she identifies a mental inclination she developed between abortion and 'foreignness'. This form of relationality becomes complicated however when Sadh became "*physically aware of pregnancy as a possibility*". It is at this point, she clarifies, that she finally understood how "*terrible*" the situation was in Ireland. She explains how her understanding of

and relation to abortion changed then from an “*intellectual*” to an “*emotional*” one. What Sadbh is describing then is a transition where abortion no longer exists only ‘in the mind’ as a signifier of foreignness, but where the prohibition of abortion through the law is suddenly *felt* in the body. This embodied obstruction carries with it a particular affective valence, whereby the quotidian condition of the gestational subject is henceforth characterised both by the experience of *fear* and bodily *vulnerability*.

At twenty-five years old, Eithne was one of the youngest activists I met during my research. Having moved to Ireland with her mother and older sister as a child, Eithne, who was Asian-Irish, had become involved in reproductive justice activism during her undergraduate studies. After attempting to engage initially with what she described as ‘liberal’ or ‘single-issue’ groups, Eithne explained how she found herself actively seeking out communities of colour and grassroots activists who organised in what she described as a more “*meaningful*” manner. Over the course of our meeting, we spoke at length about the divisions amongst and across pro-choice groups in Ireland which were brought to the fore in the aftermath of the referendum in 2018, with Eithne describing how migrants and ethnic minority groups were “*excluded*” and “*left behind*” the national campaign. I was curious as to which events or experiences catalysed the development of Eithne’s activist consciousness:

I remember in first year of college, I started going on the pill because I was having sex more regularly. That’s when I realized how scary it was, and also how I did not want to be pregnant. And I really do think that’s something no one will understand unless you’ve been there. Like, now I’m not like that. It’s obviously really bad sex-ed in Ireland. It’s actually not that easy to get pregnant. Like, I was on the pill and we were using condoms, and still, every time I would get so panicked...Then we had a conversation, me and my partner, I was like ‘What if it happened?’ I had just turned 18, the end of first year. He was like ‘It’s not gonna happen’ and I was like ‘Well, what if?’ and he said ‘Well, I wouldn’t really agree with it.’ I was like ‘Excuse me? You don’t have any say in this?’ And I think that’s when I was more and more aware. I have a say. Looking back, it’s so stupid. I haven’t thought about that in a while. Barely a chance, no chance I could get pregnant. It was so irrational, but I was looking up all these options, and at the time there were no options, there still aren’t many.

Eithne's account of deciding to "go on the pill" and the sudden realization of how "scary" a potential pregnancy might be could, in many ways, be understood as a common course of action (or reaction) for heterosexual women on the cusp of becoming sexually active. There appears to be something more contextually specific however in Eithne's experience when she refers to how "every time" (presumably, every month) she would "get so panicked" researching "all these options". Laoise - also in her twenties - told a similar story about experiencing a "pregnancy scare"; scrambling to make sense of her options and the necessary logistics, and how the realisation of abortion being fundamentally inaccessible in the Republic catalysed her entry into abortion rights activism. Laoise explains how, "for some reason", she thought that abortion was available in Belfast, County Antrim (again, illustrating a pre-existing mental association between abortion and the United Kingdom). She only discovered that abortion was not available in Northern Ireland, after her experience with a false positive pregnancy test:

I had a personal experience where I had missed my period...like, I wasn't getting it at all, I was starting to freak out. Then I did a test which gave me a false positive, so I was freaking. And I was like 'OK, I can't do this like.' So, I googled it. I was googling the bus up to Belfast like! And then I realised, it's not fucking legal in Belfast, I'm going to have to fly! I'd never been on a flight before; I was freaking out. My partner at the time was like 'Oh, its grand, we'll just raise it.' I was 19, I had no money, I was in college, I was like 'There's no way like.' So, that was my first like scare and my first real wake up to 'Wow, this really isn't accessible for me at all.' Anyway, it turns out, thanks be to Christ, it was a false positive.

Now working as an archivist, Una came from a rather conservative, rural background. Abortion was "absolutely never spoken about" in her home, she clarified, and both of her parents identified as pro-life. She told me how she didn't talk to either of her parents throughout the entirety of the *Together for Yes* campaign in 2018, adding that her father was "going door-to-door" on behalf of the anti-abortion group *Love Both*.¹⁸ Laoise's

¹⁸ *Love Both* describes itself as a 'grassroots campaign...now actively campaigning for restoration of full legal protection to unborn babies in Ireland'. It includes members from 'The Pro Life Campaign' and Students for Life, Women Hurt by Abortion, and One Day More (Love Both n.d.).

responses to my questions were half-jovial, half-stoic. I remember thinking how her energy changed when she told me the story of her 'pregnancy scare'. The words spilled from her mouth in a frenzied mixture of panic and confession. I thought about how overwhelming the idea of travelling might be, particularly for someone like Laoise who had never even been on an airplane before. She emphasises that the experience was a "*real wake up*" in terms of the reality of reproductive rights for women and pregnant people in Ireland. I marvel at the irony of her thanking 'Christ' for what turned out to be a false positive pregnancy test.

Sadbh, Eithne and Laoise all appear to describe a similar affective or emotional experience – a particular embodied state of fear or panic – the product of recognising oneself as a potentially (/pre-) pregnant subject in an environment where, through constitutional mandate, pregnancy instantiated a very specific form of gendered vulnerability under the 8th amendment. Taking its origin in the Latin word '*vulnus*' (wound), vulnerability describes 'the capacity to be wounded and suffer' (Koivunen, Kyrola, and Ryberg 2018, 4). Koivunen et al. (2018) explain how vulnerability can be synonymous for 'marginalisation or subordination, especially when it is invoked in connection to those who suffer or experience discrimination due to how they are categorised' (7). Vulnerability, unlike 'discrimination' however has a distinctly more 'embodied' and 'corporeal' facticity (Koivunen et al. 2018, 9). Vulnerability invokes the idea of 'openness' or 'injury' (ibid). I remember the bleeding student in Eabha's story, or Sadbh's readiness to 'throw' her body down the stairs and think about the idea of vulnerability as both 'an existential condition' and 'socially induced' (Butler 2016, 22, 25) .

Sara Ahmed (2014) describes how the 'openness of the body to the world involves a sense of danger, which is anticipated as a future pain or injury[...]the body shrinks back from the world in the desire to avoid the object of fear' (69). Ahmed (2014) continues, explaining how 'fear works to contain some bodies', restricting the body's movement 'insofar as it seems to prepare the body for flight' (69). Reflecting on the testimony of these activists then, it becomes evident how the *affective states of fear and vulnerability* are constitutive of the quotidian embodied experience of women and

gestational subjects under the 8th amendment. These affective experiences are intimately connected with and produced by the ways in which the body of the gendered, reproductive subject is *oriented* towards objects and (in) geographical and social space. In this sense, we can think of these affective conditions as ‘affective orientations’, exemplifying how the spatial and affective regulation of the aborting body are closely connected in this context.

Elaborating further on the phenomenological correlation between space and affect, Ahmed contends that there is a ‘relationship to space and mobility at stake in the differential organisation of fear’ (Ahmed 2014, 68). In other words, fear affects the movement of the body in space. In the case of Ireland then, it can be argued that fear does indeed prepare the body for flight(s)...as well as for boats, and for stairs too. Listening to these activist’s testimonies, I began to wonder about the embodied labour involved, not only for those who have had to travel abroad to access abortions (a journey which entails substantial emotional, physical and financial burdens), but about the work involved in “*looking up all these options*” as Eithne described it. Can we conceptualise the emotional and material labour associating with *planning* to travel as itself a form of reproductive labour or ‘abortion work’? Eabha’s testimony is particularly illuminating in this regard:

Once I recovered from number two, I knew there couldn’t be a number three, under any circumstances. And obviously, I did everything in my power to make sure there wouldn’t be, but that’s not always enough. So, I was very aware that I would have to...I did make a decision that were I ever to get pregnant again, I was going to travel. And I knew that I had the privilege, and the money and resources to fly and stay and do it in comfort. And that, maybe more than anything motivated me. It always makes me cry to think that I could do that, and so many people couldn’t. Particularly, well not particularly, there’s so many women, but women in Direct Provision, for whom citizenship is not settled. Women who just could not travel, under any circumstances.¹⁹

¹⁹ Direct Provision is ‘the name used to describe the accommodation, food, money and medical services you get while your international protection application is being processed or while you are an asylum seeker’ in the Republic of Ireland (Citizens Information n.d.).

Two things struck me about Eabha's statement. Firstly, that she had made a very clear decision that she would travel in the event of a third pregnancy and secondly, that she had already made plans for this potential trip. Effectively, what Eabha was sharing with me here were her 'abortion contingency plans' which I conceptualise as an integral element of 'abortion work'. I was intrigued by her proclamation that, if she were to travel, she would "*do it in comfort*". Her words indicate a further form of *reproductive stratification* vis-à-vis the modes of travelling available to Irish abortion-seekers. The "*lucky, privileged*" women were able to "*fly, to stay over*". The students Eabha supported, on the other hand, were faced with 18-hour round-trip ferry journeys. Listening to Eabha describing the details of her own 'abortion contingency plans', I came to understand that the fact that she had access to particular resources (that she was able to fly, and avail of anaesthetic) influenced Eabha's understanding of the intersections of her identity as a White, middle-class woman with secure citizenship rights. Her ability to access particular systems of information, to travel and to do so by any means indicates a conflation of economic, social and cultural capital - a form of *reproductive capital* perhaps - which she and other more privileged activists had access to.

Sociologist Andrea Bertotti (2013) coins as 'fertility work' the 'labor and responsibility associated with navigating a couple's fertility', including the work of adopting, managing and planning contraceptive methods (13). Bertotti (2013) explains how 'as with other forms of domestic labour, fertility work is not equally distributed among women', the distribution being delineated according to 'racial' and 'socioeconomic' factors (14). Drawing upon Bertotti's (2013) concept of 'fertility work' then, I propose the concept of 'abortion work', to encapsulate the emotional and material labour which is unequally imposed on women and gestational subjects in Ireland, as they negotiate and plan for the possibility of needing to acquire an (il)legal abortion, either inside or outside the state. Like 'fertility work', 'abortion work' can be understood as being disseminated differently along racialised and classed lines, again reinforcing the idea of a system of 'reproductive stratification' or the unequal distribution of 'reproductive capital' which Irish abortion-seekers must navigate.

Through the concept of 'abortion work', we can see how the embodied experience of living under the 8th amendment for women and gestational subjects entails not only a particular spatial and affective orientation, but a temporal orientation too. Activists like Eabha exist in an *anticipatory* state vis-à-vis the potentiality of needing to acquire an abortion and/or of being subjected to intense societal disrespectability upon becoming pregnant outside the normatively prescribed and accepted conditions. The idea that one's reproductive body or experiences may be organised according to a specific temporal politics is of course, not new; reproduction itself has long been understood as having an 'essentially temporal dimension' (Bock von Wülfingen et al. 2015, 2). By capitalising on what has been described by queer theorists as our inherent 'compulsion to embrace our own futurity', contemporary politics appropriates and deploys 'the future' – enshrined in 'the figure of the child' – as an organising principle to mandate a particular heteronormative (reproductive) life-course (Edelman 2004, 21).

Vincanne Adams, Michelle Murphy & Adele Clarke (2009) write that the 'defining quality of our current moment' is not the future but *anticipation*, that is, a characteristic state of 'thinking and living toward the future' (246). Adams et al. (2009) explain how this characteristic state of anticipation implies both an *affective* and a *temporal* orientation. Anxiety and fear (tied to 'unpreparedness' and an unknowable future) become important 'political vectors' to 'interpellate and govern subjects' (Adams et al. 2009, 249). Adams et al. (2009) coin the term 'injunction' to describe the 'moral imperative' to 'characterize and inhabit states of uncertainty' and develop the term 'abduction' to describe the labour associated with the 'requisite tacking back and forth between futures, pasts and presents' (249). Interestingly, for this analysis, they describe the moral imperative to characterise and live with/in various states of uncertainty as itself a mechanism of *disciplining* the subject-body (Adams et al. 2009). The injunction to anticipate, they explain, is a 'requirement to be obedient' which 'demands action' (Adams et al. 2009, 254, 256).

Adams et al. (2009) claim that anticipation has become a 'lived affect-state of daily life' which 'shapes regimes of self, health and spirituality' (247). They depict the

'biomedical' sphere as an 'exemplary site of anticipatory practice', citing the work of feminist technoscience scholars like Sarah Franklin and Celia Roberts (2006) whose research, they contend, has illustrated the various ways in which 'anticipatory modes reach before birth to fetal management and yet further back to conception, as active domains of the present that allow tactical interventions to prevent and/or enable imagined futures' (Adams et al. 2009, 251). It is possible then through the concept of 'abortion work' to illustrate how these 'anticipatory modes' reach back *even before conception*, expanding in their scope to shape and transform the intimate affective and reproductive experiences and the everyday embodied practices of the potentially-pregnant body-subject. Aoibhinn - a social worker in her early 40's - explained to me how living in anticipation of travelling, she regularly felt both sad and afraid and worked hard to make sure she always had enough money in her "*abortion fund*" to travel to England on short notice:

Before the campaign, before I always had the abortion fund in the bank, or the ability to get that loan out of the credit union. If I needed to go to England, and you're talking about two grand. I always tried to have that money, money you couldn't spend. And I was afraid, so many of us were afraid, so many of us were. For ourselves and for each other. And also, sadness that everyday, someone was having to say 'Shit, I have to go through with this', like.

When I asked Aoibhinn what the victory for the pro-choice movement in the referendum on the 8th amendment in 2018 signified for her, she contrasts how "*before the campaign*" she was "*always a bit scared*". Again, Aoibhinn's testimony clearly indicates how the 8th amendment catalysed a specific, quotidian, affective condition of fear and vulnerability, for all those who lived under it. Explaining how these affective experiences influenced her every day, bodily practices, she goes on to explain how she "*always had the abortion fund*" in the bank - money that she "*couldn't spend*" or made sure that she had "*the ability to get that loan out of the Credit Union*". Aoibhinn's experience illustrates how 'abortion work', like 'fertility work' requires an intensive and *longitudinal* investment of time, attention and emotional energy, as well as material resources (Kimport 2018). As alluded to above, 'abortion work' can be understood then as a particular form of embodied, reproductive labour which - like

‘fertility work’ is unequally distributed across genders, and on those subjects who already occupy a precarious position in terms of their socio-economic conditions, residency, or mobility status.

Discussing the idea of ‘anticipatory regimes’, Adams et al. (2009) describe how the future ‘creates material trajectories of life that unfold as anticipated by those speculative processes’ (248). In this sense then, ‘anticipation’ becomes another direction; a material trajectory or line of discipline that women and potential abortion-seekers in Ireland are asked to follow (Adams et al. 2009; Ahmed 2006). Adams et al. (2009) explain that ‘anticipatory regimes’ work through the ‘logics of expansion’ (250). Studying the experience of activists, living under Ireland’s anti-abortion regime, through a queer, feminist phenomenological lens, what I attempted to trace here is the *expansive* power of the 8th amendment. Through the concept of ‘abortion work’, it can be further explored how the regulation of abortion in Ireland is constituted not only through the criminalisation of abortion in the law, but through *the spatial, affective and temporal orientation of bodies in space*.

This assemblage of regulatory forces operates as a mode of *disciplining* the embodied, reproductive subject and of reinforcing their ‘non-belonging’ to the national community. The 8th amendment, which further copper fastened the criminal status of abortion in Ireland thus entailed not simply a *prohibition* of rights but an *imposition* of structural vulnerability which ‘unfolds in the folds of the body’ (Ahmed 2006, 9). It produced in the reproductive subject a system of thought-patterns which always already ‘turned’ them away, which mandated the *movement* of the aborting body across borders, and which produced in the reproductive subject an affective state of fear and vulnerability, as they labour to ‘take care’ of unplanned pregnancies before they are even conceived. Perhaps then, through the concept of ‘abortion work’, we edge closer to a better understanding the *felt burden* of anticipatory labour as a quotidian, racialised, nationalised embodied condition which has become increasingly visible now in the context of the repeal of Ireland’s constitutional abortion ban.

Chapter Four: Tracing the ‘Embodied Infrastructure’ of the Campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment

Analysing the Embodied Encounter with ‘Pro-Life’ Visual Imagery: The ‘Abortion Tears Her Life Apart’ Billboard Campaign

In this chapter, I explore activists’ experiences of mobilisation: that is, the process by which individuals became transformed into collective actors within the movement for abortion rights in Ireland.²⁰ Tracing the outlines of what I term the ‘embodied infrastructure’ of the campaign to Repeal the 8th amendment, I explore the influence of particular embodied encounters and (shared) bodily experiences, as well as the role of specific affective experiences to actuate and propel activist bodies into the spaces of protest. Concretely, I investigate the mobilising effects of the ‘negative’ feelings activists experienced – namely anger, indignation and shame – surrounding the death of Savita Halappanavar (a migrant woman who died of a septic miscarriage after being denied a life-saving abortion in Ireland in 2012). Moreover, I examine the experiences of Irish activists with ‘Pro-Life’ protest objects (specifically, graphic photographic billboard displays) as consciousness-raising, politicising embodied encounters.

With the framework of ‘embodied infrastructure’, I am borrowing from and building upon Jean-Pierre Reed’s (2015) musings on the ‘subjective infrastructure’ of social movements (947). Reviewing Deborah Gould’s (2009) work on the role of emotions in AIDS activism, Reed (2015) deduces that ‘affect, in combination with emotional habitus and moral shocks’ operate as the ‘subjective infrastructure from which a culture of political activism is animated’ (947). In her pathbreaking research on the ACT Up organization, Gould (2009) defines the ‘emotional habitus’ as the ‘socially constituted, prevailing ways of feeling and emoting, as well as the embodied, axiomatic understandings and norms about feelings and their expression’ (10). Illustrating the relationship between the emotional habitus and political mobilisation,

²⁰ John Kelly’s mobilization theory ‘identifies under which conditions “individuals are transformed into collective actors willing and able to create and sustain collective organization and engage in collective action”’ (Kelly 1998 in Holgate, Simms and Tapia 2018, 1).

Reed (2015) explains how the emotional habitus ‘gets at the contingent potentialities of feeling and emoting that shape (but do not determine) the navigation of political terrains’ (942).

Intensive affective experiences such as grief and despair work, Gould (2009) clarifies, to stimulate and in some cases, to reconfigure or re-arrange the emotional habitus, as activists urgently strive to understand what is happening to them and to make sense of what they are feeling. In the case of the AIDS activist movement in the U.S., Gould explains how the *Bowers Vs Hardwick* Supreme Court ruling in 1986 – which criminalised private consensual sex between homosexual men – worked as a ‘moral shock’, confronting queer people with ‘the extent of their outsider status’ and inducing a heightened sense of indignation and rage amongst the gay community in the United States (Gould 2009, 134).²¹ These feelings operated ultimately, Gould (2009) illustrates, to foster a ‘counterhegemonic emotional habitus’, expanding the ‘previous political horizons’ of AIDS activist groups and ultimately, paving the way for the development of a more explicitly ‘confrontational, direct-action’ movement (134).

With the framework of ‘embodied infrastructure’ then, I want to investigate the subjective and collective emotional experiences which may have facilitated the mobilisation of abortion activists in Ireland and to analyse the experience of the activist body as it moves through social space, paying close attention to the potentially consciousness-raising and politicising effects of particular *embodied encounters*. As described in Chapter Three, phenomenological analyses pay close attention to the orientation of the body-in-space, asking which objects is the body oriented towards? And how do such orientations act as a mechanism to discipline the subject-body? As Sara Ahmed (2006) explains ‘phenomenology helps us to consider how sexuality involves ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space’ (67). I am borrowing as well here from the work of Lowe and Hayes (2019) on anti-abortion activism in the U.K. and specifically from their conceptualisation of public space as ‘governed by

²¹ Moral shocks, according to Jasper (1998) occur when ‘an unexpected event’ catalyses ‘such a sense of outrage’ that an individual becomes ‘inclined toward political action’ (409).

relations of power' where 'the meaning of abortion is often negatively culturally defined' (336). Lowe and Hayes (2019) describe confrontations with anti-abortion activism as a 'specific form of gendered public encounter' (333).

After I began conducting fieldwork in autumn 2019, it quickly became clear that one specific event had played a hugely important role in mobilising Irish activists to become part of the abortion rights movement. In June 2012, *Youth Defence*, Ireland's 'most active' pro-life organisation launched its now infamous 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart' campaign. The campaign entailed a series of visual 'adverts' which appeared as billboards and posters all across Ireland's majority cities. The campaign included two variations of the same advertisement: one featuring an image of a tearful woman's face and the other showcasing a foetus sucking its thumb. Both images were overlaid with the text 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart. There's Always A Better Answer' (Morse 2012). In the weeks following the launch of the campaign, the Advertising Standards Agency of Ireland (ASAI) received almost 70 complaints in relation to the billboards. Speaking at a senate debate, Socialist Ivana Bacik described the posters as 'offensive', 'misleading' and as 'amounting to false advertising' (O'Connell 2012). In particular, Bacik contested the usage of imagery depicting 'a foetus at more than 18 weeks' (ibid).

Following Bacik's comments, debates around 'censorship' quickly ensued. In an op-ed, Niamh Ui Bhriain (2012) of the *Life Institute* (another anti-abortion organisation) wrote that the posters served simply to 'bring the reality of abortion into focus' (Ui Bhriain 2012).²² Although the ASAI were ultimately unable to act on the *Youth Defence* Campaign - which as a non-commercial organisation, fell outside of its remit - the publication of the 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart' campaign served as a hugely important moment in the development of the Irish pro-choice movement as individuals irked with the *Youth Defence* campaign banded together to make complaints to the advertising authority. It was the *Youth Defence* campaign which

²² The *Life Institute* is a non-profit organisation which 'promotes the sanctity of human life and works to protect the family'. Its aim is to 'make the public more informed, more aware and more involved in the work necessary to build a Culture of Life' (Life Institute, n.d.).

catalysed the formation of the *Irish Choice Network*, which would later go on to become the *Abortion Rights Campaign*. I wondered what it was about the encounter with the *Youth Defence* campaign which worked so effectively to politicise Irish activists? Saoirse explained her memories of the billboard campaign as follows:

So, I got involved in 2011 when Youth Defence put their abortion campaign posters around Dublin. I hadn't been involved in abortion activism before that, but they really pissed me off. I found some like-minded people on Facebook and we started having these demos outside the Dàil, just saying 'Who the hell are these people?', making complaints to the advertising authority. We were basically just saying 'who are these people?' and actually what is the situation? So, we set up ARC, as the Irish Choice Network.

I met Saoirse at an activist space in Dublin's city centre. She was in her early 30's and worked in higher education. She was in the midst of a meeting when I arrived for our interview. While I waited, I occupied myself observing the various types of pro-choice paraphernalia strewn about the lobby. I paused to look at an early iteration of a Socialist Party 'Repeal' poster. In simple, capitalised font and block colours, it read 'Women's Lives Matter. Repeal the 8th'. I remarked to myself how this more explicitly feminist messaging had been side-lined during the referendum campaign in 2018. Moments later, Saoirse came tumbling down the stairs, rousing me from my reflection. She apologised for keeping me waiting and offered me something to drink. In the meeting room, she cleared some space for me to sit down. I asked her what it was about the *Youth Defence* advertisements which spurred her to become involved in abortion activism. She explained:

I remember exactly the first time I saw one. I was standing on Crowe Street on the train platform, I was on my way to work. And there's this billboard, a full-sized billboard and a stock photo of woman crying and the caption says 'Abortion tears her life apart' and then there was these other ones saying, well they had pictures of fetuses in utero saying something like 'Don't murder me', or something like that, it was in the 'voice' of the fetus. And I had no experience myself of abortion. But I had a good friend who had gone through it. So, I only tangentially understood what it might have been like. It just hit me the wrong way, and I was so tempted-

there was like a peeling corner, and I was just so tempted to just rip the poster down and I knew obviously, it's a train station, there's cameras everywhere. Nowadays, I absolutely would. But I didn't know if I was on my own feeling that way, 'cause this was all brand new.

The 'new-ness' of the *Youth Defence* campaign was reiterated by Mairead, who also became involved in pro-choice activism after the publication of the 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart' posters. Mairead was in her late thirties and was born and raised in a rural townland in the South of the country. She worked in youth sexual health education. Prior to the Repeal campaign, her "*only activism*" (as she described it) was her involvement in the local Youth Club. She described how she came into contact with other pro-choice activists through a *Facebook* group which was set up in opposition to the 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart' campaign entitled 'Unlike Youth Defence, I Trust Women'. Describing the members of this coalition as "*just a group of angry men and women who got annoyed at a billboard*", Mairead explained how from the first protest against the *Youth Defence* campaign - which attracted around 50 people - the first annual 'March for Choice' (which saw 1,000 pro-choice activists take to the Dublin streets) was born. She described her memories of the *Youth Defence* campaign as follows:

When the Youth Defence billboards went up, the ones that were like 'Abortion Tears Her Life Apart' and that kind of thing, I hadn't been involved in any abortion activism but there was something about when the billboards went out. Nobody in the country was talkin' about abortion. There was nothing to do around the 8th, there was nothing to do around the legislation. There was nothing going on and then these billboards just popped up everywhere. There was a massive one that popped up outside the train station and it annoyed me every day on the way into work. I was just like 'Nobody has said a thing about looking for abortion in this country'. And there was a few of my friends who I was saying this to... I was like 'Have you seen these billboards?', 'What is going on?' and then a few of us went out one night for a few drinks and we were saying 'We should do something, we should have some sort of a march about it or let them know we're annoyed'.

The publication of the *Youth Defence* campaign was a deeply significant ‘event’ then in the formation of the Irish pro-choice movement. In sociological terms, an ‘event’ can be defined as ‘an occurrence that is remarkable in some way – one that is widely noted and commented on by contemporaries’ (Sewell 1996, 842). William Sewell (1996) clarifies events as ‘occurrences that have momentous consequences, that in some sense “change the course of history”’ (842). For Sewell (1996), an event results in the ‘transformation of structures’ (843). That is, events entail a ‘rupture of some kind’ or a ‘surprising break with routine practice’ (ibid). Whilst events can sometimes be ‘neutralized, reabsorbed’ or even ‘forcefully repressed’, they may also ‘touch off a chain of occurrences that durably transforms previous structures and practices’ (Sewell 1996, 843). In affective terms, ‘events’ can spark a ‘change in tone and sentiment’ or an alteration of normative ‘feeling states’ (Gould 2009, 133).

Mairead’s testimony offers important clues as to how the *Youth Defence* campaign indeed did constitute a ‘break with routine practice’ (Sewell 1996, 843). Her indignance was palpable as she described to me how, at the time of the launch of the ‘Abortion Tears Her Life Apart’ campaign, “*nobody had said anything about lookin’ for an abortion in this country*”. Pointing to the lack of a cohesive abortion rights movement at that period, Mairead clarified how, when the *Youth Defence* posters were published “*there was nothin’ to do around the 8th, there was nothin’ to do around the legislation*”. Mairead seemed to imply some sort of unspoken agreement as regards the mutual silence of abortion-seekers and the anti-abortion lobby. Her words reminded me of Ann Rossiter’s (2009) description of ‘Ireland’s hidden diaspora’ who return home after accessing abortions in the UK to ‘never speak’ about their ‘ordeal’ again (35). I wondered whether, perhaps, the return for their complete silence was implicitly understood as some degree of political safeguarding from the most aggressive of the ‘pro-life’ campaigning? (ibid). Mairead continued:

I think it was just the thing of ‘Abortion Tears Her Life Apart’ and I was kind of going, well I’ve never had an abortion, but I have friends who had. Every so often it would be like ‘Oh, such a body had to get the boat’ or ‘somebody’s gone to England’ or something like that. And it just- it sort of triggered something like... Why are you putting up anti-abortion posters

when the hoops that somebody has to jump through to get one are so hard that by the time somebody got to England, they were set in their decision? It was only later that we found out the amount of money they would have for these billboards and that sort of thing, and it was just kind of like- everyone was just going along with life and abortion was just this thing that we swept under the carpet and people went over to England. And then suddenly its like 'No to abortion!' but its like, 'Well, nobody can have an abortion!'.

Borrowing from the work of Jacques Rancière, geographer Sydney Calkin (2019b) argues that politics can be conceptualised as an 'aesthetic regime' in so far as it 'divides up the world and its people to limit what can be sensed, seen, said, or acted upon' (5). In the Irish case, Calkin (2019b) expounds, the political narrative of 'abortion-free Ireland' was maintained through a system of 'manufactured invisibility' of reproductive life (5). Through the systematic institutionalisation of women and pregnant people in Magdalene Laundries and 'Mother and Baby Homes' and by 'offshoring' and 'displacing' abortion-seekers to access services in the UK and beyond, the Irish abortion ban worked as a 'geopolitical aesthetic' that served to 'maintain moral and political claims about Irishness' (Calkin 2019b, 8). Not only would the publication of the *Youth Defence* campaign have constituted a break with the aforementioned 'agreement' to safeguard abortion travellers against anti-abortion activism but, I argue, within this 'aesthetic regime', the *Youth Defence* posters can be understood as representing a 'dislocation of normal life' in that they symbolically reinserted abortion and the aborting body into the social landscape (Calkin 2019b, 5; Sewell 1996, 846).

Sewell (1996) indicates how events bring about 'new conceptions' of 'what is possible' and in this way, constitute a 'cultural transformation' (861). The publication of the *Youth Defence* poster campaign can be conceptualised as an important event in the formation of the Irish pro-choice campaign then because, as a 'rupture' to the normative aesthetic regime, it redrew the boundaries in terms of what could be seen, heard, spoken about or felt in relation to abortion and reproductive life in Ireland. In simple terms, the *Youth Defence* campaign materialised the possibility of speaking about and *mobilising* around abortion rights in Ireland both for 'Pro-Life' and for 'Pro-

Choice' advocates too. Additionally, by connecting with others around the *Youth Defence* campaign – through their *Facebook* page, for example – activists like Saorise came to understand that they were not “*on their own*”. The collective identity of the Irish abortion rights movement was thus fortified through the collective opposition to the *Youth Defence* billboards.

I wanted to know more about the specificities of activists' embodied and affective encounters with the *Youth Defence* posters. Muireann – a 40-year-old activist who worked in a non-governmental organisation – recounted her memories of the campaign. Muireann prefaced our interview by telling me that “*growing up in Ireland*” she was “*kind of anti-choice by default*”. She recounted how her feelings began to “*stir*” during the 2002 referendum, when a proposed amendment to remove suicide as grounds for legal abortion was narrowly defeated (Irish Family Planning Authority n.d.). Her feelings changed further, she clarified, when she found herself assisting a friend in accessing an illegal abortion on a business trip overseas.²³ Although she had no experience of abortion previously, she explained how there was “*no question*” for her other than to “*support*” her friend. She revealed how the experience helped her to realise that she was “*quite pro-choice as it turns out*”. Muireann recalled being concerned about how the *Youth Defence* posters would affect her friend – the one she assisted in accessing an abortion abroad – who came to visit her in Ireland around the same period that the billboard campaign was launched:

So, then she came to visit me in Ireland...when all those horrible Youth Defence posters and billboards were going up all over the place and I remember ringing her and saying 'I'm so sorry that you are gonna have to see, all these horrible things...like, I'm so sorry that youre going to have to see that' because, it feels like judgement, it feels like constant judgement.

²³ This experience of reconceptualising abortion morality or becoming involved in abortion activism in the wake of assisting someone in accessing a clandestine abortion was recounted to me by a number of the activists I interviewed. One interpretation is that, by assisting a friend, colleague or family member in negotiating an unplanned pregnancy or in securing access to an illegal abortion, the question of the '(im)morality' of abortion is renegotiated in 'practical' rather than in 'abstract' terms. In short, when faced with the 'social conditions and concrete situations in which moral judgements take place', questions of 'life' are superseded by more 'pragmatic' considerations around health and wellbeing, for example (Pollack Petchesky 1990, 360).

Feminist scholars have analysed at length the role of visual media in (anti-)abortion campaigning. Social historian Barbara Duden (1993), for example, has argued how the publication of Lennart Nilsson's photographic exposition on 'intrauterine development' in *Life* magazine in 1965 facilitated 'a new kind of seeing' which implied 'the disappearance of the frontier between visible things that are visibly re-presented and invisible things to which representation imputes visibility' (16).²⁴ Although, as Duden (1993) describes, Nilsson's images constituted a 'pervasive illusion' – in that they featured foetal remains as opposed to live, in vitro foetuses – the result was 'misplaced concreteness' about the ontology and teleology of foetal development (25). Through the proliferation of foetal imagery, anti-abortion campaigners have largely succeeded in substantiating ideas around 'foetal personhood' by 'making the foetus a public presence' (Pollack Petchesky 1987, 264).²⁵

Arguably, what remains understudied in feminist scholarship on abortion politics however is how abortion activists experience the *encounter* with graphic foetal imagery and other 'Pro-Life' protest objects, on an embodied and affective level. The question here is not simply whether these images are accepted by abortion activists as scientifically accurate depictions of abortion or pregnancy development – they often are not, as Senator Bacik's comments illustrate above – or even whether they facilitate the same affective attachments to foetal 'life'. Rather, I am interested in how women and gestating people – the very people whose bodies these images purport to represent – experience these images in terms of their content *and* intent, as well as how they experience the *encounter* with these posters as material objects in public space. Muireann's testimony offers important clues in this regard. She explained:

I used to walk down the canal every day and there were obviously posters, and a lot...most of the posters were like a pregnant belly or a womb, or disembodied floating kind of embryo. So,

²⁴ Nilsson's photographic exhibition entitled 'A Child is Born: The Drama of Life Before Birth - An Unprecedented Photographic Feat in Color' appeared in the April 30, 1965, edition of *Life* magazine (Duden 1993, 11).

²⁵ More recent scholarship has examined how activists advocating for abortion rights respond to and counter the use of 'foetal imagery' by deploying visual framing strategies in their own work (Sutton and Vacarezza 2020).

that was the only representation you saw of yourself for all those months, was a womb. Not even a pregnant person, just a belly, you know. And it was like they were looking down on you, the judgement and the shame. And again the echoes of these decades of how women were viewed and how our bodies were policed, just looking down on you from these posters.

Describing how “the echoes of these decades of how women were viewed and how our bodies were policed” were “just looking down on you from these posters”, Muireann illustrates how these posters served as a manifestation and extension of the historic, systematic and violent surveillance of gendered, reproductive bodies in Ireland. In their discussion of anti-abortion aural rhetoric, Lentjes et al. (2020) describe how, although such rhetoric is not ‘legally characterized as true threat, incitement or assaultive speech’, the noises and sounds made by anti-abortion activists outside clinics and doctors’ offices are often perceived as ‘intimidation and harassment’ by women and pregnant people passing through these spaces (423). Borrowing from Berlant’s (2011) framework of ‘crisis ongoingness’ which aims to move the analytical focus beyond instances of ‘large-scale trauma or crisis’ towards ‘everyday scenarios’, the authors describe how during the otherwise mundane experience of ‘walking down the sidewalk’, women are subjected to the sounds of anti-abortion protestors as a form of ‘non-consensual listening’ which, the authors argue, can itself be experienced as a form of ‘violence’ (Lentjes et al. 2020, 424).

Lentjes et al. (2020) characterise anti-abortion protestors as possessing ‘acoustical agency’, deploying sound ‘as a verbal expression of their embodied, patriarchal, political agency’ (437). In this vein, such speech acts are experienced as ‘upsetting’, they emphasise, not only because of the ‘content’ of what is being said, but because of its ‘intent’ (ibid). Lentjes’ et al. (2020) framework is useful here in helping us to understand the embodied experience of activists like Muireann with the *Youth Defence* posters which are conceptualised and felt as an ‘objectifying’ and ‘invasive’ force which assume public ‘ownership of feminised ears’ and eyes (425, 423). In their research on anti-abortion clinic activism in the U.K., Lowe and Hayes (2019) offer a similarly helpful analytical contribution. Drawing upon Goffman’s (1963) theory of ‘focused versus unfocused interaction’, Lowe and Hayes (2019) contend that the

failure of anti-abortion activists to extend 'civil disattention' to women and abortion-seekers works as a form of 'public harassment' (335).

It is important to consider then how the existence of anti-abortion visual imagery campaigns like the *Youth Defence* billboards can *shape* and *transform* public space and particularly the embodied and affective experience of women and abortion-seekers as they move through these environments. Describing the terms of her encounter with the *Youth Defence* posters as material objects in public space, Muireann invokes the significance of their spatial configuration and highlights the significance of the literal placement of the posters – which often hang at the top of lampposts or electricity poles. As Muireann takes her walk along the canal, she describes how she experiences the posters “*looking down*” on her from above, emanating “*judgement*” and “*shame*”. The placement of the posters, in an elevated location, thus works to remind Muireann of the authoritative and supposedly ‘superior’ moral stance of the anti-abortion lobby and by extension, implicates the ‘lowly’ and ‘immoral’ position of the aborting subject.

In terms of the content of the posters, Muireann interestingly indicates a positive form of *identification*: describing the billboard campaign as “*the only representation you saw of yourself for months*”, Muireann explains how she apparently sees herself represented (however inaccurately) in these images. She takes issue with the specific ‘representation’ of embodiment these posters depict however, obfuscating or erasing the “*pregnant person*” who becomes “*just a belly*” or “*womb*”. Reed (2015) describes social movements as ‘nurturing sites of counter-hegemonic subjectivity’ (942). Perhaps, in this vein, we can conceptualise abortion rights movements as ‘nurturing sites’ for *counter-hegemonic embodiment*, too? (ibid). Muireann’s testimony illustrates how her encounter with the *Youth Defence* billboard campaign fostered a process of self-reflection in terms of her own understanding of and relationship to her reproductive body. The impetus for her mobilisation within the abortion rights movement can thus be conceptualised as being informed by a desire to challenge the highly objectified image of the feminine reproductive body in the *Youth Defence* posters, but also by a desire to transform hegemonic understandings and

representations of the feminised, gestating body within Irish society and culture at large.

Returning then to the idea of the 'embodied infrastructure' of the movement to repeal the 8th amendment, it can be argued that activists' shared bodily experiences and encounters with the *Youth Defence* billboard campaign were hugely significant in terms of mobilising individuals to become active members of the campaign for abortion rights. In terms of their embodied encounter with these billboards as material objects in social space, activists sought to contest the culture of reproductive coercion and surveillance which the billboard campaign exemplified and reproduced, and to challenge the material and symbolic domination of the anti-abortion lobby in public space. Identifying (with) the fragmentation of their reproductive bodies depicted in these posters, activists like Saoirse and Muireann come to experience a sense of *embodied solidarity* with all of those whose bodies are violently objectified under the photographic gaze, and more importantly are moved by a desire to nurture and make visible alternative conceptualisations and representations of their gendered, reproductive bodily lives.

The Death of Savita Halappanavar: Tracing the Mobilising Affects of (Feminist) Anger and (Middle-Class) Indignation

Four months after the publication of the *Youth Defence* billboard campaign, on the 21st of October 2012, Ms Savita Halappanavar – who was 17 weeks pregnant at the time – self-referred to Galway University Hospital complaining with lower back pain. After initially being sent home without a diagnosis, Ms. Halappanavar returned to the hospital later that day with 'unbearable pain', where doctors finally diagnosed 'an inevitable/impending pregnancy loss' (McCarthy 2016, 14). Throughout the management of her miscarriage, Ms. Halappanavar's membranes ruptures causing her to contract sepsis. Her requests to be induced were denied on account of the fact that a foetal heartbeat could still be detected. As a result, and in light of the sanctions imposed by the 8th amendment, no interventions which would potentially harm the

foetus could be made. Ms. Halappanavar died on October 28th, 2012, at 31 years of age. A subsequent report into her care by the Health Service Executive (HSE) identified an ‘over-emphasis on the need not to intervene until the fetal heartbeat stopped’ and an ‘under-emphasis on...managing the risk of infection and sepsis in the mother’ (HSE 2013a in McCarthy 2016, 15).

Social movement scholar Linda Connolly (2020) explains that Ms. Halappanavar’s death was a ‘key turning point’ that shifted the focus of Irish pro-choice activism ‘from the rights of mobile women with means forced to discontinue their unwanted pregnancies in Britain’ to ‘the 8th being a life-threatening risk and danger to pregnant, immobile and incarcerated women in Irish maternity hospitals’ (51). The *Association for the Improvement of Maternity Services Ireland* (AIMS) described the 8th amendment as a ‘spectre’ which hangs ‘over the Irish maternity services’, affecting ‘everyone who takes decisions related to women’s care’ (AIMS Ireland 2017, para. 3). Following her death, Ms. Halappanavar became the ‘widely accepted symbol of the harm the Eighth Amendment can cause to women’ (Rivetti 2019, 184). Her ‘economic status’ (Ms. Halapanavar was a dentist), Paola Rivetti argues, resonated particularly with ‘neoliberal Ireland’ (ibid). Investigating the role of racism in Ms. Halappanavar’s death, Rivetti critiques how ‘pro-choice state elites and policymakers[...]consumed her as the icon of why the Eighth had to go’ whilst simultaneously ‘silencing[...]the fact that she was a migrant’ (ibid). This critique was echoed by Eithne, an abortion activist who was also involved in anti-racist organising:

What was really frustrating and still is, is the use of Savita’s image. It’s just so disturbing on all fronts ‘cause they don’t give a shit about migrants, they still don’t and they continue to use that image. You have people in republican groups who are like ‘class analysis is the only analysis’ and it’s like, Savita was very middle class, class didn’t save her. So, from all sides, your analysis is super reductionist.

Despite sustained debate around the usage of Savita’s image inside of the mainstream abortion rights movement, there seems little doubt that Ms. Halappanavar’s death mobilised a new cohort of abortion activists, with over half of the activists I

interviewed citing her death as having catalysed or concretised their involvement in the campaign to Repeal the 8th amendment. Indeed, Ms. Halappanavar's death was another hugely important 'event' in the formation of the Irish abortion rights movement, constituting what social movement theorists might term a 'moral shock' (Sewell 1996; Jasper 1998). As James Jasper (1998) describes, moral shocks are often 'the first step toward recruitment into social movements' (409). Whether triggered by 'highly publicized events' or 'personal experiences', moral shocks often induce a 'state of shock' or a 'bodily feeling on a par with vertigo' (ibid). Jasper (1998) explains while some people who experience a 'moral shock' simply 'resign themselves' to their situation, for others, they manage to 'channel' the experience into 'righteous indignation and political activity' (409). Many of the activists I spoke to talked about where they were when and how they felt when they heard the news about Ms. Halappanavar's death:

I remember really well hearing about Savita Halapanavaar. I remember I was at home; I was going to a meeting in the Townsend Hotel. I remember hearing it on the radio and I was cycling into town, I couldn't get it out of my head. I remember arriving at this hotel and telling people that I worked with that this was after happening and people were like 'Oh my God'. That was a huge turning point for me, it was like a bolt of lightning suddenly back into 'This cannot happen'. But I think it was just such a body-blow for a lot of women in Ireland. You know, just like 'My God'. And I had a friend who was working in the hospital that night, and it really hit her.²⁶*

Ailbhe was 51 years old, had three children and worked in community education. She came from an urban, working-class background and had become involved in abortion activism through Leftist politics, socialist feminism and trade union organising. Ailbhe was 14 years old when the 8th amendment was inserted into the Constitution in 1983. She described her memories of the 1983 referendum and recounted how, at the time, "there was no question that you were anything other than Pro-Life". She explained how her own feelings around abortion had changed in her early twenties when a

²⁶ *The hospital where Ms. Halappanavar died.

friend experienced an unplanned pregnancy overseas and was able to access an abortion on a college campus. She told me how hearing about an abortion “*in context*”, it “*wasn’t such a big deal*”. After taking a hiatus from activism to raise her children, she became involved again in 2012. When I asked her about her motivations for coming back into the movement, she recounted the significance of Ms. Halappanavar’s death.

The language Ailbhe used to describe the experience of learning about Ms. Halappanavar’s death – describing it as a “*body blow*” for Irish women, and as having “*really hit*” her friend who was working in the hospital that evening – implies the ‘visceral’ and ‘bodily’ nature of the ‘moral shock’ (Jasper 1998, 409). Her description of Ms. Halappanavar’s death as a “*bolt of lightning*” indicates the ‘disjunctive’ quality of the moral shock which ‘jars you into a state of disbelief’ and ‘forces you to reconsider your habitual going-along’ (Gould 2009, 134-135). Recounting her experience of learning about Ms. Halappanavar’s death, Ailbhe paints a picture of a dramatic, *embodied* consciousness-change, catalysed by a violent act of institutional misogyny and racism. Describing the vigil she attended for Ms. Halappanavar in her local town, Eabha described the palpable emotions which characterised the event:

Anger. Rage... She was so young and every single one of us knows that that could have been fucking avoided. Every one of us. Every parent, every sister, every brother, every person who has ever met a woman in their lives knows that that young woman should have been saved. There’s no reason that she should have died. And therefore, everyone of us who could be pregnant ourselves or has a person in our lives who could have been pregnant knew that we were in danger. And that’s the way it felt, we were in danger. And it felt so unfair. It’s terrible that we would not only grieve her but also feel fear for ourselves...It felt to me like ‘This is what they think of women, they don’t give a fuck, alive or dead, they don’t care. She’s nothing, except a container.’ That was probably the beginnings of rage...for an awful lot of activists.

Eabha’s testimony indicates how, following Ms. Halappanavar’s death, the ‘negative’ affects which circulated between and amongst activist bodies worked to produce what can be described, using Gould’s terminology, as a ‘counterhegemonic emotional habitus’ where anger and rage became redirected towards the government in a more

explicitly combative manner (Gould 2009,134). Sewell (1996) describes how historical events are 'characterized by heightened emotion' and are also 'punctuated by ritual' (865, 868). In the days and weeks following Ms. Halappanavar's death, huge numbers of demonstrations as well as vigils were organised in various locations across the country. On November 14th, 2012, more than 2,000 demonstrators gathered outside of Government Buildings at Leinster House in Dublin's city centre, in an event co-organised by the *Irish Choice Network*, the *United Left Alliance* and the socialist, anti-austerity party, *People Before Profit*. Sinead Kennedy of the *Irish Choice Network* described how 'anger' at Ms. Halappanavar's death would extend 'beyond Ireland' and vowed that if the government refused to act on the issue of abortion, the pro-choice movement would make it their mission to 'bring this government down' (Kennedy, O'Boyle, and Kane 2021).

In this way, emotional experiences and particularly, the so-called negative emotions of anger and rage can be understood as constituting an important affective 'fuel' to the activity of the Irish abortion rights movement (Holmes 2004). The anger Eabha describes here is both *relational* and *intentional*: it emerges as a result of the perceived injustice committed against another and involves a particular orientation towards an object or social problem (Ahmed 2010; Holmes 2004). In relation to Ms. Halappanavar's death then, anger and rage can be conceptualised as productive affects which, by physically propelling bodies into the space of protest, translate themselves into 'action' which works 'in service of' a different 'vision or future' (Lorde 1981, 8).

Importantly, Eabha's testimony indicates how *indignation* as well as anger served as an affective mobilising force in the wake of Ms. Halappanavar's death. Gould (2009) describes indignation as a 'variation of anger that revolves around the sense that one has suffered an injustice' (143). The injustice of Ms. Halappanavar's death is emphasised by Eabha who insists that "*every one of us knew*" that she "*should have been saved*", that there was "*no reason that she should have died*". Eabha's words illustrate the 'interpretive quality' of the 'moral shock', where the importance of 'understanding oneself and the world and the relation between the two' takes on greater urgency

(Gould 2009, 135).

Eabha explains how Ms. Halappanavar's death forced her to reinterpret her own subjective position vis-à-vis the State's reproductive laws. Her astonishment is tangible as she explained to me how she suddenly realised that *"they don't give a fuck...dead or alive, they don't care"*. In a similar way to how Muireann identified herself with (the bodies depicted in) the *Youth Defence* posters, Eabha's describes how she and *"anyone who could be pregnant"* suddenly recognised or *identified* themselves as being *"in danger"*. In terms of fortifying the 'embodied infrastructure' of the repeal the 8th movement then, these processes of collective identification and the assumption of a shared sense of bodily vulnerability and solidarity served as an important foundation for activist mobilisation.

As Gould (2009) indicates, indignation revolves not only around a sense of injustice but is 'a form of outrage that stems from being spurned or rejected after having thought that you were a member of the club and thus entitled to membership rights and privileges' (143). It appears then that Ms. Halappanavar's death caught the attention, specifically of other middle-class Irish women – particularly White, middle-class women who, whilst safeguarded from the violence of White supremacy and institutional racism which contributed to Ms. Halappanavar's death – were confronted finally with reality of what could potentially befall them in the case where they were not able to exercise their racial and mobility privilege and seek alternative forms of care outside of the Irish healthcare system. Ms. Halappanavar's death illustrates once again the expansive power of the 8th amendment and the 'chilling effect' it created on healthcare practitioners whose hands were effectively tied in terms of what care they were legally able to deliver under its remit (Carnegie and Roth 2019, 117). This was underlined by Emer, a Black, West-Indian activist who had emigrated to Ireland as a teen:

I think...there are lots of other things that stood out and rang home but...I felt, if this could happen to her, you know...who else could it happen to? Cause there were other cases of migrant women, or marginalised women...and...you could kind of explain it as maybe they weren't

health literate, maybe maybe maybe...lots of maybes, you know? But it struck me because...if...if my friend were a couple weeks further along or she had gotten septic. Then her ability to pay for a flight, pay for an appointment and head over, would be taken away from her. And it really underscored to me that we were operating a two-tier system, one. But that ultimately it didn't matter how much money you had, how educated you were, how literate you were, because if you were truly sick and you could not move...you were stuck...and fairplay to him, in the middle of all his pain and grief, for agreeing to open this up.²⁷ I do think that because they were immigrants, I think people were willing to kind of dismiss him and then realised, when he was able to advocate for himself, I think it struck home with some people. And it sounds perverse, but I think it resonated with other middle-income people and young people, like you can't just throw money at this problem.*

Emer emigrated to Ireland from the West Indies when she was 18 years old. After finishing her degree, she decided to stay in Ireland and began her career as a healthcare professional. She explained how, when she arrived in Ireland, she “*knew that you couldn't get an abortion on the island*”. The “*actual reality*” of the law, she says, only became apparent to her when her colleague got pregnant “*in a situation she didn't wanna be in*”. After accompanying her colleague to access an abortion in England, Emer became more interested in the regulation of abortion in Ireland and enrolled in a course to learn about the legal ramifications of the 8th amendment in medical care. She explained how she learned that there was a culture of “*avoidance*” around the 8th amendment in medical circles. The 8th amendment, she says, was a “*real big grey stripe*” that limited the decision-making and care-giving capacities of medical professionals caring for pregnant people.

Emer emphasised how Savita's case really resonated with her as she was “*so like me*”, an “*educated, financially-independent immigrant*”. Emer's testimony provides a fascinating insight into the intersectional politics of Ms. Halappanavar's death. Firstly, she alludes to how the racialised identities of Savita and her husband, Praveen, played a role in how the news about Ms. Halappanavar's death was originally received in the

²⁷ * Savita's Husband, Mr. Praveen Halappanavar.

Irish media; explaining how *“because they were immigrants...people were willing to dismiss him”*. She goes on to clarify how, it was only when people saw that Mr. Halappanavar was *“able to advocate for himself”* (that he had the social, cultural and financial capital to take a case against the Health Service Executive for negligence causing Savita’s death) that the case *“struck home with people”*. Emer even goes so far as to explicitly state that Ms. Halappanavar’s story resonated more with *“other middle-income people”* who realised that they *“can’t just throw money at this problem”*, that they too could find themselves *“stuck”* at the mercy of the system where, as Emer herself described it *“the vagueness of the law hampered delivery of healthcare”*.

It appears then that Ms. Halappanavar’s death forced large swathes of the population who might previously have considered themselves shielded from the ‘worst’ of Ireland’s abortion laws to reevaluate their position vis-à-vis the 8th amendment. The recognition of this *shared condition of embodied vulnerability* under the 8th amendment fostered the collective identity of the abortion rights movement and bolstered solidarity between otherwise disparate groups. In relation to the propensity of particular ‘negative’ feelings to draw activists into direct action, indignation was specifically relevant it appears in terms of the mobilisation of middle-class, White women who were confronted suddenly with life-endangering nature of the 8th amendment and the extent of the government’s disregard for the safety and wellbeing of women and pregnant people alike.

Embodying White, Postcolonial Shame: A ‘Meaningful’ Force for Politicisation?

In the final section of this chapter, I conclude my analysis of the ‘embodied infrastructure’ of the campaign to Repeal the 8th Amendment, investigating specifically the role of ‘shame’ as an affective force which worked to mobilise Irish abortion activists following the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012. Jill Locke (2007) argues how ‘shame occupies a well-established place in the activist toolkit’ (146). Locke (2007) posits that the performance of ‘shaming’ works to ‘build solidarity’, adding that ‘if shame is felt for the *right* reasons, toxic forms of shame may be

alleviated' (146-147). In her analysis of the official government apology to the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries, Clara Fischer (2017) takes a cynical view of collective expressions of shame which she argues work primarily as a performative mechanism to allow the nation-state to appear repentant without necessarily engaging in any material acts of reparations. Muireann identified how many of the vigils and events organised to memorialise Ms. Halappanavar were characterised by a sense of anger and sadness, but also by an overwhelming feeling of (collective) shame:

I remember going to the vigil, I was working around the corner and I thought, I'll just go down to it and see. It was really sad, people were really upset. It was very-very dignified and very respectful but this simmering feeling of anger, and shame. I think just people were so ashamed. And that feeling of like 'OK I'm not the only one who feels like this, this is something very collective'.

Explicating the historically important role of shame in Irish reproductive politics, Fischer (2017) describes how in the early twentieth century the national and religious identity of Catholic Ireland was built via a process of 'disidentification' with (protestant) Britain (753). The newly formed Irish Free State constructed itself as morally superior to its Anglian counterpart, with this moral superiority being premised on the supposed 'gendered' and 'sexual purity' of Irish women (Fischer 2019, 38; O'Shaughnessy 2021, 2). In this vein, the criminalisation of abortion became synonymous with the 'virtue of Irish women' and subsequently, with the inherent virtuous-ness of the Irish nation-state itself (Fischer 2019, 37). Abortion-seekers, by contrast, were henceforth constituted as 'shameful moral failures incapable of living up to the standards[...]required of them as symbols of the nation' (Fischer 2019, 41).

Interestingly, the civil society campaign *Together for Yes* which advocated for a 'Yes' vote in the abortion rights referendum in 2018 appeared to have strategically mobilised this national preoccupation with 'shame' and 'shaming', displacing 'shame' away from the figure of the aborting women and onto the country as a whole, now constituted as 'shameful' for its lack of compassion for abortion-seekers (O'Shaughnessy 2021, 9). I wanted to know more about this collective experience of

‘shame’ surrounding Ms. Halappanavar’s death and asked Orlaith to explain what it was about this case that caused Irish activists to feel so ‘ashamed’ of their country:

I think it was to do with the fact that this was a woman that was married, and she wanted that baby...One of the things that really struck me as well was the fact that she was Indian, that she wasn't Irish. And I always kind of told my friends at the time, if the roles were reversed and if this was an Irish woman in India that died because she couldn't access a health service, we'd be going 'What a terrible country! What a disgusting terrible country?' We should be applying that here. She wasn't an Irish native. She deserved better treatment than she got. So, I think it was a combination of her being married, wanted pregnancy, the fact that she wasn't Irish. That made it all the more like 'Jesus, you came from India to have a better life'. And she died here because we couldn't give her treatment.

Orlaith’s explanation that Ms. Halappanavar’s case attracted public sympathy because she was a “married” woman with a “wanted” pregnancy, as opposed to a “young” person who “got pregnant” through “unprotected sex”, exemplifies a type of ‘good’ versus ‘bad abortions’ trope typical of contemporary political debate surrounding abortion rights (Lowe 2016, 66). ‘Good abortions’ are those where the person in question has a ‘good’ reason to terminate their pregnancy, such as ‘poverty, sexual violence or maternal age’; ‘bad abortions’ are ‘repeat’ abortions or those wherein the pregnant person has failed to use contraception (Lowe 2016, 66; O’Shaughnessy 2021, 6). As Orlaith explains, in the case of Ms. Halappanavar, her status as a (heterosexual) married woman who “wanted that baby” facilitated a greater degree of public sympathy in relation to her death – her maternal identity (assumed already by virtue of her ‘chosen’ pregnancy) making her life inherently more ‘grievable’. Orlaith’s emphasis that Ms. Halappanavar’s case “struck” her on account of the fact that she was not, as she describes, “an Irish native” warrants further analysis.

Weerawardhana (2018, para. 5) describes that whilst the deployment of Ms. Halappanavar’s image in the Repeal the 8th campaign is often touted as an example of ‘Irish multiculturalism’, this is a deeply flawed and problematic assumption. Wade (2017) describes multiculturalism as the idea that ‘notionally separate cultures can

interact and mix on equal and inclusive terms, thus increasing democracy and perhaps resulting in an endless and nonhierarchical proliferation of hybrids' (14). Weerawardhana (2018) explains that while Ms. Halappanavar's status as a 'well-educated professional with a light skin tone' made her a 'highly marketable' mascot, she remains one of a huge number of migrant women who have died at the hands of a 'misogynistic and white supremacist Irish healthcare system' (para. 13).

Indeed, in relation to maternal morbidity, Ireland has historically and consistently reported a disproportionately higher rate of maternal deaths among women of colour in the national maternity system (O'Hare et al. 2020). The Confidential Maternal Death Inquiry Report for 2016-2018 showed an overrepresentation of migrant and ethnic minority women who accounted for 30% of maternal deaths but only 23% of Irish maternities during the period of 2009-2018 (O'Hare et al. 2020, 20). In 2010, Ms. Bimbo Onanuga suffered a cardiac arrest and died in the Rotunda hospital in Dublin after being induced with misoprostol. As Ronit Lentin (2015) writes, in contrast to Ms. Halappanavar's death, Ms. Onanuga's death received 'virtually no media attention' (180). With this in mind, expressions of 'shame' in relation to the death of Ms. Halappanavar's – a "*non-native*" to Ireland, to use Orlaith's terms – must be further examined.

As I have described elsewhere, the 'morally superior' identity which Ireland constructed for itself in the postcolonial period was contingent not only on its 'virtuous' treatment of 'the unborn' but was predicated on the learned 'racial positioning' of White Irish people as 'saviours' of Black and Brown bodies (O'Shaughnessy 2021, 10; Lentin 2004, 303). Irish-Israeli sociologist Ronit Lentin (2004) argues that, owing to the historical colonialist enterprises of Irish religious missionaries, White Irish people have been conditioned to regard Black and Brown people, particularly those from the Global South as 'passive victims' who can 'only be saved by the good offices of the Catholic Church' (303). It is this same 'saviour' relationality which White Irish people continue to deploy in order to 'distance' themselves from migrants and communities of colour inside the country today (Lentin 2015 in O'Shaughnessy 2021, 10). So, whilst Ms. Onanuga's death received 'virtually

no media attention' on account of her 'pregnant African body' which was construed as the 'epitome of illegality', the death of Ms. Halappanavar (a middle-class, neoliberal subject) garnered massive international media attention and served to illustrate the failure of the Irish state to live up to its 'compassionate' and 'charitable' status (Lentin 2015, 180; O'Shaughnessy 2021, 10).

Arguably then, public expressions of shame in relation to Ms. Halappanavar's death worked at one level to 'recover Ireland's "virtuousness"' and are 'symptomatic of a wider tension with regards to reconciling Ireland's racial positioning and postcolonial identity in an increasingly secular and multicultural context' (O'Shaughnessy 2021, 10). That being said, shame also operated, it appears, as an effective mobilizing force, propelling large numbers of activist bodies into the political sphere. In this case, whilst shame may have worked as an affective force to draw individual actors into the abortion campaign, the question of the ethics and utility of shame as a mobilizing tool for the Irish abortion movement and as a method of achieving true reproductive justice and autonomy for all women and gestating people in Ireland, remains unclear.

Jill Locke (2007) argues that whilst 'shaming will always be a part of politics', as feminists we should 'focus less on shaming the shamers' and more on 'creating a world that is open to the voices, dreams and imaginations of those who live within the shadow of shame' (149). In sum, whilst shame certainly appears to have constituted an integral element of the embodied infrastructure of the Irish abortion rights movement, perhaps this strategy of shame can only be conceived as truly ethical in the case where the abortion rights movement in Ireland begins to treat women like Ms. Halappanavar not only as an 'object of shame' – whose image can be deployed out for international political expediency – but as subjects of reproductive injustice and as agents of activism in their own rite.

To conclude, this analysis suggests that the embodied encounter of Irish activists with pro-life protest objects (specifically with anti-abortion, graphic foetal imagery), as well as the experience of the negative affects of anger, indignation and shame which circulated between and amongst activist bodies in the aftermath of the death of Savita

Halappanavar in 2012 together formed the 'embodied infrastructure' from which the repeal the 8th campaign was born. The framework of the 'embodied infrastructure' is important then as it highlights how the specific affective and embodied experiences of the activist body as it moves through the world may provide the impetus for political engagement. In this case, Irish activists describe feeling compelled to move against the material and symbolic dominance of the pro-life campaign in the social landscape – manifested in the proliferation of anti-abortion billboards and posters – and explain how their identification with the objectified and fragmented representation of the pregnant subject therein catalysed a sense of embodied solidarity with other bodies regulated under the 8th amendment. In this vein, Irish abortion activists illustrate how the movement for abortion rights functions not only as a campaign for access to abortion care, but as the site for the development of 'counterhegemonic embodiment' too.

Chapter Five: The Embodiment of Protest – The Discursive and Material ‘Politics of Revelation’

‘Coming out’ for Abortion: Reconstructing Embodied Subjectivity and Reasserting Political Agency

In her pathbreaking research on women’s political activism in Argentina, sociologist Barbara Sutton (2007) deploys the terminology of *‘poner el cuerpo’* to describe her understanding of how political agency, in this context, is manifested and constituted through embodied protest activity. With this argument, Sutton (2007) builds upon existing feminist literature which contends that for women, it is precisely the (gendered) body which has functioned as both impediment and entry point to political engagement (Parkins 2000). Translated from the original Spanish, *‘poner el cuerpo’* literally means ‘to put the body’ and in English, signals the idea of ‘putting the body on the line’ or ‘into action’. As Sutton (2007) explains, the concept of *poner el cuerpo* emphasises the significance of ‘bodily participation in social change’, allowing for a reconceptualization of social transformation itself as an ‘embodied, collective project’ (Sutton 2010, 130, 177). In Sutton’s (2010) study, she examines the ways in which bodies are ‘embedded in and significant to political protest’ and moreover, illustrates how, through their involvement in political activity, women activists challenge and transform hegemonic constructions of gendered embodiment, as well as their own understandings of their embodied abilities (171).

In this chapter (and the next), I investigate the *role of the gendered, reproductive body* in the Irish abortion rights movement. Furthermore, inspired by Sutton’s work and building upon my analysis in Chapter Four in relation to the idea of social movements as sites for the nurturance of ‘counter-hegemonic embodiment’, I analyse how Irish pro-choice campaigners *(re)construct their embodied subjectivities* through their activist practices. In the second half of this chapter, I explore activists’ experiences of mass, physical demonstrations to analyse the function of collective embodied practices - such as *marching* and *chanting* - as space-claiming activities which redefine the boundaries of legitimate political engagement. Moreover, I examine these activities as modes of ‘retutoring the body’ which ultimately transform the gendered,

reproductive body from an 'object of discipline' to a 'site of resistance' (Mahmood 2011, 167; O'Keefe 2006, 549). Following this, I examine the ways in which Irish abortion activists deploy their bodies as a *symbol* or *text* in protest activity, exploring the political meanings and values created and attached to particular items of clothing. Here, I focus on the launch of the 'Repeal jumper' in 2016 to investigate the role of what I term 'gestural dress' as a uniquely intimate and affective, embodied protest activity.

Firstly, however, I want to discuss the experience of 'coming out' as a type of embodied political action engaged and mobilised by Irish abortion campaigners. The use of the terminology of 'coming out' in reference to abortion politics remains undertheorized in sociological scholarship. In spite of this, many of the activists I interviewed utilised this vocabulary to describe their experience of disclosing their abortion experiences or of outing themselves as a pro-choice activist. Analysing activists' testimonies, I began to conceptualise activists' experiences of 'coming out' as having two distinct but interconnected bodily valences. In the first instance, 'coming out' is understood as a speech-act or a form of storytelling; wherein individual actors 'speak out' about their personal abortion experiences, in an effort to challenge stereotypical perceptions about *who* abortion-seekers are and *what* the abortion experience entails (Whittier 2012, 15). In the second instance, 'coming out' is conceptualised as involving the physical transition and mass 'public assembly' of activist bodies onto/in the street (Butler 2015, 71). Both modes of action engage a *politics of bodily revelation*, I argue, where activists take public ownership either of their abortion experience or of their pro-choice activist identity.

Initially borrowed by queer communities from the culture of elite debutante balls, the vocabulary of 'coming out of the closet' implies a process 'by which people reveal their sexual identity' (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014, 811). The idea of 'coming out of the closet' implies the possibility of 'casting off secrecy, shame and marginality by affirming one's gay or lesbian identity' (ibid). 'Coming out' is a way to 'transgress' norms in so far as it constitutes an embodied act of '*refusal*'; a refusal to pass as heterosexual, and a refusal to engage in the 'hiding' behaviours normally associated

with (or imposed) upon the shameful/shamed queer subject (Pralat 2020, 276; Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014, 813; Britt and Heise 2000, 254). Here, Orlaith – an activist in her early 30’s – tells me about her decision *not* to ‘come out’ about her abortion experience to other members of the deaf community:

I haven’t really told a whole lot of people in the deaf community, even though it happened 11 or 12 years ago. I still haven’t come out to the deaf community about the fact that I had an abortion, even though I was so strongly involved in the Repeal campaign. Because I know what they’re gonna say about me ‘That’s the only reason she fought for Repeal, because she had one herself’, you know? So, the deaf community were kind of lagging on...because the deaf community don’t have that incidental access to radio. You know, you go into a supermarket, you hear music in the background, your brain is taking in all of this information without you knowing you’re taking it in. Deaf people don’t have access to that same incidental... those debates happening on TV, Joe Duffy Liveline, there’s none of that. They don’t have access to that...And this is the other thing as well...Any information, any workshops were all face to face. And then, because the deaf community is small, everyone knows each other. My parents are both deaf as well. If I tell someone, they might tell their mother and their mother might tell my mother. It’s just a very small community.

Orlaith had an abortion in 2009 using pills she ordered online from *Women on Web* (WOW). At the time of her abortion, Orlaith was a student, and was supporting herself financially via her disability allowance. She describes the moment she realised that she couldn’t afford to “go to England” and decided instead to “order these dodgy pills off the internet”. As Sydney Calkin (2019a) explains, medication abortion pills have radically transformed the ‘abortion access strategies’ of Irish women (73). Between 2012 and 2016, 3,328 abortion pills were confiscated by Irish customs officials (Power 2017)²⁸. Like many abortion-seekers in the Republic during this period, Orlaith had the pills delivered to a friend in Northern Ireland, who then posted them to her down South. She told me how she never disclosed her abortion experience to her mother, who died in 2011. When I asked her why, she explained that it was because of “the

²⁸ Abortion pills are illegal in Ireland under the 1861 *Offences Against the Persons Act*.

shame and secrecy that was put upon me, because of the fact that it wasn't allowed". Listening to Orlaith's story, I reflected upon how 'coming out' about one's abortion may elicit not only stigma and shame (as Orlaith herself described), but in some contexts, may risk immediate and grave legal ramifications.²⁹

Nevertheless, 'coming out' can operate as a 'strategy for social change', as Nancy Whittier (2012) describes (3). Recounting the history of the gay liberation movement in the United States, Whittier (2012) explains how, in the 1970s, queer activists began to 'come out' both as a 'celebration' of their identities but also to challenge 'invisibility, stigma, and assumptions about the nature of homosexuality' (2). Importantly, Whittier (2012) underscores how Gay and Lesbian activists in the US drew inspiration from 'Black Power, American Indian, and Chicano movements' who 'fostered the idea that pride in one's identity was a means of challenging a dominant culture that denigrated one's group' (3). As a social movement strategy, Whittier (2012) explains, 'coming out' points to 'the political nature of "identity politics"' as well as to the interplay between individual and collective identities''' (7). On the individual level, Whittier (2012) explains, 'coming out' enables activists to 'feel a sense of self, of ownership over their own experiences' (17-18). In this sense, 'coming out' entails an 'emotion-laden individual transformation' of identity (Whittier 2012, 2).

On the collective level, Whittier (2012) clarifies, 'coming out' works as a strategy to influence and change culture and policy. By 'coming out' as individuals, activists transform 'internal group definitions of collective identity' but also impact external perceptions and beliefs about the group at hand (Whittier 2012, 2). 'Coming out' thus serves as an 'antidote to shame' for individuals who have been marginalised and stigmatised, but moreover, by engaging in collective 'coming out', activists deploy what Whittier (2012) coins a 'visibility politics' to transform the 'attitudes and feelings of others' (15). During my interview with Saoirse, she indicated how a similar 'politics

²⁹ In 2013, a woman in Northern Ireland attempted to buy abortion pills online for her 15-year-old daughter and was subsequently prosecuted by the Public Prosecution Service. Her charges include 'unlawfully procuring and supplying the abortion drugs mifepristone and misoprostol with intent to procure a miscarriage, contrary to the 1861 *Offences Against the Person Act*', with a penalty of five years imprisonment (Erwin 2019).

of visibility' worked in the Irish abortion campaign. As activists came forward with their stories about their abortions, those close to them were forced to see the 'social conditions and concrete situations' in which abortions take place, and as a result, reconceptualise the morality of abortion in more practical terms (Pollack Petchesky 1990, 360). Saoirse explained to me how this form of storytelling served as an important mechanism towards destigmatising abortion in Ireland. By disclosing their experiences to friends and family, those who have had to 'travel' or who imported pills made abortion a tangible and irrefutable reality of reproductive life in Ireland:

I think a lot of people who had had an abortion who never told people before, quite a few of them decided to open up to people, people they were close to...we heard a lot of those kinds of stories, where people were essentially 'coming out' and telling people. I suppose it's all very well thinking 'oh well they were being slutty and went off and got pregnant' but then it's different when it's you. You know, you're my cousin. You have to know a person to understand it. And that makes me grossly uncomfortable, for women, you know the fact that I have to be known to be seen. There is something about that, but also, that is reality.

Interestingly, Saoirse's statement also points to the limitations of 'coming out' as a movement strategy. Through 'coming out', activists who have had abortions attempt to make themselves (and their experiences) visible – to "be seen", as Saoirse describes – as a means of achieving 'representational power' (Phelan 1993, 140). In establishing 'representational visibility' as its goal, however, the movement thereby contributes to the reification of the 'hierarchical relationship between the visible and the invisible' on which the patriarchal regulation of reproduction depends (Phelan 1993, 139). There are advantages and disadvantages then to sharing one's personal abortion experience as a form of activism. In 'coming out' activists contribute alternative representations of the aborting subject and the abortion experience which may transform public understandings of and relations to abortion politics. On the other hand, 'coming out' with one's abortion experience necessitates offering up one's intimate bodily life to intensified public and political surveillance.

Reflecting on the strategy of ‘storytelling’ as it was utilised by pro-choice activists in Ireland during the 2018 referendum campaign, Orlaith Darling (2020) confirms how, in sharing their ‘abortion stories’, activists risked exposing themselves and their bodies to violent public inquiry (para. 16). Darling (2020) describes how, whilst telling one’s story may be cathartic for some, publicly disclosing one’s abortion experience is also a ‘radical act of vulnerability’ which runs the risk of ‘re-entrenching women’s role as the suffering body’ (para. 5). Darling (2020) concludes that is precisely women’s embodied and emotional pain that elevates the abortion experience to the status of a ‘story’ as opposed to ‘other female bodily experiences’ like ‘smear tests or periods’ (para. 6). Despite contestation over the ethics of ‘coming out’ as a campaign tool, it seems irrefutable that it was through the embodied vulnerability of those who first shared their abortion stories that the pro-choice campaign in Ireland began moving the public body to consider voting ‘Yes’.

The call to ‘come out’ is also a *call to action*, as American sociologist Abigail Saguy (2020) adeptly describes. Saguy (2020) outlines how Harvey Milk, a prominent activist in the US Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement urged fellow queers to ‘come out, come out’ in order to defeat a California proposal to ban LGBTQ teachers from working in state schools. Milk supposed that if Californians realized that ‘they had friends, coworkers and family members who were gay’ they would oppose the initiative ‘out of solidarity’ (Saguy 2020, para. 16). As a social movement strategy then, I argue, ‘coming out’ mobilises a politics of revelation which operates on both the *discursive* and *material* level. Activists counter stigma and shame attached to marginalised identities by ‘coming out’ as a member of the oppressed group, or by physically ‘coming out’ onto ‘the street’ where they take public ownership of their collective identity, engage in an act of embodied solidarity and where they reassert their embodied and political agency. In the latter case then, ‘coming out’ implies the *literal movement of bodies in space*. Deirdre – a 35-year old activist - described the process of becoming an activist in similar terms, as an explicitly embodied experience which requires “*actually coming out*” onto the streets:³⁰

³⁰ Whilst I want to emphasise the importance of (the gathering of) ‘massed bodies’ in public space (as Deirdre describes it) as politically disruptive, I want to be careful to emphasise that public space is not

Someone once said to me, 'Well, when's the moment you become an activist?' It's the moment you step off the pavement and onto the street. And I think that really resonated with the March for Choice. People really felt like they were doing something... I think the March for Choice worked on two levels. People really felt like they were becoming visible, stepping out of the shadows... On one level you were calling for a referendum, but on another level, you were rebuilding your own society. Like, you actually felt like you were changing the communities and the world that you lived in. You felt that by actually coming out, you were breaking down stigma and opening eyes.

As described in Chapter Four, the first annual 'March for Choice' took place in September 2012, with numbers increasing exponentially in the following years; from about 5,000 attendees in 2014 to an estimated 40,000 in 2017 (Holland 2014; RTÉ 2017). Deirdre's testimony illustrates how by "*coming out*" and "*stepping off the pavement and onto the street*" as part of the March for Choice, activists increased both the visibility of the movement as well as the legitimacy of its political claims. As Judith Butler describes, 'political action takes place on the condition that the body appear' (Butler 2015, 76). By 'coming out' into the streets, activists are 'posing their challenge in corporeal terms' (Butler 2015, 83). As described in Chapter Three, abortion politics in Ireland has historically been contingent on the spatial regulation of gendered, reproductive bodies. Thus, through their physical occupation of public space, activists not only make themselves *visible*, thereby increasing their *representational power*; moreover, they disrupt the geopolitical status quo, making a 'public claim to political agency on behalf of abortion-seekers whose collective power is diffused by social stigma and political marginalization' (Calkin 2019b, 11-12).

equally accessible to differentially gendered, classed, racialised and (dis)abled bodies. Furthermore, in correlating political subjectivity with bodily action, I do not mean to indicate that the recognition of political agency be *contingent upon* specific bodily capacity. As Judith Butler (2015) argues "the capacity to move depends upon instruments and surfaces that make movement possible...and... bodily movement is supported and facilitated by nonhuman objects and their particular capacity for agency" (72).

Finally, Deirdre's testimony illustrates the *active* or *doing* nature of 'coming out' as an embodied movement or transition. Deirdre explains how "*by actually coming out*" (the 'actually' here presumably indicates the *physical* act of coming *outside* - inserting one's body in public space) - activists succeeded in "*breaking down stigma and opening eyes*". Deirdre describes how, through their experience in collective physical demonstrations like the March for Choice, activists came to feel that they were "*rebuilding your own society*" and "*changing the communities and world that you lived in*". Echoing Sutton's (2007) sentiment, Deirdre emphasises how through the act of 'coming out' onto/into the streets, activists come to understand and experience their bodies both as 'embattled sites' and also, as actively involved in the reconstruction of their own society (Sutton 2007, 129).

In the Irish context then, by 'coming out' with their abortion stories, Irish activists engaged in a sustained and collective act of refusal; a refusal to be silent, to hide, to be ashamed of their abortion experiences. Equally, by 'coming out' into the streets, they refused to submit to the geopolitical organisation of space which has historically operated to marginalise and exclude them from public debate, and moreover, they successfully reasserted – both to themselves and to society at large – the extent of their political capacities. In this vein, it becomes evident that the process of 'coming out' with their abortion experiences or as abortion activists – on both the material and discursive levels - has been integral to the contemporary processes of 'becoming' of women and gendered Others in Ireland as political subjects.

"Wrenching Off the Hands" (Of Reproductive Coercion?): The Role of Collective, Physical Demonstrating in Enacting Bodily Liberation

In July 2016, four years after the first March for Choice, the Irish government announced that a Citizens Assembly would be held to consider the issue of the 8th amendment and to make recommendations with regards to possible legislative change. Comprised of 100, randomly-selected members of the Irish public, the Citizens Assembly was intended to 'provide a representative sample of the Irish

population' (Field 2018, 614). Convening over the course of five sessions between November 2016 and April 2017, the Citizens Assembly heard contributions from 'medical, legal and ethical experts' and considered 'pre-recorded personal testimony[...]from women affected by the Eighth Amendment', as well as deliberating over 'written submissions from members of the public' (ibid). In a shock move, the Citizens Assembly concluded with 87% of members voting against 'retaining the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution as it currently exists' and recommending that the government legislate for the provision of unrestricted abortion up to 12 weeks of pregnancy and up to 22 weeks for 'socio-economic reasons' (McGreevy 2017).

Perceiving the Citizen's Assembly as a 'delay tactic' emblematic of the government's desire to pass the buck on the abortion issue, members of the Irish pro-choice campaign came together to protest the Citizens Assembly's activities and to demand that the government simply call a referendum on the 8th amendment outright (Cahillane 2018; Conroy 2016). Inspired by the 2016 'Black Monday' protest which saw thousands take to the streets across Poland to oppose an almost total-ban on abortion proposed by the Polish government, Strike 4 Repeal – an 'ad hoc, non-affiliated group of activists, academics, artists and trade unionists' – proposed a similar event in Ireland on the 8th of March 2017.³¹ Strike 4 Repeal released a statement demanding that the Irish government call a referendum on the 8th amendment, before International Women's Day 2017. If a referendum was not called by this date, the organisers vowed that they would request a non-industrial strike on the 8th of March to 'show solidarity for those forced to travel for abortion that day, and everyday' (Strike 4 Repeal 2017). Sadbh, an activist in her late 30's from the rural South-East, recounted her memories of the 2017 event as follows:

2017 I feel was the year that everything felt most heightened. I kind of felt the most sense of power. We were moving towards the referendum, but it still wasn't definite. They still could

³¹ In October 2016, thousands of women in Poland went on strike, marching through the streets wearing black 'as a sign of mourning for their reproductive rights'. Inspired by the women's strike in Iceland in 1975, they refused to do domestic chores, work, or go to school, all in an effort to protest the country's outlawing of abortion (BBC News 2016).

kick the can down the road so there were a lot at stake. There was a Strike for Repeal in March and that had a very big turnout, we shut down O'Connell bridge and there was a really great sense of power then. I know the guards had to stop traffic and everything which they weren't expecting so there was this sense of 'We've caught them on the hop' and then the March for Choice that year was really powerful as well...I remember when we were coming in past government buildings, there wasn't this sense of hopelessness where you're havin' a rally but there's nobody watching you or people or laughing at you, it felt like, we're actually a force to be reckoned with now.

Sadbh's testimony indicates then how collective physical actions (such as the annual March for Choice) operate as important sites where activists begin to *redefine their bodies* not as objects of shame and stigma but as sites of agency, strength and even, pride. As Sadbh indicates, the huge numbers that lined the Dublin streets for the Strike 4 Repeal on the evening of March 8th was largely unexpected by event organisers and media alike. As Sadbh explains, through their collective presence alone, the protestors were able to *"shut down O'Connell bridge"* and *"stop traffic"*. In bringing the capital city – the seat of government – to a complete standstill during rush hour, Strike 4 Repeal activists demonstrated, to themselves and to the public, that the pro-choice movement was indeed *"a force to be reckoned with"*, both literally and figuratively speaking. Fionnula – a 29-year-old activist – also from the rural South-East narrated her experience of the Strike 4 Repeal, emphasising the *size* of the demonstration and the importance of the activist's *"amplified voice"*:

I remember there was one march in particular, it was the Strike 4 Repeal march which was on in the evening, I can't remember, I think it was international women's day, I think that's March. It was on in the evening time, and it was quite dark but we marched through Dublin City Centre, and the atmosphere at that was amazing, it was electric. There was this amplified, anger and amplified voice and I had gone, myself and a friend had travelled up on the train to Dublin in the evening to join the march, the actual Strike 4 Repeal...and I know a senator personally and I was chatting to them afterwards, and they said 'I saw that march, and it was the largest march I'd ever seen outside the Dail'. They were able to go undercover a certain degree but, because they're not very well known. But they walked by and they just said, there

was just swarms of young women in their 20's roaring abuse at politicians, chanting slogans and I just-I cant even describe it. It was so electric.

Fionnula's emphasis on the size of the Strike 4 Repeal demonstration – which her Senator associate described as *"the largest march I'd ever seen outside the Dail"* – illustrates the significance of this event in terms of the *number of bodies* which gathered to protest. As Barbara Sutton explains, 'massed bodies' constitute 'tangible sources of power' (Peterson 2011 in Sutton 2010, 174). Goodwin & Pfaff (2001) argue that 'mass gatherings' can produce 'something like a Durkheimian "collective effervescence"' which they define as a 'collective feeling of unusual energy, power and solidarity' (289). Contrasting the *"dark"*-ness of the evening with the *"electric"* atmosphere produced and circulated by the gathering of activist bodies, Fionnula's description of the Strike 4 Repeal takes on an almost visceral quality. Her testimony invokes the idea of activist bodies as individual voltage points which, when connected to one another, produce a powerful energetic charge which powerfully lights up the night's sky.

Describing how activists were *"chanting slogans"* and *"roaring abuse at politicians"*, Fionnula's testimony illustrates the importance of oratory practices as mechanisms by which activists encourage one another and cement their collective identity (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001). Describing the 'democratic' nature of the voice as an instrument, bell hooks (1995) writes that 'voice' can be used 'by everyone, in any location' (211). While hooks (1995) speaks specifically about the significance of spoken word for African-American activists 'in the process of decolonisation in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy', her arguments in relation to the importance of 'claiming voice', 'asserting one's right to speech' and transgressing the boundaries of 'accepted speech' provide important lessons for activists challenging other forms of structural violence (212). hooks (1995) emphasises the importance of voice specifically where 'institutional structures' are unavailable to oppressed groups (ibid). The *"amplified voice"* of abortion activists at the Strike 4 Repeal is particularly important then both as a source of energy for the collective movement, and as a tool by which activists enact and reinsert their political agency in an environment which has marked their voices/bodies as grounds for political exclusion.

As Wendy Parkins' (2000) illustrates, embodied activity and particularly high-risk physical action, has been central to the success of many historical women's movements. In the case of the British suffrage movement, Parkins (2000) describes how during this period and according to the liberal political tradition, political agency was derived from the possession of property rights. Those without property were not regarded as citizens and thus were not eligible for participation in the political sphere. Parkins (2000) explains that through embodied protest the suffragettes 'refigured political agency as based on performance, rather than entitlement' (63). Parkins continues, explaining that such performances worked to keep the suffragettes cause 'at the forefront of public attention' and to imbue activists with 'a powerful sense of their own bodily capacities' (ibid). In the case of the Irish abortion rights movement then, it appears that physical protest activities like the Strike 4 Repeal or the annual March for Choice played a similar role in maximising the visibility of the movement. More importantly however, as Muireann indicates below, these events offered activists the opportunity to *move, feel and relate* to their bodies in manner which contrasted radically with their quotidian embodied experience:

That physical presence, noise, taking up space is so important. I think for anyone who had been impacted by the 8th amendment in any way, which you could argue is any person whose lived in Ireland is impacted in the 8th amendment in some way, to feel that they're not alone and to feel that solidarity I think is so important...I think the fact of, the horrors that have been inflicted on women by the Irish state – that we're still only learning about – there was definitely a sense of like 'Fuck that shit, that's not who we are, we want to cast that off' and again I don't think it's something you were actively thinking about all the time but it was definitely in your DNA and in your responses and for something like reproductive rights, which is a very physical thing, cause it's a feeling of not having control over your body and a feeling of your body being owned, and written into the constitution. So, being able to get out and march, and march alongside other people and shout is very cathartic and really really important. It also can't be ignored; they can't ignore 30,000 people on the street making a load of noise.

In her testimony, Muireann discusses the importance of the explicitly embodied aspects of protesting – particularly those wherein activists are making "noise" and

"taking up space". Like Fionnuala, Muireann emphasises the importance of the *number* of bodies that gather to protest, reminding us how *"30,000 people on the street making a load of noise"* can't be *"ignored"*. Interestingly, Muireann describes the importance of these embodied activities as a mode of catharsis for all those who have been *"impacted by the 8th"* (which she clarifies, interestingly, as *"any person who lives in Ireland"*). Explaining how *"being able to get out and march...and shout"* works to offset the effects of having the body *"written into the constitution"*, Muireann illustrates the importance of collective bodily protest activities as arenas for the reconstruction and rearticulation of embodied subjectivity.

Muireann's description of the 8th amendment as something one does not *"actively think about"* but rather, as something that is simply *"in your DNA and in your responses"* again indicates how Ireland's abortion laws are deeply formative to the quotidian embodied and affective experience of women and gestating people in Ireland. Her testimony reaffirms the *expansive power* of the 8th amendment – which not only imposes additional reproductive labour upon women and pregnant people (in the form of 'abortion work'), but which literally *shapes, limits and contains* the everyday movement of the reproductive body, by *"writing"* the gendered body *"into the Constitution"*. In this vein, the bodily experience of protest takes on an additional relevance for Irish activists as it provides them an opportunity to physically enact an *alternative modality of embodied experience*. Aoibhinn explained the experience in further detail:

Aoibhinn: I guess, from a young age, I didn't feel that my body was mine and I think a lot of people are like that. So, I feel very strongly even now, like kids don't have to hug you...you ask a child for consent before you touch them. So, even at 12 and 13, I was getting shit said to me and that included members of my own family. More than one member and on more than one side of my family. It was so grand and normal to say things about women's bodies. So, my body always felt to me something more like a target than me...I literally felt hands on my body.

AOS: How does that translate then to when you're on a demo or on a march? In terms of the feeling of it?

Aoibhinn: It literally feels like youre wrenching off the hands with your hands. It gives you so much energy. When youre in it, like I was when I was younger, you don't even know that youre so contained. But the minute you start kind of peeling them off, finger by finger, youre like 'Fuck it!' I shout a lot, I'm very loud at marches. Not angrily, I shout nice things, and sing, and whatever. The liberation...the bodily freedom that I experienced. They went hand in hand...the ability for me to say 'No, fuck off. Get off my body.' They happened at the same time for me, for the same reason like.

Having been “recruited” into the anti-abortion organisation *Youth Defence* as a teenager, before leaving and becoming active in the pro-choice movement in the 2010's, 41-year-old Aoibhinn explained to me how living under the 8th amendment affected her relationship to her body. Aoibhinn described how “growing up”, she felt that her body didn't ‘belong’ to her. She explains how she experienced her body as a something akin to a “target”. In light of this, she explained how the physical experience of protesting took on an extra layer of significance as an opportunity for her to “wrench off” what she felt were “hands on (her) body”. There is an interesting resonance then between Muireann and Aoibhinn's accounts. While neither report being explicitly aware of the 8th amendment and its effects as young women, both describe feeling or experiencing a type of “containment” within or in relation to their bodies which, through their involvement with abortion activism, they come to be able to name and resist.

As I described in Chapter Three, the 8th amendment affected the quotidian embodied experience of the feminised, reproductive body in Ireland by literally regulating the reproductive mobility or movement of the body within and across geopolitical space. Muireann and Aoibhinn's accounts then illustrate how the regulatory power of the 8th amendment worked to constrain and restrict the movement of the reproductive body at the level of *intentional experience*. Through marching, singing and shouting at demonstrations and rallies, activists like Aoibhinn ‘actively embody, manipulate and change’ social norms as they exist and relate to (the movement of the) gendered reproductive body (Inglis 1997, 16). Not only does Aoibhinn experience a sense of bodily “liberation” or “freedom” at these protests, which stands in direct opposition to

the sense of “containment” she previously described, but her phenomenological experience of her body in *relation* to the world and to others is transformed too. Being able to “get out and march and...shout” – through the physical reconstruction of her embodied experience – Aoibhinn literally enacts her bodily liberation.

‘Gestural Dress’ and the Movement for Abortion Rights: The Case of the Repeal Jumper

In early 2016, Anna Cosgrave launched the *Repeal Project* – a partnership with the *Abortion Rights Campaign*, designed to ‘give voice to a hidden problem’ (O’Connor 2016). Cosgrave’s project sold plain black sweatshirts with the word ‘Repeal’ in large, white, block capitals emblazoned across the front (ibid). With proceeds from the sale of the jumper, Cosgrave and colleagues sought to raise money for the *Abortion Rights Campaign* and to start discussion about ‘the need and want for free, safe, and legal access to abortion in Ireland’ (O’Connor 2016). Interviewing Irish abortion activists, it quickly became clear how the *embodiment of dress* – and specifically, the wearing of the Repeal jumper – functioned as an integral element of the movement’s (embodied) protest activity. One of the first public, collective protests involving the Repeal jumper to garner widespread media attention took place in September 2016, when six politicians from the leftist party *Anti-Austerity Alliance/People Before Profit* wore the Repeal jumper during the ‘Leader’s Questions’ session in the Dáil. Activist Ailbhe described the importance of this “stunt” as demonstrating the “power” of collaboration between grassroots activists and politicians and for increasing the visibility of the movement through the international media attention it garnered:

I think one thing that Repeal did very well was show the power of effective collaboration between some TDs and a grassroots movement. So, it showed, when they worked in harmony, the impact. When they wore the Repeal jumpers in the Dail in 2016, that was an incredible stunt. That was as powerful as the March because it got international attention.

The black and white Repeal jumper thus became an important ‘agent’ in the campaign for abortion rights in Ireland. The jumper served as a communication device – clearly

articulating the demands of the movement in no uncertain terms, allowing activists an effective and efficient mechanism to identify one another, and generating increased awareness of the campaign amongst the Irish public. Moreover, the jumper served as an important *affective object* – strengthening ties between movement members and operating as a symbol of hope for an alternative (political) future. With the *Repeal Project*, the abortion rights campaign moved away from making ‘fringe political statements’ in the form of small badges etc, to directly projecting its message *onto the activist body* in the form of political ‘outfits’ (Cavanagh 2016). To understand more about the importance of these outfits for activists and their relationship to political protest, I was keen to hear more from interviewees in terms of how they *felt* about or when wearing this item of clothing. Speaking to Emer over Skype in January 2021, she describes the launch of the Repeal jumpers as the moment when “*the Repeal movement kind of took off*”.

I had lived through Savita and all the repercussions about Savita, all the ramifications and all the talk about Savita. And I realised how many people didn't think about it...were almost wilfully ignorant. As I had been! You know? So, I got the jumper...and it was funny cause the jumper was really comfortable. I was gonna wear it anyway but it was really cosy so I would wear it and reach for it all the time...you know, not just 'I'm going to a protest'. I think with the first batch, it was a little frustrating cause you saw celebrities wearing it and getting it and I was like 'I ordered mine weeks ago, where is it?' and when it arrived and you saw people wearing it, and you saw it on a Saturday morning when somebody had obviously just popped into the shop to get milk. When you saw it at the gym when somebody pulled it on after they had done their workout. And you know, it became like this little nod. Like, this little wink you know? And I would wear it every time I flew. Every time I flew I wore it...You know, the feeling of....not necessarily fear but secrecy and I felt that by wearing it, it made my position clear. But I hope that for people who were also in secret, and maybe couldn't be open, that it said 'There's somebody who's in my favour'.

When I asked Emer about the Repeal jumper, she began by reflecting back to time when she was “*almost wilfully ignorant*” about Ireland’s abortion laws, before contrasting this with the moment when she “*got the jumper*” which, she describes, as

having a transformative, radicalising, consciousness-raising effect. Because of how “comfortable” it was, Emer explains how she found herself “reaching” for the jumper “all the time”, not only when she was “going to a protest”. She recounts the experience of seeing other people wearing the jumper when they had “just popped into the shop to get milk” or “at the gym when somebody pulled it on after they had done their workout”. Describing how the wearing of the Repeal jumper became “this little wink”, Emer indicates how this form of ‘gestural dress’ created and sustained new forms of intimacy and sociality – visibilising and strengthening the identity of and relations between activists inside of the abortion rights movement. Playing a similar role to the orange ‘voting hand’ and the green kerchief (*pañuelo*) in abortion rights movements in the Southern Cone, the widespread presence of the Repeal jumper – inside and outside of formal political spaces – made the repeal the 8th movement impossible to ignore (Vacarezza 2021).

Emer’s testimony exemplifies then how dress, as an *embodied practice*, performs ‘significant semiotic and ideological work’ which constitutes an integral element of a social movement’s activity (Parkins 2002, 7). By wearing the Repeal jumper “at the gym”, or in “the shop”, activists like Emer create additional ‘social and political spaces of participation’ and reconstitute these spaces as sites for ‘nonviolent resistance’ (Yangzom 2016, 629). Again, this is particularly important in a geopolitical context where women and feminised people have been excluded from formal political opportunity structures. Emer’s decision to wear the jumper whilst flying is particularly important and indicates how donning the Repeal jumper constitutes an act of *gestural embodied solidarity* with abortion-seekers. Remembering the journey she took, to support her colleague undergoing an abortion in England, Emer explains how by wearing her Repeal jumper on the airplane, she hoped to make her “position clear” and to indicate to other ‘abortion travellers’ that there was someone on board who understood and supported their actions and who recognised the injustice of the journey they were having to make.

In essence then, through this act of gestural dress – by wearing their Repeal jumpers – activists deployed their bodies to convey political meaning, to enact solidarity and

to strengthen the collective movement identity. Such moves are not without risk however, and as has so often been the case throughout history, the attachment of these mostly young, female activists to what was perceived as a mere item of clothing was used as evidence of the frivolity of the movement and the political ineptitude of Repeal activists by those seeking to keep abortion rights campaigners outside of the sphere of legitimate politics (Parkins 2002). Ciara - an activist in her early 40s - who lived in rural, agricultural community in the South of the country, told me how there was a “backlash against the Repeal jumpers” and “what they were associated with”. When I asked her to clarify what she meant by this, she explained:

Yeah, I think it was John McGuirk or someone who was going on about the ‘blue-haired feminists in their Repeal jumpers’, that kind of stuff.³² Some of the fun stuff, girls posing in the news with the statue of Mary. Most of that was dismissed, it was whatever, there was a little bit of outrage but mostly people didn’t care. The girl who appeared on the Pat Kenny show, anyway she was talking, and the next day I ran into 3 or 4 people who said ‘Oh my god, she shouldn’t be allowed anywhere near the campaign.’ One woman said to me ‘I don’t know what it was about her, she just got on my goat.’ I think it was the Dublin accent. People were so judgmental about these young, attractive women being totally unapologetic. Which I think is a great thing. But for some people, it was that reaction ‘they’re not taking this seriously enough at all’.*

As Ciara describes here, the Repeal jumper quickly became associated with “young, attractive” and “unapologetic” female activists. It was these same “blue-haired feminists in their Repeal jumpers” who attracted intensive media attention for their engagement in what might be construed as a more unconventional repertoire of playful, creative, and subversive protest activities. In 2017, for example, in a particularly contentious move, a group of abortion rights activists in Dublin placed a Repeal jumper on the altar of a local Church, subsequently sharing pictures of the scene on *Facebook* and *Instagram*. The picture soon went ‘viral’, sparking intense online debate; with conservative political commentators deeming the move as reckless, disrespectful and

³² * Pro-Life’ conservative political commentator and communications directors of ‘Save the 8th’ anti-abortion group (O’Brien 2018).

even blasphemous (Fenton 2017). The ‘scandal’ caused by these activists in draping the jumper across the altar demonstrates how the Repeal jumper itself had taken on the status of a ‘disobedient object’ – serving as a material manifestation of the movement’s indictment of the Church-State apparatus’ historical maltreatment of women and pregnant people (Flood and Grindon 2014 in Orozco 2017, 357). In affective terms, the Repeal jumper became what I term an ‘incendiary object’, as illustrated in Laoise’s account below:

I remember there was one year, one Christmas I had just gotten my repeal jumper so it was whenever they came out and I wore my repeal jumper home and my mammy was like ‘Take that off’ or whatever, she was like ‘We’re going down to grannies, you can’t wear that in grannies’. I was like ‘Honestly, grannies not gonna know what Repeal means’. No one knew what repeal meant back then, you know. But mammy was like ‘Take it off, take it off!’ and then the time I came home with my ‘Free, Safe, Legal’ bag, she was like ‘oh, free, safe, legal what?’ and I was like ‘abortion!’ She was like ‘Oh my god!’, she nearly had a stroke like.

Returning to her hometown for Christmas, Laoise describes her mother’s intense discomfort and unease at her daughter’s arriving home in the black and white Repeal sweatshirt. Listening to Laoise’s description of her mother fussing excitedly about the jumper, urging her to “take it off, take it off!”, the incendiary quality of the garment again comes to light. In my mind’s eye, I see Laoise’s mother trying to pull the jumper off of her daughter’s body, throwing it the ground and stomping upon it repeatedly, attempting to douse the sparks that if left to burn, might ignite her kitchen into full-blown, all-encompassing flames. Reflecting on Laoise’s story then, it becomes clear how the Repeal jumper serves not only as the manifestation of activist consciousness, but the wearing of the jumper constitutes an act of situated, bodily resistance - one that becomes all the more intolerable by virtue of the fact that it is predominantly “young, attractive...unapologetic” feminised bodies that engage in this activity.

Whilst wearing the Repeal jumper constituted an act of resistance, it also entailed, by the same virtue, the assumption of a degree of embodied vulnerability. This contradiction was explained to me by Blathnaid, a 30-year-old activist living and

working in the rural South-East. During the course of my meeting with Blathnaid, who worked in a local community college, she spoke at length about the lessons she learned from Irish abortion activists mobilising in the 1980's. She narrated a story of the 1983 anti-amendment campaign, recounting the particularly violent tactics of the *Society for the Protection of the Unborn* (SPUC), whom she described as “like Youth Defence on acid”. Blathnaid told me about reading an article which described how the anti-amendment/pro-choice campaigners were “pelted with stones” and “beaten up” by SPUC activists. She compared the “self-consciousness” she felt wearing her Repeal jumper with the explicit violence that activists in the 1980's experienced. Her testimony illustrates her expectation that, as part of her activity in the abortion rights movement, she might be required to put her body on the line in similar ways (Sutton 2010). Wearing her Repeal jumper, was one way she regularly put her body on the line, as she explains below:

I felt self-conscious when I bought a repeal jumper and I wore it only a couple of times but one of the times was when Pope Francis came to Ireland and there was the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries and you know Colm O' Gorman, he had a big march about it. And I know a lot of people who wanted to wear the Repeal jumper and they did, and I did because I wanted to get across that message of like, that public ownership of it. I remember the amount of comments I got in public, derogatory comments, misogynistic comments, etc. But for people who were like very much so in the public realm, whether you're a politician or a leader of one of the coalitions or whatever, how tiring must that be.

Pope Francis' visit to Ireland occurred three months after the successful abortion referendum in May 2018, meaning that Blathnaid's decision to wear her Repeal jumper during the counter-protest was perhaps motivated by a desire to “get across that message of public ownership” of the pro-choice victory (Sherwood 2018). Again, despite the fact that the 8th amendment has successfully been repealed at this point, she recounts receiving “derogatory” and “misogynistic comments” about the sweatshirt from members of the public. Indeed, the Repeal jumper proved to be an increasingly incendiary object in the run-up to the referendum. In April 2018, a young gay man was viciously attacked in Dublin ‘for wearing a “Repeal” jumper’ (Berry 2018).

Returning to Sutton's (2010) research and the concept of *poner el cuerpo*, Sutton illustrates how political resistance 'connotes risk, courage and struggle' (180). Defying the 'status quo', Sutton (2010) explains, means exposing the body to 'potential jeopardy' (180). Blathnaid's statement then points to the complex and sometimes contradictory potential of the Repeal jumper as an incendiary object, which at once works to stimulate and energise activists (and the movement) whilst at the same time, functions to reconstruct the activist body as a site of vulnerability and risk.

To conclude, the testimonies put forward here by Irish activists illustrate that activist practices are not only happening 'through the body', but that, through these embodied activities, activists in fact reassert their political agency and reconstruct their embodied subjectivities, too. For these activists then, the protest body is the *vehicle*, *agent* and *outcome* of political resistance. The embodied experience of Irish activists must be taken into account then in order to understand how political resistance operates in this context, but also to understand the varied and nuanced objectives of the abortion rights movement. The campaign to Repeal the 8th amendment can thus be reconceived not only as a movement for the legal provision of abortion access, but as a campaign to reconstruct and reconfigure the quotidian embodied experience of women and gestating people inside the country at large.

Chapter Six: Embodying 'Respectability' – The 'Politics of Concealment' and the Referendum Campaign

Launching Together for Yes: A Softer, Gentler Movement for Abortion Rights

On March 22nd, 2018, *Together for Yes* (TFY) – the national civil society campaign which would advocate for a Yes vote in the forthcoming referendum on abortion rights in Ireland – was formally launched. Nominally an 'umbrella network' for over 100 different pro-choice organisations, *Together for Yes* was coordinated by three individuals representing the three primary constitutive groups; Grainne Griffin, founding member of the *Abortion Rights Campaign* (ARC), Orla O'Connor, the director of the *National Women's Council of Ireland* (NWCi) and Ailbhe Smyth, convenor of the *Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment*. All three women attended University College Dublin, where Smyth set up the Women's Studies programme in 1990. O'Connor joined the *National Women's Council* – a predominantly state-funded, non-profit organisation – as a policy officer, in 2000. In their co-authored post-referendum memoir, *It's a Yes! How Together for Yes Repealed the Eighth and Transformed Irish Society*, the three convenors describe themselves as coming from 'diverse backgrounds' but as 'united in their determination to bring about the change which would enable Irish women to access abortion on home soil' (Griffin et al. 2019, 1).

As the title of their book exclaims, *Together for Yes* did indeed transform Irish society. The referendum campaign was an astounding success, with 66.4% of voters opting to repeal the 8th amendment and legislate for abortion in Ireland. In the months following the referendum, however, it became clear that many of the activists who had campaigned on behalf of *Together for Yes* were dissatisfied with the organisation's messaging and tactics. Debate about the perceived 'conservatism' of the 'Yes' campaign ensued and was stoked further by the publication of exit poll data which indicated that the majority of those who voted in favour of the repeal of the 8th amendment did so on the basis of their belief in the right to choose; demonstrating that a substantial liberalisation of abortion attitudes in Ireland had already taken place prior to 2018 (Reidy 2019). Reflecting on the referendum campaign, abortion activist and disability rights campaigner Emma Burns (2018) described the launch of *Together*

for Yes as signalling a changeover from 'a purely grassroots, homegrown, diverse, feminist' movement to a 'slick, centrally directed, professionally run campaign with strict messaging and zero tolerance for deviation from the messaging booklet' (para. 24). Emma Campbell - Co-Chair of *Alliance for Choice* - critiqued 'the cost of the emotional labour required' by those who campaigned for the 'Yes' campaign, the majority of whom were women and members of the LGBTQ community (Campbell 2018, para. 6).³³

In this chapter, I analyse activists' affective and embodied experiences as part of the *Together for Yes* campaign, beginning in March 2018 and culminating in the May 25th referendum on the 8th amendment. I situate this analysis of the embodiment of the 'Yes' campaign in relation to existing scholarship in social movement studies on 'respectability politics'. Coined in 1993 by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, the term 'respectability politics' was devised to describe the tactics of the Black Women's Baptist Church (BWBC) movement - a group of anti-racist organisers active in the early 20th century in the US - who utilised code-switching, emotional labour and impression management techniques as part of their activist work. By consciously dressing and speaking in ways that White America would find acceptable, members of the Black Women's Baptist Church movement asserted their claim on respectability, allowing them to initiate a 'process of dialogue' between Black and White society (Higginbotham 1993, 196).³⁴ In short, the respectability politics strategy encourages members of a social movement to speak, act and behave in ways that the dominant group in a society would find acceptable, in order to ingratiate activists with would-be voters, or with the public at large.

Drawing upon the work of Black feminist scholars like Higginbotham (1993) on the emotional and aesthetic labour of respectability politics activism in the US civil rights movement, on Beverly Skeggs' (1997) research on respectability as a mechanism for regulation of femininity, and on Sara Ahmed's (2017) examination of the affective

³³ *Alliance for Choice* is a non-profit organisation campaigning for abortion rights in Northern Ireland.

³⁴ More recent sociological scholarship defines 'respectability politics' a 'school of thought that utilizes *respectability narratives* as the basis of enacting social, political and legal change' (Dorsey and Chen 2020, para. 3).

‘costs of organising’ (para.3), I conceptualise respectability politics here as a form of body politics. Continuing my analysis of the role of the body in the Irish abortion rights movement, I turn here to investigate the embodiment of respectability in the 2018 *Together for Yes* campaign. Specifically, I explore the performativity of respectability through the analysis of the speech politics, emotion management strategies and aesthetic labour deployed and required of Irish abortion activists ‘on the doorsteps’.

This analysis indicates a distinct transformation in the modality of embodiment between the grassroots and the official referendum campaign; wherein the former was predicated on the radical potentiality of ‘coming out’ or *revealing* the reproductive/protest body inside of public/political spaces, the latter appears to be contingent upon processes of covering up or covering over (aspects of) the activist body (or certain groups of activist bodies themselves), in line with classist, racist and misogynistic political ideologies and social norms. I want to begin my analysis of the bodily politics of respectability inside of the ‘Yes’ campaign however by further contextualising the development of the *Together for Yes* organisation and reviewing existing (critical) literature on the tactics and outcomes of the referendum campaign.

Following the official national launch of *Together for Yes*, campaign material and messaging booklets were sent out to regional *Together for Yes* groups across the country. I received mine during the last week of April 2018. Sitting at the kitchen table in my parent’s house, I opened the email from my local canvass leader and downloaded the attachments. One of the attachments was the *Together for Yes* logo – a graphic with three, overlapping yellow, green and pink speech bubbles overlaid with the words *Together for Yes* in green font, with a space above for the name of each local constituency to be inserted in yellow text. I would be canvassing in my home constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny, a predominantly rural area in the South-East which boasts a strong agricultural community. The other two documents I received from my local *Together for Yes* group were a ‘social media toolkit’, describing what types of social media platforms campaigners should use as well as the appropriate ‘tone and style’ for engagement (Carlow Together For Yes 2018b). The third document was the

‘messaging booklet’, which further described the communication strategies for canvassing (Carlow Together For Yes 2018a). I opened the third document and scrolled down to ‘Section 1’ entitled ‘Why Vote Yes’. The three sub-sections included were ‘Core messaging’, ‘Key arguments for Yes’ and ‘Words to use and words to avoid’.

As the three *Together for Yes* co-ordinators would explain in their book, the ‘Yes’ campaign structured its ‘core’ arguments around three pillars, which would come to be known as the ‘three C’s’ strategy (Griffin et al. 2019). In the first instance, the public would be asked to vote Yes in order to enable ‘care’ for pregnant women ‘in their own country’ (ibid).³⁵ With this argument, the Yes campaign sought to engage and mobilise postcolonial, nationalist sentiment, urging Irish voters to provide care for pregnant women in ‘their own country’, as opposed to forcing them to travel abroad to access abortion services, often to ‘unfamiliar cities in the UK’ (O’Shaughnessy 2021, 4; Carlow Together For Yes 2018a, 4). Secondly, voting Yes was constructed as an act of ‘compassion’, particularly towards those couples or families who are obliged to travel after receiving diagnoses of severe or fatal foetal anomalies during pregnancy.³⁶ Finally, the *Together for Yes* messaging booklet cast a Yes vote as the ‘pragmatic’ choice since abortion was clearly already a ‘practical’ reality of women’s lives and in light of the fact that the legal status quo was clearly not functioning – as evidenced by the large volumes of abortion pills entering the country on a daily basis (Calkin 2019a, 73).

In *It’s A Yes!*, Griffin et al. describe the origins of *Together for Yes* and how the campaign strategy was developed. In 2015, Ailbhe Smyth – acting on behalf of the *Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment* – approached the advertising and design agency

³⁵ TFY spoke exclusively about ‘pregnant women’ as opposed to using the more gender inclusive language of ‘pregnant people’. This caused concern among some activists in relation to the erasure of the voices and reproductive experiences of trans and gender-nonconforming people within the referendum campaign (Burns 2018).

³⁶ The ‘Yes’ campaign focused heavily on the experiences of the aforementioned group, giving a particularly large platform to the pro-Repeal organisation *Terminations for Medical Reasons*. Termination for Medical Reasons is a support group for ‘parents who receive diagnoses of severe or fatal foetal anomaly during pregnancy’ (tfmr.ie). Dorothy Roberts identifies as a common trend this tendency within ‘pro-choice’ movements to use ‘the “tragedy” of fetal anomalies as an argument for supporting abortion rights without considering discrimination against people with disabilities’ (Roberts 2015, 81).

Language, commissioning them to undertake research in order to ‘get a sense of specific tactics and how they would play out with the Irish public’ in a hypothetical referendum on the 8th amendment (Griffin et al. 2019, 50). A subsequent research plan was developed, they explain, in conjunction with the *Irish Council for Civil Liberties*, NWCI, *Amnesty International*, ARC, the *Irish Family Planning Association* (IFPA) and the *Unions of Students in Ireland* (USI). This research, the results of which would go on to inform TFY’s messaging, collected data through a number of focus groups. Two focus groups (each consisting of one, two-hour session) were carried out in Dublin, and ‘to get a real sense of how people were feeling outside of Dublin – “the pro-choice bubble”’, two additional focus groups were carried out in Mullingar, Co. Westmeath, and two in Tralee, Co. Kerry (Griffin et al. 2019, 49). Mullingar was chosen as a focus group location on account of ‘its proximity to Roscommon’ (the only county to vote ‘No’ in the same-sex marriage referendum in 2015), Griffin and colleagues clarify; whilst Tralee was selected to give an ‘urban...but also rural’ perspective (Griffin et al. 2019, 49). No details are provided of how many participants were involved in each focus group, or how they were recruited. Neither was any information given in relation to the demographic background of participants.

Griffin et al. (2019) do not include any direct reference to, or analysis of the data collected as part of their research in their book; nor do they describe how the aforementioned data was analysed. Instead, the TFY leaders state simply that their research demonstrated that the people of Ireland wanted the outcome of the abortion referendum to be ‘caring and humane’ (Griffin et al. 2019, 51). Griffin et al. (2019) refer to unspecified opinion polls which allegedly demonstrated that ‘the majority of Irish people[...]would only support the provision of abortion in certain, restricted circumstances’ (50). Referring to an undefined ‘centre ground’, the ‘Yes’ campaign coordinators explain how this group ‘was thoughtful and caring and realistic about the need for change, but[...]felt emotionally torn on the issue’ (Griffin et al. 2019, 51). Again, without reference to any empirical data, they maintain that this ‘muddled middle’ would not support abortion without restrictions (ibid). In conclusion, Griffin et al. (2019) explain that the public ‘wanted a safe space to listen, think and talk’, but ‘tended to withdraw’ if the debate ‘turned angry’ (52). They resolve that, despite

having their own 'reservations about expressing abortion as a need rather than a right', a consensus was reached that 'a softer, gentler, reasoned approach' was the best way forward for the *Together for Yes* campaign (Griffin et al. 2019, 51, 55).

As alluded to above, in the months following the referendum, academic research, blog posts, and newspaper articles offering critical reflections on *Together for Yes* began to circulate. One criticism which was consistently levelled against the TFY campaign was its exclusion of the voices and experiences of migrants and people of colour, and its failure to interrogate the role of systemic racism in Irish abortion politics.³⁷ Chakravarty, Feldman and Penney (2020) offer a sustained analysis of the Whiteness and Eurocentrism of *Together for Yes*, crowning the campaign 'intersectionally tone-deaf at best, purposefully exclusionary at worst' (175). Chakravarty et al. (2020) critique the 'easy cooptation of "diverse" images – like Savita Halappanavar' by this group of predominantly 'white, Irish, middle-class feminists' who, whilst advocating for reproductive justice, have failed to engage meaningfully with the 'racist border-regimes of the Irish nation-state' (181).

Whilst thinkers like Chakravarty et al. (2020) and Burns (2018) have offered important analyses of the 'intersectional politics' of *Together for Yes*, an intersectional analysis of the 'respectability politics' of the 'Yes' campaign has yet to be put forward. In the following sections, I investigate the *embodiment of respectability* in the referendum campaign, through the analysis of activists' testimonies surrounding their affective and bodily experience of campaigning as part of *Together for Yes*. A key question I want to address here is, who shouldered the costs of this 'respectability politics' strategy? Etymologists have established a link between the words 'shoulder' and 'to shield'. To 'shoulder a burden' then, means to literally shield someone/something from harm by taking the burden onto one's body. As described above, respectability politics have an implicitly bodily valence. For Black women members of the Baptist Church

³⁷ With the 'Yes' campaign leaders failing to respond directly to these critiques, the activist group *Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice* (MERJ) convened a workshop in Dublin in October 2019, entitled 'Challenging White feminism: Moving Beyond the Exclusionary Politics of *Together for Yes*' to 'challenge the narrative surrounding *Together for Yes* as a model of intersectional feminism and to address the continued exclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities from Irish feminist discourse' (MERJ 2019a).

movement, achieving 'respectability' required literally re-tutoring, or re-presenting the body in a manner deemed acceptable by mainstream (White) society (Higginbotham 1993). How, I wondered, were the respectability politics of the *Together for Yes* campaign embodied? And what were the embodied effects on campaigners of having to toe the line of this arguably assimilatory strategy?

"Particular Words" and "Plastered-on Smiles": Speech Politics, Emotion Management and the Role of Clothing in the 'Yes' Campaign

Surveying the *Together for Yes* messaging booklet, a particular subsection entitled 'Words to use and words to avoid' caught my eye. Explaining that 'certain language resonates with the middle-ground, and some does not', the 'Yes' campaign's messaging booklet set out categories of words and terminology canvassers were encouraged to use, including 'personal decision', 'regulated' and 'under a doctor's care' (Carlow Together For Yes 2018a, 8). In the section 'words to avoid', the terms 'choice', 'on demand', 'right to choose' and 'bodily autonomy' were listed (ibid). Armitage (2010) argues that language is an extremely important tool in abortion campaigning (16). Drawing upon discourse theory, Armitage explains how whilst words themselves have no 'intrinsic' significance, the 'surrounding contexts' inform the meanings words assume (ibid).

Interestingly, the word 'abortion' itself was not included in either the 'words to use' or in the 'words to avoid' sections of the *Together For Yes* messaging booklet. Similarly, the Social Media Toolkit document offered only one sentence about the use of the word 'abortion', stating that 'we use the word abortion, and the term abortion care as opposed to other euphemisms' (Carlow Together For Yes 2018b, 4). Many activists I interviewed described how, as a result of this ambiguity around language, they were left feeling confused as to what terminology they could or should use on the campaign trail. Oonagh, an activist and student in her early 20's, recounted a tense exchange with a co-campaigner which ensued on her first day of door-to-door canvassing when she utilised the word 'abortion' in a conversation with a prospective voter:

Oh yeah, I remember one of the first days knocking on a door and using the term abortion and one of the other campaigners ate me because she said we're not allowed use the term abortion, we have to only talk about womens' rights. Which is a real skirting around the issue. So, there's a few standout moments, that was one of them. So, trying to figure out, should we continue to skirt around this issue or should we come out with it? Cause they can always slam the door in your face, which happened a few times.

Oonagh provides important clues here as to the 'speech politics' of the 'Yes' campaign, when she describes feeling conflicted between her desire to "come out" with the word 'abortion', and the injunction laid upon her by her fellow campaigners to continue "skirting around the issue". As described in Chapter Five, the term 'coming out' designates a process of *revelation* (Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Saguy 2014). To 'come out' as an abortion activist, I explained, implied the assumption of a state of embodied vulnerability. Here, Oonagh describes her uncertainty as she wrestles with the decision to simply 'come out' with the word abortion on the doorsteps, thereby revealing the reality of the issue as she described it. Again, the instructions given to her by her co-canvasser indicate how the bodily experience of the referendum campaign can be characterised by this impetus towards *concealment* which stands in stark contrast to the body politics of the grassroots abortion campaign which utilised radical acts of bodily *revelation* to great political effect.

On the other hand, however, Oonagh explains how the decision to "come out with it" (to 'come out' as an abortion activist) implies a degree of physical *risk* - of having the individual "slam the door in your face". Her other option then, as she describes it, was to "skirt around the issue", or perhaps to put a skirt around the issue? To wrap the word abortion in a 'softer', more 'feminine' cloak. To paraphrase Sara Ahmed (2017), Oonagh's story indicates how the demand to be respectable is 'lived as a form of body politics, or as *speech politics*: you have to be careful of what you say, how you appear' (para. 30). Speaking to Saoirse – an activist in her early 30's – it became increasingly clear that the language selected by *Together for Yes* elicited strong, often conflicting feelings among those activists working on behalf of the 'Yes' campaign. Saoirse explained her thoughts on the chosen terminology as follows:

It was very pathologized, I'd agree with that. It was a very particular set of words that were picked, not by me if it helped. I had no input. I think it was focus groups they used. The buzzwords were compassion and care. And it worked, I guess is the most important thing. I think what's frustrating for some activists was realizing that the campaign was not designed to appeal to us. It was designed to appeal to the moveable middle, and it did. It was not appealing to me to see this plastered on smile on it all. That it always had to be abortion care, and never just an abortion. As if the word 'care' somehow kind of softened it – like, 'Don't forget there's a hug at the end!' I found it quite jarring that a lot of the people who shared their stories, the overwhelming narrative was of suffering and tragedy relating to abortion. And that of course was the strategy and it made people stop thinking about murder of babies and start thinking about 'who needs this'?

The “buzzwords”, as Saoirse labels them, of ‘care, compassion, and change’, proved particularly divisive amongst campaigners. As I have documented elsewhere, the word ‘compassion’ comes from the Latin ‘*compassionem*’, which includes the stem ‘*pati*’ meaning ‘to suffer’ and ‘*com*’ which means ‘with’ (O’Shaughnessy 2021, 8). To idea of having compassion for someone then literally translates into the idea of suffering *with* them (ibid). Saoirse describes as “jarring” this “overwhelming narrative” within the official referendum campaign of “suffering and tragedy in relation to abortion”. Despite her own negative feelings in relation to this discursive register however, she acknowledges the success of this “strategy” in shifting the focus away from “the murder of babies” and onto the idea of abortion as a ‘need’. Interestingly, Saoirse’s testimony here indicates the *fluidity* of moral discourse in relation to abortion and highlights again how the ‘Yes’ campaign sought to ground themselves in a ‘practical morality’ which focuses upon the ‘real relations in which the necessity of abortion arises’ (Pollack Petchesky 1990, 311).

Describing the contemporary emotional construction of abortion, Australian sociologist Erica Millar (2017) notes that the popular tendency to emphasise experiences of ‘suffering’ and ‘tragedy’ in relation to abortion works to construct abortion as ‘inherently productive of grief and shame’ (3). This particular ‘emotional script’ Millar explains, operates such that, even in cases where women and pregnant

people have the legal 'choice' to terminate their pregnancy, abortion will nevertheless be constructed – in emotional terms – as an inherently 'damaging experience' (ibid). In the Irish context, I have argued, the discursive focus on 'compassion' and 'suffering' in relation to abortion is emblematic of efforts to mobilise religious and postcolonial gender logics which conflate the suffering Irish mother both with the suffering Virgin Mary and the suffering Motherland; thereby, ultimately reinscribing the apparently 'sacrificial' nature of 'Irish femininity' (Martin 2002 in O'Shaughnessy 2021, 12).

As I listened to Saoirse, I was struck by the disjuncture between the image she described – standing on a doorstep, with a "*plastered on smile*" – and the way she appeared in front of me in that moment, almost seething with anger and visibly holding back tears. Saoirse's testimony designates how, for campaigners like herself who toed the line of the 'Yes' campaign's referendum strategy, canvassing entailed not only intense physical work but also required an intensive investment of emotional labour. In her ground breaking book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, American sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1985) coins the term 'surface acting' to describe the process whereby people adopt particular body language or facial expressions in order to outwardly display particular emotional expressions (36). In 'surface acting', Hochschild (1985) clarifies, facial expressions are 'put on' but not experienced as an authentic 'part of' the subject (ibid).

Hochschild (1985) describes how women, as well as those working in the service industry, are most often required to perform this 'emotional labour' in line with normative expectations of their gender(ed) role (36). Discussing the emotional labour of social justice activism, Sara Ahmed (2017) explains how smiling is a particularly important instrument in the emotional labour toolkit. Smiling works to 'soften' one's appearance, particularly where one is perceived as 'too hard' (Ahmed 2017, para. 25). Ahmed (2017) discusses how smiling is particularly helpful for activists or diversity workers who may otherwise be perceived as 'hostile', facilitating them in their efforts to 'pass' into institutions of power (para. 25). As Muireann – an activist in her early 40's – explained to me, the management of emotions and in particular, the expression of 'positive' emotions was an integral to the strategy of referendum campaign, and

was apparently designed to distinguish the approach of the 'Yes' activists from that of the anti-abortion movement:

You know, I think the tone that was decided really early on of, we're gonna be positive, we're not gonna get into mudslinging with the antis, we're gonna respect people's opinions, we're not gonna shout, we're gonna be the approachable friendly people. And I remember at canvassing training, people being like 'What?! I don't want to have to be really nice if somebody is telling me they don't think women should be having sex'. Or whatever. And that was really hard and that really took a toll on people, having to swallow that stuff everyday, 'cause you just need that person to vote Yes. And I think that has taken me a very long time to process, what that actually does of saying 'I understand what you mean, I understand your question, I understand your concern', when they just don't trust women. Like, I don't understand! So, but I think that Together for Yes did that really well, of like, if you were looking in from the outside, you're going to want to side with the smiley, friendly people who aren't shouting things into a megaphone about murder and who are going to say 'OK, yeah no I can understand that'. People are gonna respond to that, they're not gonna respond to shouting.

Like Saoirse, Muireann spoke at length about the utility of smiling on the campaign trail; explaining that members of the public would be more likely *"to want to side with the smiley, friendly people who aren't shouting things"*. Interrogating the politics of smiling, Ahmed (2017) defers to the work of Betty Friedan (1963) whom, Ahmed says, 'exposed a rotten infection underneath the smile of the housewife' (para.18). Ahmed (2017) analyses representations of Friedan's object of study – the White, bourgeois housewife – explaining how in images of the White, bourgeois housewife in mainstream media, for example, she always appears smiling (ibid). The smile becomes 'evidence', Ahmed explains, that the housewife is 'happy' to do the unpaid, reproductive labour in the home (Ahmed 2017, para. 18).

Moreover, smiling is a 'feminine achievement', Ahmed (2017) explains, and exemplifies the housewife's successful performance of hegemonic gender roles (para. 24). As Muireann explains however, neither herself nor her fellow campaigners were 'happy' to take on the very specific emotional labour that the 'Yes' campaign required

of them. Recounting a conversation at canvassing training, Muireann recalls a colleague's reaction towards the injunction to "*be nice*" to voters who espoused sexist or misogynistic views on the doorstep. Again, demonstrating the explicitly bodily valence of the 'respectability politics' strategy, Muireann explains the toll this took on activists having to "*swallow*" such comments. As she spoke, Muireann contorted her face as though recalling the unpleasant taste "*that stuff*" left in her mouth.

During my interview with Ciara, an activist in her early 40's who canvassed in the rural South-West, she explained how the injunction to "*present ourselves as respectable*" necessitated not only the assumption of particular ways of speaking and particular emotional expressions but the adoption of a specific 'uniform', as well. Returning to the 'respectability politics' strategies critical to the history of the Black organising tradition in the U.S., Tanisha Ford (2013) demonstrates how clothing and uniforms became a particularly important 'cultural and political tool' in the civil rights movement (627). In the early 20th century, Black women activists were encouraged to dress as if they were 'going to Church', Ford (2013) explains (629). By performing 'respectable' womanhood, through their 'conservative' clothing, these women sought to 'publicly articulate their moral aptitude', Ford clarifies (*ibid*). Here, Ciara recounts a similar 'politics of dress' at play within the referendum campaign in 2018:

There was no place in our campaign for blue hair or repeal jumpers. We could wear our badges, it was only at events we could put on our shirts, cause then you're crew. And sometimes I would wear it if I wasn't on a street stall, I might wear my jumper then, cause then you're a walking billboard. But when you're out walking in the town and you're meeting people on their lunch, we had to take a different strategy, we had to present ourselves as respectable. Our message had to be respectable, but still we'd managed not to compromise too much on the content. But we had to present it in a certain way.

Reflecting on the launch of *Together for Yes*, Ciara complained that "*rural perspectives weren't included*" in putting together the referendum campaign messaging. Moreover, Ciara alleged that some of the TFY media spokespeople "*had a detrimental effect down the country*". As Mary McGill (2019) has explored, as both 'geography and imaginary',

rural Ireland occupies a 'distinct space in the Irish landscape' characterised 'by the region's assumed conservatism (109). Both national and international media commentary constructed the abortion debate as neatly divided along the lines of rural versus urban (McGill 2019). In reality, almost every county in Ireland delivered a landslide 'Yes' vote in the May 25th referendum. In Wicklow, the 'Yes' side secured a 74% victory, with voters in Roscommon (assumed as one of Ireland's most conservative rural enclaves) delivering a victory of 54% for the pro-Repeal campaign (Henley 2018).

Whilst rural Ireland ultimately proved itself as less conservative than previously assumed, Ciara's testimony illustrates a culture of misogyny which continues to be pervasive in rural Ireland and which had to be deftly circumvented by canvassers working on behalf of the 'Yes' campaign. Canvassing in rural Ireland required a "*different approach*", Ciara clarified, which entailed the adoption of an alternative sartorial presentation. As I illustrated in Chapter Five, whilst the black-and-white Repeal jumper played a hugely important role in the consolidation of the repeal the 8th campaign after its launch in 2016 – as a tool to foster collective identity, as a symbol of hope and as a mechanism of 'gestural dress' (a uniquely intimate and affective, embodied protest activity) – the jumper had to be thrown out by certain factions of activists during the referendum campaign, particularly as it appeared to signify a type of non-normative and 'disrespectable' femininity, and thereby prevented these activists from successfully embodying and *proving* their moral authority (Skeggs 1997). Ciara explained:

There's this whole thing about respectability that really went through our campaign as well, with the jumpers and everything. As my partner in crime would say, 'We have to put on our church clothes when we're going to canvass'. And when she's doing street stalls, she'd have her nice dress on, she'd have her hair done and her make-up on and good shoes, and she'd stand there in her good coat. And people would be like 'Oh who are you now?' and like, you could be from MACRA. Like, wholesome. And you as a wholesome, nice- had to put on the middle-class persona, you could be picking your kids up at the school or you could be on a lunchbreak from the solicitors office.

Analysing Ciara's account, it becomes clear how clothing became an integral element of the 'Yes' campaign's 'respectability politics' strategy. Referencing 'MACRA', a voluntary organisation set up 1944 to provide young (male) farmers with training and an outlet for socialising in rural areas, Ciara indicates how herself and her "*partner-in-crime*" sought to embody a particular version of 'traditional' (conservative) Irish femininity (Macra Na Feirme 2022). Almost directly echoing Ford's (2013) analysis, Ciara explains how through donning her "*Church clothes*", activists like herself and her colleagues in the rural South-West sought to prove their moral aptitude. Explaining how they needed to look like they "*could be picking (their) kids up from school*", or "*be on a lunchbreak from the solicitor's office*", Ciara's testimony indicates how, for rural women in particular, the endowment of respectability - which, as Skeggs (1997) argues 'embodies moral authority' - was contingent upon class status, as well as upon the assumption of traditional, maternal, feminine roles (2). Laoise elaborated on how this re-inscription of conservative gender roles and the coterminous concession to classism formed integral elements of the 'Yes' campaign's strategy from the outset:

Behind the scenes, they were doing canvasses in 2013, 2014...all in the run up to the campaign. They had gone and they had tried different messaging. They had tried taking, you know 'Trust women' and unfortunately, Irish people don't trust women, that was not working on the doors. The whole human rights thing, just not buying human rights or whatever. They came back and they were like 'Well, what's working, people trust doctors', yeah I think it just...this private decision with a doctor. Irish people like privacy, they're really private. I think it did work for that older generation. Now, the younger generation and the activist in me, wanted to scream out 'It is my body and it is my choice!' but that's not gonna work on the door, you know. I took to the streets, and I did scream that manys a time. But when you're door to door, face to face with someone, you have to be, you have to approach it-you have to see where people are at as well.

Referring to the focus group research started by Ailbhe Smyth and co. in 2015 - which Laoise describes here as the "*canvasses*" that "*they were doing*" - Laoise matter-of-factly explains to me how this research had demonstrated that "*Irish people don't trust*

women” and that this message was apparently “*not working on the doors*”. Skating adeptly over this pronouncement of inherent (and apparently unchallengeable?) cultural misogyny, Laoise clarifies that the same research confirmed that Irish people “*trust doctors*”. As Erica Millar (2017) notes, this prioritisation of medical ‘expertise’ in political debate around abortion – which often comes at the expense of the testimony and experiences of women and abortion-seeking people – is not new. In contexts where abortion has become medicalized, Millar (2017) argues, a ‘web of gendered power relations’ operates to construct the idea that abortion should be a ‘medical doctors, rather than a woman’s decision’ (14-15).

The decision to centralise the voices of (usually male) doctors in the *Together for Yes* campaign certainly feeds into a wider effort to shift the terms of the debate; to depoliticise abortion, to construct abortion as a legitimate healthcare issue, and thus to make abortion a more palatable concern for the people of ‘middle-Ireland’ (Mullaly 2016). Analysing the testimony of activists like Ciara and Laoise, however, it appears that the decision made by the ‘Yes’ campaign leaders to prioritise the voices and experiences of doctors – instead of those of women, pregnant people and abortion-seekers themselves – may speak to deeper intersecting structures of misogyny, classism, and paternalism at play both within the Irish healthcare services and within Irish society at large; structures which the ‘Yes’ campaign chose not to challenge, but to simply circumvent.

By encouraging campaigners to adopt a ‘positive, non-reactive’ tone, by asking them to ‘skirt around the issue’ of abortion (to use the term ‘abortion care’ instead of ‘abortion rights’), by compelling activists to ‘swallow’ the sexism they encountered on the doorsteps, and by prioritising a discursive register which focalises the ‘suffering’ of aborting women, the ‘Yes’ campaign sought to establish a connection with the voting public on the basis of a shared, conservative interpellation of gender, and a shared culture of paternalism. Centralising the experiences of ‘respectable’, White, middle-class, heterosexual women (and couples) who receive ‘the devastating news that their happy pregnancy involves a fatal foetal abnormality’, the ‘Yes’ campaigners could by association prove their own moral aptitude and ‘social value’ as charitable,

respectable, bystanders, concerned with the welfare of these misfortunate, mothers and their families (Carlow Together For Yes 2018a, 4; Skeggs 2002, 2).

Higginbotham (1993) describes 'respectability politics' as entailing a 'highly conscious' concession to hegemony. The question remains, I argue, as to whether the reproduction of paternalistic tropes within the 'Yes' campaign signals a *conscious* (and potentially subversive) concession to/appropriation of misogynistic logics, or whether this exemplifies a more cynical conservatism at the heart of the referendum campaign. Whilst the embodiment of 'respectable' dress allowed activists like Ciara to initiate the process of dialogue with rural voters, the costs of this 'assimilationist' strategy are less clear (Higginbotham 1993, 187). In addition, we are compelled to ask, by colluding in the reproduction of a classist, heterosexist performance of gender, (how) did the 'Yes' campaign reinscribe the idea of the 'disrespectability' or moral *inaptitude* of activists who did not successfully embody these norms?

The Embodied Costs of Respectability? Accounting for the Affective Bonds of Whiteness and Learning from our Fear of Anger

Reflecting on the emotional politics of social justice organising, feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (2017) describes how being 'part of a cause' is 'assumed to require getting over your misery: getting over it; getting over yourself' (para. 1). Ahmed (2017) recounts how the idea that one has to put one's emotions aside in order to successfully engage in diversity or social justice work – exemplified in the popular expression 'don't agonise, organise' – has become mantra (para. 2). Ahmed (2017) takes issue with this notion, complaining that there is 'something wrong with the idea that there is a right way to feel when protesting' (para. 3). By contrast, she clarifies that 'protesting is messy' and 'there are times when we arrive and leave with grief in our hearts' (Ahmed 2017, para. 4).

In this way, Ahmed (2017) keenly observes the 'complicated' and 'sticky' nature of emotion work in activism. The activist may 'smile and be plotting', she explains; they

may appear to be ‘working in agreement in order to work against an agreement’ (para. 32). I want to pause here on the word ‘agreement’ and reflect upon its various meanings. From the French verb *agréer*, meaning ‘to please’, to be ‘working in agreement’ could signify the idea of trying to ‘please’ or even ‘placate’ others.³⁸ Working ‘in agreement in order to work against an agreement’ might indicate a process of concession to the status quo, in an effort to ultimately overturn the same system. The word *agreement* however, also signifies the idea of ‘mutual understanding’; in this case, to be ‘working in agreement’ should imply a process of *working together* on the basis of formal, mutual comprehension.

Whilst we can argue that the ‘Yes’ campaign’s appropriating ‘respectability’ was motivated by subversive ends – that the campaign sought to establish commonality with the voting public on the basis of shared, hegemonic understandings and values in relation to gender, race and class, to eventually overturn established norms – the question of whether and in what ways this strategy was conceived of or supported by the collective campaign remains unclear. The lack of transparency around the public relations research conducted by *Together for Yes* in the years preceding the referendum, combined with the fact that this research contradicts exit poll data gathered on the day of the referendum in relation to public attitudes towards abortion in Ireland thus begs the question of where this injunction to embody respectability might have come from? Returning to Saoirse’s testimony, it becomes increasingly clear that the respectability politics strategy came at a great cost for activists on the ground. Specifically, Saoirse describes how toeing the line of the TFY strategy had left activists with a great deal of “rage” and “anger” which had yet to “come out”:

This is the nature of a referendum campaign. We had to appeal to everyone. And that’s awful because suddenly you’re tone policing yourself. I’m not allowed to be angry because that’s what people think we are. You’re not allowed to demand your rights. You have to beg for them, and I think a lot of people felt like, the sacrifice they made on the doorstep, it was the indignity of having to ask and ask with someone else’s words was just really really hard for people.

³⁸ The French ‘*agréer*’ signifies ‘to accept’, ‘to suit’ or ‘to approve’; ‘*agreement*’, on the other hand, signifies ‘an accord’ or ‘treaty’ (Collins Dictionary, n.d.a; Collins Dictionary, n.d.b)

Immensely hard emotional work that people were doing. Canvassing wasn't just hard 'cause it's brave and you're knocking on strangers' doors. Which is in itself kind of mind-blowing but just like the idea of approaching someone else's space is quite intimidating. It's really not easy to do so, to do that in a sort of forced, kind of, subjugated isn't the right word but in a pleading kind of a way, it was the indignity of it was just shocking and it really exhausted people. And we were asking the most educated, the most brilliant, the most empowered people to kind of beg for their lives. No wonder people are angry...I don't think we've started to deal with that yet...The absolute rage that's still in the back of people's minds...it's yet to come out.

As she spoke, Saoirse conjured a disturbing image of standing, unwillingly on a doorstep as *"someone else's words"* are literally and forcefully placed into her mouth. Saoirse points to how the *"indignity"* as she describes it, of having to *"beg for your life"* was compounded by the fact that she *"wasn't allowed to be angry"* about it. I was struck by Saoirse's description of her colleagues in the 'Yes' campaign as *"the most educated, the most brilliant, the most empowered people"* – should 'educated', 'empowered' people be exempt from door-to-door canvassing, I wondered? What did Saoirse's statement indicate about the meaning and value other White, middle-class Irish people attribute to embodied, political campaigning?³⁹ As Saoirse explains, having to suppress her anger constituted *"immensely hard emotional work"*.

Hochschild (1985) terms as 'deep acting' this labour whereby one attempts to subdue or induce authentic or 'real' emotions in oneself (35). 'Deep acting' differs from 'surface' acting, Hochschild (1985) explains, as it implies intervening in the 'inner shape of feeling', as opposed to simply 'shaping the outward appearance of one' (36). Again, demonstrating how she and other activists struggled against this mandate to *conceal* their bodies/selves, Saoirse reinvokes the terminology of 'coming out', in reference to the *"rage"* which has *"has yet to come out"* after the conclusion of the referendum campaign. Saoirse's description of the inevitability of this rage reminds

³⁹ In *Social Movements and Ireland*, Connolly and Hourigan (2006) explain how after the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, collective action 'became regarded as a relatively marginal form of political expression', which the authors attribute largely to the influences of 'Catholicism, nationalism and the desire for political stability in the newly formed post-colonial state' which together created an 'institutional conservatism and authoritarianism' in Irish politics (6).

me of the words of Soraya Chemaly's (2018) who describes anger as being 'like water'... 'no matter how hard a person tries to dam, divert, or deny it, it will find a way, usually along the path of least resistance' (31).

Drawing on the work of Black feminists like Audre Lorde (1981) who described anger as a 'powerful source of information and energy', Chemaly (2018) proclaims that anger is what keeps us 'invested in the world' (Lorde 1981, 8; Chemaly 2018, 32). Explaining the positive, productive nature of affects like anger and rage, Chemaly (2018) contends that anger plays a hugely important role in social justice work as it 'bridges the divide between what "is" and what "ought" to be' (31). Indeed, as Audre Lorde (1981) contends, translating anger into action 'in the service of our vision and our future' is 'a liberating and strengthening act of clarification' (8). As I described in Chapter Four, emotions like anger and indignation worked as hugely important affective forces in the mobilisation of activists within the Repeal the 8th campaign.

As evidenced by the testimony of activists laid out here, with the changeover from the grassroots campaign to the official referendum strategy however, campaigners were encouraged to enact a very different emotional repertoire. As activists like Saoirse have described, their involvement in the 'Yes' campaign required intense emotional work including both 'surface' and 'deep acting'. In concrete terms, as part of the *Together for Yes* campaign, activists were encouraged to suppress their anger and instead, to approach the canvass with 'calmness and compassion' (Carlow Together For Yes 2018a, 4). Dorsey and Chen (2020) explain that such 'in-group policing' is characteristic of respectability politics strategies wherein members of the 'marginalised groups' are not 'afforded the nuance of individual personalities' (para. 17). I asked Saoirse to expand on the embodied costs of having to consistently 'swallow' her rage. She explained:

Some people are so burned out that they'll never come back to activism. They're done. And I don't blame them... Mentally and physically. Because it's not good for people to kind of carry that trauma around, and it is trauma, mentally or otherwise. I think some people have diverted it into other kinds of activism... And I think people are just very brittle and they're arguing

and they're fighting and they're looking around at other activists, and they're fighting with other activists. And there's a massive sense of betrayal. A sense of 'this wasn't what we agreed on'. But nobody agreed on any of it. We are all angry and so the ontology of whose anger is prioritized...there's already narratives emerging about whose especially angry, I can't blame them. I think angry is an important thing, especially in Ireland, especially for women-not women, anybody who's not men. I don't know what's gonna happen to all that. Because I think people are hoping for a resolution, but it's not there, it's not available. Nobody has it, they're looking around the room, to other activists who've also gone through it. But to a lesser extent, or more depending on the person, feel similarly betrayed or traumatized and are just wrecked. Nobody has the answer. The shock waves are still going.

Explaining how activists have been left “very brittle” in the aftermath of the campaign, Saoirse’s words provide a sharp illustration of the various ways in which power ‘gets right to the bone’ (Ahmed 2014, para. 25). Her description of how herself and her comrades have been left “*carrying (trauma) with them*” speaks to the idea of an unreasonable degree of (bodily) sacrifice – or what Barbara Sutton (2007) might term ‘bad’ *poner el cuerpo* – required of those engaged in the ‘Yes’ campaign (147). I was struck particularly by Saoirse’s description of the anger and the “*massive sense of betrayal*” around the ‘Yes’ campaign’s adopted strategy which, as Saoirse explains, “*wasn't what we agreed on*”. There was a particular sense of anger, it seemed, around the emotion work that was required of campaigners. Having to mediate their language and behaviour for such a long period of time had left activists feeling estranged from themselves and their feelings, and from the movement at large. This sense of alienation became more evident to activists like Aoife who, instead of feeling “*elated*” after the campaign, instead found themselves facing a “*difficult transition*”:

It was really rough. And I think there was this idea afterwards that we should feel elated. But I think there was something to do with the way we ran the campaign and the compromises that made us feel...there was a difficult transition afterwards. I couldn't really reconcile some of what happened during the campaign. And also, I was badly bullied by someone during the campaign, and everybody knew about it but nobody was willing to do anything until we had won. That was the thing of, everybody just wanted to sweep everything under the rug until we

had won. But in that, we compromised on our core foundation, which was bodily integrity and respect for people... within five months of the referendum, I had had a full breakdown. And so, I don't think my experience is unique. I think I was possibly out and about more than the average campaigner. But it was a hugely emotional campaign and just extremely draining and I'm still not over it. And like, I can't be involved in any activism at the moment. And so, it was quite hard because all of the organisations ended up fighting. There was an awful lot- we compromised a huge number of our values as a campaign. And it was done through fear not through principle... I think we were scared. Scared about everything and scared about how-scared of how quickly we might lose and this idea that if we did lose, we wouldn't have another chance for years. But making decisions based on fear is cowardly. I don't know. Everybody just kept making these decisions based on fear and not on principle.

As Aoife spoke, her disappointment both with regards the 'compromises' made and with the fact that she didn't *feel* how she thought she would feel after the referendum victory, were palpable. Sara Ahmed (2017) describes how 'anger' is often the emotion which 'fills the gap' between the 'promise of a feeling and the feeling of a feeling' (para. 23). Similarly, discussing what we might term the embodied costs of emotion work, Hochschild (1985) argues that 'maintaining a difference between feeling and feigning over the long run leads to strain' (90). The separation of 'display' and 'feeling' leads to a process of 'emotive dissonance', Hochschild continues (ibid). The performer is forced to 'remove the self from the job' and in the process, the 'self becomes smaller' (Hochschild 1985, 135). In asking activists to assimilate to the 'respectability politics' strategy then, *Together for Yes* required more than 'surface acting'; it required campaigners to engage in a process of affective alienation, to distance themselves from their feelings, to make themselves smaller.

To come back to Dorsey and Chen (2020), when engaging in respectability politics strategies, it is important to acknowledge 'why' and 'who' we are performing for. As Aoife explains, there appeared to be an implicit understanding among certain segments of the campaign that the concessions being made by *Together for Yes* were motivated (or perhaps, legitimised) by "*fear*". Aoife explained how herself and other 'Yes' campaigners were "*scared...scared about everything and... scared about how quickly*

we might lose". Listening to Aoife's testimony, I began to wonder about the relationship between *fear* and *anger*. I wanted to know whether or how this pervasive sense of 'fear' affected or related to the ways in which the 'Yes' campaign sought to manage or mitigate the 'anger' which circulated amongst and between activist bodies both before and after the referendum. My conversation with Shauna - a migrant woman activist involved in reproductive justice and anti-racist organising - who campaigned on behalf of *Together for Yes* provided some important clues in this regard:

So, as a migrant, we fought, we sent emails asking them to change 'women of ireland' for 'pregnant people'. We fought for Savita's face not to be used as the 'good migrant'... We were told we were problematic; we were aggressive, we were unable to represent the campaign. Like, what the fuck do you want me to do? You're silencing us. We're literally fucking dying. And you are OK with this to what? Benefit Simon Harris? The National Womens Council? Labour? So, of course I'm fucking angry. And you have Ailbhe Smyth on a BBC interview saying they were inclusive, we lost it there. On top of the campaign, how strenuous it was, it was that sense of anger and despair. We had no resources; we had no funding. We worked and worked till the end and then when it finished, we kept going. It was an awful lot of friendships lost, comrades lost, abuse...let us celebrate, we did the best we could ... sorry, it's a little bit sore.

The activist group in which Shauna was engaged was made up primarily of migrants and women of colour. She described how, when herself and her comrades from this group approached *Together for Yes* to discuss the intersectional politics around the use of the image of Savita Halappanavar (amongst other issues), they were dismissed, branded as "*aggressive*" and "*unable to represent the campaign*". Listening to Shauna, and thinking about the pervasive sense of fear described by Aoife and other activists in relation to the 'Yes' campaign, I began to wonder what exactly it was that the 'Yes' campaign was afraid of? Was the *Together for Yes* campaign simply afraid of 'losing' the referendum, or was the decision to run a conservative 'respectable' campaign also motivated by a fear of being perceived as 'angry'? By a fear of anger, in itself? More importantly, why, if anger was such an important mobilising force for the campaign, did the referendum convenors decide then to try and quash its affective energy?

Chemaly (2018) argues that ‘when a woman shows anger in institutional, political and professional settings, she automatically violates gender norms’ (25). She continues, explaining that ‘gendered ideas about anger make us question ourselves, doubt our feelings, set aside our needs, and renounce our own capacity for moral conviction’ (Chemaly 2018, 31). In choosing *not* to be angry then, the ‘Yes’ campaign made a decision to lean into normative ideas around ‘gender appropriate’ emotional expressions. In essence, the ‘Yes’ campaign chose to prioritise the comfort of (male) politicians by keeping their (female) anger under wraps. As Lorde (1981) describes, women have been socialised to understand that ‘the anger of others was to be avoided at all costs’, since there was ‘nothing to be learned from it’ apart from ‘a judgement that we had been bad girls, come up lacking’ (ibid). By not rocking the boat, perhaps *Together for Yes* activists hoped to ingratiate themselves to the ‘good will of patriarchal power’, upon which women are ‘taught that our lives depended’ (Lorde 1981, 9). As Shauna’s testimony indicates however, some women – specifically, women of colour – will always already be perceived as ‘angry’. In this sense, we can understand anger as an affect with a distinctly racializing valence.

Perhaps then, this fear of anger within the ‘Yes’ campaign was motivated not simply by the concern that, through the display of negative affects like anger and rage, activists might violate heterosexist gender norms, thereby incurring the wrath of paternalistic power upon whose ‘benevolence’ the success of the campaign – and by extension, our lives and wellbeing – depend. Moreover, by presenting themselves as *not* ‘angry’, perhaps the ‘Yes’ campaign sought to distinguish themselves from activists like Shauna and her comrades, to lean in to a version of White femininity which could distinguish itself from the “aggressive”, “problematic” approach of some activist of colour groups. In this vein, it becomes clear how the affective bonds of Whiteness played an integral role in developing the foundations of and in the formal political successes of the *Together for Yes*’s ‘respectability politics’ campaign.

Returning to Higginbotham’s (1993) avowal that respectability politics invariably entails a concession to hegemonic values, I would add that whilst ‘respectability’ takes on different meanings across cultural and historical settings, it is always already

entangled in and (re)productive of contextually specific, racist, sexist and classist logics. Or, as Beverley Skeggs (1997) argues, 'respectability contains judgements of class, race, gender and sexuality and different groups have differential access to the mechanisms for generating, resisting and displaying respectability' (1). For the *Together for Yes* campaign, the 'respectable' woman – that is, the morally apt woman – is the White, middle-class, 'professional' mother who is never angry, but instead smiles consistently through suffering and sacrifice.

Analysing the differential experiences of activists within the *Together for Yes* campaign provides some important clues then, I argue, which might allow us to move beyond reductive, binary analyses which situate 'respectability politics' strategies as *either* subversive of or concessionary to hegemonic societal norms and values. The testimonies of Irish activists put forward here illustrate, I contend, that our time might be better spent – as activists and academics – not in deciding whether 'respectability' narratives are radical or assimilationist, but in examining the *embodied costs* and the *affective outcomes* that respectability politics strategies entails, for activists positioned differently across gendered, classed and racialised groups. The 'sores' of the protest body and the emotions which circulate between and amongst activist bodies in the aftermath of campaigns can be reconceptualised then as important sources for feminist knowledge production.

In her keynote address to the NWSA Convention entitled 'The Uses of Anger' (1981), Audre Lorde writes that 'your fear of anger will teach you nothing' (7). Indeed, I would argue that for the Irish abortion rights campaign, our fear of anger has accomplished very little. By contrast, and inspired by Lorde's words, I argue here that there is much to be *learned* from this fear of anger and from the anger itself which continues to circulate amongst and between activist bodies in the aftermath of the referendum campaign. By analysing this fear of anger within the *Together for Yes* campaign, the operation of the affective bonds of Whiteness inside Irish feminist circles becomes increasingly clear. Moreover, it is through the examination of this fear of anger that we can delineate how patriarchal power structures continue to shape

and influence the emotional politics both of reproductive justice activism and of the everyday lives of women and feminised people in Ireland.

To conclude, Soraya Chemaly (2018) argues that anger is ‘an assertion of rights and worth[...]it is the demand of accountability’ (692). Ignoring our anger, she says ‘makes us careless with ourselves and allows society to be careless with us’ (ibid). When we take seriously our anger, we make it clear that we ‘take ourselves seriously’, Chemaly explains (Chemaly 2018, 34). Perhaps then, one of the most important lessons we need to take away from this analysis of the ‘Yes’ campaign’s respectability politics strategy is the value of anger. Moving forward, post-Repeal, it is imperative to think about what might be gained for activists to sit with their anger, to feel it, to allow ourselves to embody it finally and truly. This will be an important step, I think, in allowing us to become more careful with ourselves, and with each other, to assume and assert our worth and our rights, and to build a truly feminist, intersectional reproductive justice movement in Ireland, and beyond.

Chapter Seven: Changed Bodies? – Reproductive Politics and Embodied and Affective Life After the 8th

Celebrating Referendum Day and the Intersectional Politics of Cathartic Breathing

Uncharacteristically for early Irish summer, Friday May 25th, 2018, was bright, warm and sunny. After a night of broken sleep, I woke early, and immediately turned on the radio to keep a close track of the day's events. The WhatsApp group I shared with my co-canvassers in Carlow was abuzz with conversation. With nimble, eager fingers refreshing the *Together for Yes* Twitter page, we spent the morning engaged in a real-time commentary, dissecting each piece of referendum-related news as it slowly trickled through. Around mid-morning, Sinead - one of the local campaigners - shared an image in the WhatsApp group. The picture was of a single white rose and 'Tá' badge attached to the outside. After casting her own vote, Sinead had brought the flower to the memorial for the survivors of the Magdalene Laundries in Graiguecullen Park, County Carlow. She placed it on a headstone which read: "To the memory of all those who passed through the institutions in Ireland: may their injustice never be forgotten".

After a reluctant breakfast, I packed my bag to head to the local polling station. I drove slowly in my dad's old pick-up truck; my usual driving-nerves compounded with the anticipation of the day. I arrived at the polling station - my old primary school - around 11 o'clock. Entering the room where I would cast my ballot, I was struck by a sense of disjuncture. I thought about the loud, ferocious energy of each of the marches and demonstrations I had attended in the previous few years. How peculiar that they would culminate in this, I thought; a small, silent, empty room with two makeshift polling booths and a pile of children's toys strewn casually in the corner. After receiving my ballot, I moved gingerly towards the booth. Carefully, I read and re-read the ballot before marking an 'X' in the 'Yes/Tá' box. Folding the ballot in half, I slotted it into the box in the centre of the room, breathing a sigh of relief as the small slip of paper disappeared into the darkness.

That afternoon, I travelled by train to Dublin, exchanging warm, anxious glances with fellow travellers sporting 'Yes' paraphernalia. By the time I arrived in Dublin in the late afternoon, there was a tentative but jubilant atmosphere in the city centre. Excitable bodies in Repeal jumpers spilled out from every café, restaurant and bar. Later that evening, I joined my aunt to watch the announcement of the results of the first exit poll which would be broadcast towards the end of the popular Friday-night talk show, *The Late Late Show*. Shortly after 10 o'clock, journalist Paul McCullagh revealed the results of two exit polls, one taken by national broadcaster RTÉ and the other carried out by the *Irish Times* newspaper; both of which reported a margin of victory of 68-69% for the 'Yes' campaign. Thirty-five years after its introduction, it appeared that the electorate had chosen to remove Ireland's constitutional abortion ban by a resounding two-thirds majority (Leahy 2018).

From early in the afternoon on Saturday May 26th, large crowds gathered in the grounds of Dublin Castle – the former centre of colonial administration in Ireland – where the official referendum results were due to be announced. A large stage was set up where the co-directors of *Together for Yes* gathered to make speeches, joined by public figures like comedienne Tara Flynn and journalist Roisin Ingle (two women who were among the first to 'come out' to the Irish media with their abortion stories in the early 2010's). Peter Boylan (former Master of the National Maternity Hospital), as well as various politicians who had supported Repeal also joined the group on stage. Final tallies revealed that 1,429,981 votes were cast in favour of the proposal to repeal the 8th amendment, with 723,632 people voting to retain Article 40.3.3 of the Constitution (Leahy 2018). During our meeting in December 2019, Clodagh (early 30's) reflected on her memories of being in Dublin Castle on May 26th, and the mixed emotions she felt when the referendum results were finally announced:

It was around 6 o'clock because all the journalists on the stage were fidgeting. It was raining. And I'm going to try say this without crying. But this person next to me-everyone was putting their hoods up and this person said 'Oh, it's like its washing our sins away', and I just took to sob. It was the most cathartic experience of my life. My friend was like 'Do you wanna get under my umbrella?' and I was just like 'No, I just wanna stand'. So, I just stood in the rain,

and it was an amazing experience. But I was so angry at the same time, all day, for the women who didn't get to have this. So, I met some friends from TFMR and they were in great form.⁴⁰ But I remember being so angry for those people, that it was too late for them, you know? It was too late to circumvent their tragedy. So, I was upset for those people. But also happy, and it was a weird kind of happiness because I was so relieved and probably delirious from exhaustion as well.*

I was struck by the imagery of Clodagh standing in the rain in the grounds of Dublin Castle; an experience she described as one of the “*most cathartic*” of her life. The word ‘catharsis’ can be used to describe the release of repressed emotions but also a process of cleansing, purification or *bodily purging*.⁴¹ Clodagh describes how herself and her colleagues felt that the rain was almost “*washing away*” the shame which had been imposed upon them. Feminist philosopher Luna Dolezal writes that ‘the experience of becoming and being a woman[...]historically involves a process of learning to interpret the body as a site of shame’ (Dolezal 2015, 106). Dolezal (2015) argues that overcoming shame - which she designates as a ‘mechanism of social control’ which is ‘centred on the body’ - plays an important role for women in the ‘validation of subjectivity, both personally and politically’ (xv). Clodagh’s testimony provides clues then as to the various *meanings* of the repeal victory which, in the first instance, signifies the removal of a set of social norms and structures within which the gendered, reproductive body is constituted as a *shameful object*.

Clodagh’s testimony also captures how the victory of the abortion rights movement held various meanings across generations and between activist communities. As Enright (2018) describes, the ‘Repeal’ campaign existed as a ‘floating signifier’ that was ‘appropriated, not only by campaigners for reproductive justice in the present, but by queers demanding bodily autonomy, disabled women insisting on being seen as adults with sexual and reproductive lives, older women asking for recognition of past historical abuses’ (9). Clodagh lamented how the result came “*too late*” for people

⁴⁰ *Terminations for Medical Reasons

⁴¹ ‘Catharsis’ signifies ‘purification or purgation of the emotions’; ‘a purification or purgation that brings about spiritual renewal or release from tension’ or ‘the elimination of a complex by bringing it into consciousness and affording it expression’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary n.d.a).

like her grandmother, who had spent a large portion of her life incarcerated in a Magdalene Laundry after becoming pregnant outside of marriage. Clodagh explained how, for her, voting Yes was a way to acknowledge what her grandmother had experienced, even if her grandmother herself *“might never make the connection”*.

Reflecting back on the referendum campaign Mairead, too, spoke passionately about the intergenerational nature of Repeal activism (de Londras 2020). She explained how many of the women who she campaigned alongside had mothers who were also involved in activism against the 8th amendment in previous decades. Moreover, Mairead told me how, for her, the results of the referendum signified the removal of a specific burden that her (future) daughter would no longer be forced to carry. As I described in Chapter Five, Ireland’s abortion laws were deeply formative to the quotidian embodied and affective experience of women and gestating people. Mairead’s confirms how her everyday bodily experience, but also the bodily experience of her future daughter would be transformed now that the 8th amendment was repealed. Specifically, she describes feeling as though there was a *“weight gone off”*, for her and *“for the next generation coming after us”*.

Clodagh and Mairead’s testimonies demonstrate the spectral experience of referendum day which was marked by the ‘absent-presence’ of previous (and future) generations of Irish women and abortion-seekers (Calkin 2019b, 15). American sociologist Avery Gordon (2008) writes that ‘spectres or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view’ (xvi). The ghost, Gordon (2008) identifies ‘is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure’, the analysis of which ‘can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life’ (8). Pertinently for this analysis, Gordon (2008) describes how ‘ghostly matters’ can ‘haunt our bodies’ (8). Haunting, she clarifies is ‘one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known[...]especially[...]when their oppressive nature is denied’ (Gordon 2008, xvi). In the following excerpt, Mairead describes how, through the memorial which had been erected in her honour in Dublin city centre, Savita Halappanavar became another spectral figure on referendum day:

I remember waking up the next day and just feeling that there was just a weight gone off, that we had done it. 'Cause as I said, an awful lot of the women that I had campaigned with, some of their mothers were campaigners against the 8th amendment when it was coming in. I remember lots of them were saying, I don't want my daughter still to be doing this. So, it felt like a weight off, it felt like we'd done something good for the next generation comin' after us. One of my resounding memories of that time was going round to the memorial for Savita Halappanavaar that they had up at that stage. There were just strangers on the street, writing messages, hugging each other, crying and everything. I think it took a lot out of a lot of us, that we didn't realise till afterwards. There was a sense that you'd been holding your breath for too long, and then everything just came out in one flood of emotions. But there was definitely a thing when you sort of realised that, yeah, I'm getting back into my exercise routine, I'm getting back into this or that. And then it's like 'Oh, my jaw isn't as sore as it used to be', it was like a tightly wound spring being released like.

Again, documenting the changes in her quotidian embodied experience post-Repeal of the 8th amendment, Mairead explains how, in the days and weeks following the referendum she felt a profound sense of relief which she felt deep within her body as the alleviation of muscular aches and pains. Placing her hands to her face, she explains to me how she realised that her jaw became less “sore” after the campaign, like a “tightly wound spring being released”. Listening to Mairead, I was struck by the contrast between the apparent *temporality* of bodily life pre and post Repeal. As I explained in Chapter Three with my analysis of ‘abortion work’, before the 8th amendment was repealed, women and gestating people in Ireland existed in a state of *anticipation*, labouring and orienting their bodies always towards the future, towards a potential crisis pregnancy. Mairead’s testimony illustrates then how the release from this anticipatory state was experience on an embodied and affective level as a slow and tentative corporeal unfurling which brought with it a set of growing pains, as women like Mairead got used to bodily life without the weight of the constitutional abortion ban.

Deploying similar terminology to Clodagh who related the “*cathartic*” experience of standing in the rain in Dublin Castle, Mairead describes the unstoppable surge of

affect flowing through her in the moment that the results of the referendum were announced, recounting how “*everything just came out, in one flood of emotions*”. She explains being struck with the sense that she had, in fact, been “*holding (her) breath*” until that point. Listening to Mairead recount her memories of referendum day, I paused to think about this idea, as she described it, that she was able to *breathe differently* after the 8th amendment was repealed. Her words reminded me of the work of Black and Indigenous feminist scholars who were the first to reflect upon the intricate, intimate relationship between power and breath/breathing (Moraga and Anzaldua 1983).⁴²

Articulating a contemporary feminist politics of breathing, philosopher Magdalena Górska (2021) foregrounds how the ‘biopolitical and necropolitical operations of power over breath are[...]clearly manifested in the current historical moment, in the *Black Lives Matter* protests’, specifically in the ‘I can’t breathe’ slogan – a refrain inspired by the last words of Eric Garner, a young Black man who was murdered by a police officer in New York city in 2014 (113). Górska (2021) draws upon the work of the aforementioned Black and indigenous feminist scholars as well as anti-racist activists to argue that ‘who can breathe and who is in constant danger of losing their breath is clearly structured along the socially and environmentally toxic lines of racism’ (113). Górska (2021) argues for a conceptualisation of breathing as a ‘material-semiotic *and* a political phenomenon’ (109).

Breathing is ‘not just a metaphor’ then, Górska (2021) explains, but ‘a process that manifests current power relations’ (116). Power operates in fact, Górska (2021) maintains, through social norms which create ‘conditions of living’ which are ‘suffocating for those who do not fit into the standards of “proper” human subjectivity’ (113). Importantly for this analysis, Górska (2021) elaborates upon how conditions of ‘psychic suffocation’ produce a ‘daily struggle for breathable life that

⁴² Pointing both to the pernicious pattern which sees communities of colour suffer disproportionately under the hazardous effects of environmental degradation, as well as to the *virulent* nature of systemic racism which we inhale into the body, Puerto Rican author Rosario Morales describes how ‘we all breathe in racism with the dust in the streets’ (Morales in Moraga and Anzaldua 1983, 92).

takes a significant psychological and physical toll' (113). Speaking to me over Zoom in February of 2021, Muireann also deployed air and breathing-related metaphors to describe the experience of listening to the announcement of the referendum results on May 26th, 2018. As she spoke, she took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, letting her shoulders drop:

*In Head Office...there was a load of people I hadn't even seen all week 'cause we were all coming and going, so seeing them and just crying...It was just like this valve and it was like 'gguuuuuhhhh'. I think that's my abiding feeling, just relief and that it was so definitive...Everything just hanging on these words that someone is gonna read out and then it was like this valve just opening, it was this *deep breath* 'Oh thank god!'...It sounds a bit woolly but the fact that it was mostly women, nearly entirely women and that feeling that we were all connected in terms of what it meant for our bodies, whether or not we'd ever had an abortion.*

Describing how herself and her activist colleagues were “all connected in terms of what it meant for our bodies”, Muireann again indicates this idea that the repeal of the 8th amendment would usher some sort of transformation in her everyday bodily life and in the everyday embodied experiences of her activist colleagues. I noted the word ‘valve’, which Muireann used twice in describing her memories of referendum day. A valve is a device that regulates, directs or controls the flow of liquid or gas. It works by partially obstructing a passageway, to change or control the amount of liquid or gas that can flow through it. When a valve opens, gas or liquid flows in a direction from higher pressure to lower pressure. For people with respiratory diseases, valves can be inserted into the lungs to reroute away from damaged tissue, helping patients to breathe easier. The word ‘valve’ itself comes from the Latin *valva* which indicates one ‘leaf’ (or section) of a set of double or ‘folding’ doors.⁴³

Listening to Muireann and Mairead describe their joyful inhalation and exhalation on referendum results day, I became fixated on one detail in Mairead’s account; wherein

⁴³ From the Latin ‘valva’, meaning “one of the halves of a folding door” or “section of a revolving door”, related to *volvere* (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.a).

she described how activists were gathering in their droves at the memorial to Savita Halappanavar, erected on a wall near the George Bernard Shaw pub in Dublin's south inner-city. The mural dedicated to Ms. Halappanavar had become a focal point for Repeal campaigners in the weeks prior to the referendum, with activists gathering there to write messages of gratitude, remorse and apology to Ms. Halappanavar and her family. Ruth Fletcher (2018) writes that remembering those who had been 'the subjects of reproductive injustices' can operate as a way to 'bring them into the narrative of Repeal as a form of restoration' (249). In relation to the memorialising of Ms. Halappanavar however, Fletcher (2018) cites the words Emily Waszak (2018) (co-founder of the group *Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice*) who poignantly observes that the mural served as a 'visceral reminder' of the 'physical manifestation of white tears' covering over 'a brown migrant woman and her pain' (Waszak 2018 in Fletcher 2018, 242).

Reflecting on the outpourings of grief at Ms. Halappanavar's mural on referendum day, Fletcher (2018) pushes us to question why it is that certain (racialized) bodies only 'come into our vision as a sequence of cadavers' (242)? Indeed, given the well-documented criticism of the marginalisation of the voices and experiences of women and activists of colour in the *Together for Yes* campaign, there was something deeply uncomfortable, I thought, in the iconizing of this one-dimensional *image* of a dead Brown woman, who, as a result of her death within a violent, racist, misogynistic Irish healthcare service, was ultimately unable to speak back. Why was it, I wondered, that the campaign seemed comfortable with engaging with women of colour, only when those women existed as objects of grief or pity? Perhaps, the gathering of activist bodies in front of Ms. Halappanavar's mural is further evidence of the learned racial positioning of White Irish people, conditioned to regard Black and Brown people as 'passive victims' who can 'only be saved' (or not saved, in this case) by the 'good offices' of Catholic Ireland (Lentin 2004, 303).

Describing 'feminist breathing' as 'a set of rituals for living through the foreclosure of political presents and futures', queer theorist Jean-Thomas Tremblay (2019) explains how 'feminists train themselves to keep inhaling without the certainty that there will

be a world to welcome their exhalation' (94). Contrasting the 'vigorous breathing' of White feminist consciousness-raising groups in the late 20th century with the laboured breathing of women of colour activists confronted with unwelcoming White spaces, Tremblay (2019) reaffirms the connection between racism and breathing politics (94). Drawing upon the work of Chicana feminist scholar Cherrie Moraga (1985), Tremblay (2019) highlights how 'the ability to experience cathartic breathing' is 'a matter of privilege' (95). The capacity for some women to 'breathe deeply and to laugh, moan and cry, all of which compress and extend the airways' Tremblay (2019) maintains is 'contingent on the concealment of the breathing needs of women of colour' (95).

Returning then to the hordes of activists gathered at the memorial wall for Savita Halappanavar on referendum day, we can think again about this uncomfortable juxtaposition of the cathartic breathing of those predominantly White bodies gathered there and the breathlessness of Ms. Halappanavar whose death six years earlier resulted directly from the pernicious enmeshment of the 8th amendment inside of a racist, misogynistic Irish healthcare regime. Perhaps this image of the jubilant, ecstatic breathing of White activists outside of Ms. Halappanavar's mural gives us a new way to reconceptualise the repeal of the 8th amendment then. Staying with these metaphors of breathing and breath, we can reconceptualise the repeal of the 8th amendment as the opening of a valve – where the valve in question is not simply a device regulating the control of air, but borrowing from the original Latin, a set of doors. These doors open and close to facilitate the movement or *release* of certain bodies. At the same time, they continue to curtail the movement of other (Othered?) bodies, refusing to let these other bodies breathe easily or pass freely through.

Healing the Sores of the Protest Body: Tracing the Reproductive Inequalities of Abortion Activism

Drawing upon autoethnographic data gathered during her own involvement in the student protest movement in Canada in the mid-2010's, Quinn (2018) describes how activist bodies are 'profoundly changed' through the protest experience (62). Quinn

(2018) argues that the 'embodied experience of protest produces and reveals different embodied inscriptions' (58). The 'legacy' of our protest activity remains in the body Quinn (2018) clarifies in a physical sense, as 'scars and wounds, muscles that are quick to tighten under threat, muscles that are tired and sore, dark circles under my eyes' (58, 63). By analysing our protest bodies 'in relation to one another', Quinn (2018) maintains, we can better understand how we 'embody social suffering and violence in distinctly different ways throughout the protest process' (58). Speaking to Nuala, a 23-year-old, lesbian, student activist, she recounted the sheer physical toll that campaigning had taken on her body as well as the complicated emotional experience of the referendum victory itself:

It wasn't a feeling of, for me anyway, it wasn't a feeling of joy...it wasn't...a lot of excitement, it wasn't anything. It wasn't like that. Whereas I suppose marriage referendum would have been all them feelings. But this was very much...relief. It was relief and it was exhaustion...it was 'thank god it's over'. Because the day we finished campaigning and canvassing, I ended up at home from complete exhaustion like. I got into the car after dinner, after last leaflet drop. I got really sick and had to go to bed when I came home. I got really really sick, I was completely exhausted. And I was dehydrated and everything. So, it wasn't a feeling of joy, or even...it was very much for me anyway, just pure relief that thank God its over...like, thank God it's actually repealed and...you know, if it hadn't have passed, how many years more would we have been waiting for another referendum on it? So, when it came out it was just a feeling of 'It wasn't all for nothing'.

Like many of the activists I interviewed, Nuala compared the experience of her involvement in the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum with her experience in the 2018 abortion rights campaign. Nuala, herself a member of the LGBTQ community, recalls the 2015 referendum as entailing great "joy" and "excitement". By contrast, she explains, the 2018 referendum on abortion rights "wasn't like that". Instead, the dominant feelings Nuala recalls are those of "exhaustion" and "relief". The word 'relief', from the Anglo-French *relif*, indicates 'that which mitigates or removes' and

stems from the Latin *relevare* which means ‘to raise’ or ‘lighten’.⁴⁴ Again, Nuala seemed to be pointing to this idea of the experience of the repeal referendum victory as akin to the removal of some type of weighty, burdensome, embodied restriction.

Interestingly, Nuala was just one of several activists who told me how they became “*really sick*” in the immediate aftermath of the referendum campaign; again, demonstrating how activism entails a risk of bodily vulnerability, commitment and investment (Sutton 2007). As alluded to above, several of the activists I interviewed recounted the intense exhaustion or ‘burnout’ they experienced following the referendum. The topic of activist ‘burnout’ is receiving increasing attention in social movement scholarship contemporaneously (Chen and Gorski 2015). Activist burnout can result in those ‘once highly committed to a movement or cause’ losing ‘the idealism and spirit’ that once motivated their political engagement (Chen and Gorski 2015, 368). Activist burnout can manifest in a multitude of ways, including through; ‘depression and anxiety’, ‘health challenges’ such as ‘headaches, high blood pressure, and illnesses’ as well as ‘increased feelings of alienation and despondency’ (Schaufeli and Buunk 2002 in Chen and Gorski 2015, 369).

In her recently published book *Repealed. Ireland’s Unfinished Fight for Reproductive Rights*, adult and community education scholar Camila Fitzsimons (2021) dedicates several pages to the discussion of activist burnout post-Repeal. Via a combination of online surveys and in-person interviews, Fitzsimons’ (2021) research gathers testimony from 405 canvassers involved in the *Together for Yes* campaign to analyse ‘their memories of the campaign, their thoughts on abortion services today, and their levels of activism two years on’ (208). Fitzsimons (2021) identifies burnout as a key reason why ‘one-third’ of activists have ‘disengaged’ from reproductive rights activism post-Repeal of the 8th amendment (148). Fitzsimons’ (2021) participants highlight the damaging effects of trying to live up to the image of ‘the ideal activist’ who ‘is able to prioritise “the cause” over everything else’ (150). This idea is

⁴⁴ The word relief meaning ‘alleviation of distress, hunger, sickness, etc; the state of being relieved; that which mitigates or removes’ (pain, grief, evil, etc.), from old French *relief* which originated in the stem of *relevare* (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.b).

particularly impactful for women, Fitzsimons (2021) explains who are 'supposed to hold down a job, give quality time to kids, be fully in control of their reproductive health and pick up the slack in terms of elder care and domestic responsibilities' (150).

In Eimear's testimony, given below, Eimear – an activist and mother of two in her late 50's - recounts the intensity of the 'burnout' she experienced after the conclusion of the Repeal campaign; explaining how it took her *"about a year to recover"* from the experience. Eimear's testimony seems to indicate that part of the reason that activists were so burnt out following the campaign was due to the divisions which ensued across the activist community and between different groups who disagreed, amongst other things, with the tactics and strategies adopted by the *Together for Yes* campaign. Eimear explained how a similar split had occurred in 1983, between the more radical faction of the abortion rights movement who wanted to advocate for the legalisation of abortion forthright and those who mobilised specifically against the insertion of the 8th amendment. She stated:

I was exhausted. And I was also very-like I was exhilarated, I mean I'm not a leader in my own head and I've never really led a campaign. To have that responsibility of making those decisions, it took me about a year to recover to be honest with you, I'm only now back to myself...it was really...I'm disappointed that there was a split. I'm really disappointed about that, because its woman against woman. I'm really disappointed about that. And social media, which wasn't there when I was your age...I'm heartbroken actually to see that its kind of bringing feminists together. I'm not saying that the campaign split feminism, I don't think it did, but it highlighted differences.

When I asked Eimear to explain the causes of this split in Irish feminism, she recounted that much of the disagreement was in relation to *"things around intersectionality"*. Indeed, a split did occur (or perhaps widen) after the conclusion of the Repeal campaign, specifically between the 'mainstream' abortion movement in Ireland (exemplified by institutions like *Together for Yes* and *The National Women's Council of Ireland*) and intersectional, grassroots groups like *Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice*. As described in Chapter Six, MERJ were vocally

critical of the 'Yes' campaign both during and after the referendum, arguing that the proposed legislation would leave behind many migrant and ethnic minority groups as well as working-class and disabled women and people (MERJ 2019b).

In her study, Fitzsimons (2021) explains how the concept of care emerged as a 'controversial area' in the activist community post-Repeal (151). Despite this, she explains how some activist groups have taken steps to address burnout within their communities. Fitzsimons et al. (2021) clarifies how the *Abortion Rights Campaign* (ARC) for example, now host 'collective spaces for healing and well-being' and work via a non-hierarchical model (152). In the excerpt given below, Shauna, a migrant activist in her late 30's with three children, described how herself and her comrades took steps in the aftermath of the 'Yes' campaign to deal with the intense levels of burnout many of them were experiencing. Within their reproductive justice activist network, Shauna and her colleagues had set up a "*communal aid*" system, to share in each other's caring and reproductive labour needs, thus allowing campaigners alternate periods of respite to recover from the physical and emotional exhaustion incurred as a result of their work in 2018.

Three months after the Repeal campaign, I was in hospital for three weeks. It nearly killed me. You're working, you're studying, daily life, meetings. You keep moving, moving. You're not doing this for appreciation, because you want your name somewhere. The reason you're doing it is because there's someone worse off than you. When someone worse than you reaches out, there's nothing you can do. So, no it's not a choice. We don't have a choice. We take turns and we actually developed these workshops, so communal aid. 'Cause we need each other but we need to be OK. As women, that we take emotional labour, physical labour, caring labour, reproductive labour, we take all the labour in the fucking world and how to say 'How are you?', 'How can we help for you to come back?' We need your brains, your power. And to be strong with the criticism that comes your way.

Listening to Shauna explain how the referendum "*nearly killed*" her, how she had to "*keep moving, moving*" because there's "*someone worse off than you*", I reflected upon the 'sacrificial' nature of the activist body as she described it. I wondered whether and in

what ways this idea of the 'sacrificial' activist body might operate similarly or differently to the idea of the 'sacrificial' Irish feminine body? (O'Shaughnessy 2021). Was reproductive activism becoming yet another arena in Ireland in which women were expected to martyr themselves or to sacrifice their bodies for some sort of greater good? Studying 'burnout' in social justice organising, Chen and Gorski (2015) identify a 'culture of martyrdom' which is often present in activist circles and to which activists are expected to 'comply' (379). In many activist spaces, Chen and Gorski (2015) argue, activists are conditioned to believe that engagement in any sort of 'self-care' is self-indulgent and demonstrates a lack of commitment to the cause (379).

Hearing Shauna's testimony, I began to consider how reproductive justice activism itself is not immune to the assumption of unequal reproductive logics. In many ways, abortion activism is yet another area of social and reproductive life within which the key organising principle remains the assumed, inherent and incessant 'corporeal generosity' of women and feminised bodies (Diprose 2002 in Hird 2007, 2). As Hird (2007) explains however, whilst processes of 'embodied "gifting"' entail the possibility of 'threatening the integrity of bodies', they equally furnish opportunity for 'opening up new possibilities' in terms of how gendered, reproductive bodies give and take from one another (2). I thought about Shauna's account of the communal aid program she had developed with her fellow activists in their reproductive justice organising group and reflected upon how we might continue to develop collective, cooperative, reciprocal feminist relations inside of a reproductive justice activist commons (Federici 2018).

Shauna's testimony also serves as an important reminder of how reproductive autonomy continues to be withheld from large swathes of the population, under the new legislative regime in Ireland. On Thursday December 20th, 2018, President Michael D. Higgins signed the *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Bill 2018* into law, paving the way for the introduction of legal systematic abortion provision for the first time in the history of the State. Services were scheduled to begin as of January 1st, 2019, via GPs, family planning services and at a number of hospitals across the country. The new law would provide for abortion only in three conditions: up to

12 weeks on request, or up to 24 weeks where there is a risk to the life or health of the pregnant person, or where there is a condition likely to lead to the death of the foetus shortly after birth (*Health Act 2018*).

Under the new law, with its provision for conscientious objection, medical practitioners were invited to sign-up to provide care. In late 2018, masters of three of the country's maternity hospitals wrote to the Minister for Health expressing concern as to the 'readiness' of the Health Service to successfully implement the new law (McCrave 2019). As of March 2021, only half of the country's maternity units were offering some form of abortion care (Loughlin 2021). New data published by the *Abortion Rights Campaign* (ARC) in 2021 highlighted issues in relation to information and access to abortion services, with 54% of their survey respondents indicating that they did not know where to go to get an abortion when they required it (Grimes and ARC 2021, 8). One third of the ARC respondents stated that they had to travel long distances, of between 4 to 6 hours, to access an abortion provider, whilst one in five respondents stated that they had been refused care or refused a referral to an abortion provider at some point (Grimes and ARC 2021, 8-9).

Writing in early 2020, legal scholar Fiona de Londras (2020) offered a 'cautionary accent to celebratory discourses of Repeal' (35). Explaining the 'shortcomings' of the *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018*, de Londras (2020) argued that 'post-repeal abortion law reform was more about managing risk than maximising agency' (33). de Londras (2020) clarifies that the new legislative regime remains 'foetocentric' in nature and that, as a result, pregnant people continue to be exposed to 'constitutional and dignity harms' and to 'lack decisional security' post-Repeal (33). Mairead Enright (2018) offers a similarly critical analysis of the *Health Act 2018*, reminding us how *Together for Yes* had 'said as little as possible about the legislation or about the possible shape of future constitutional law' during the referendum campaign (7).

Drawing upon her own experience as part of the campaign, Enright (2018) clarifies that many activists felt that they were 'over a barrel' - in no position to refuse the

proposed law (7). As a result, Enright (2018) explains, 'securing speedy passage' of abortion legislation 'began to take priority over its content' (7). Reflecting on the first year of provision under the *Health Act 2018*, the *Abortion Rights Campaign* (ARC) celebrated that 'the clear majority of those who need an abortion' were able to 'receive this essential healthcare at home' adding however that the new legislation 'has left people behind', particularly rural and disabled abortion seekers, as well as migrants and asylum seekers with limited mobility rights and resources (ARC 2020, para. 4). In December 2020, I spoke with Deirdre – an activist in her early 40's - who had worked in the upper echelons of *Together for Yes*. I asked her about her views on the *Health Act 2018* and the current provision of services:

I'm not that well placed to speak to it, because really I'm just repeating what other people have said to me, I'm not actually involved in provision. And I'm not doing any evidence gathering at all in terms of people's experiences of it. But from talking to people, the ground has shifted entirely, like it's wonderful. We've walked into a whole new world...in terms of access, it is working. It is working well. I mean, in Ireland, we're so small. You know so we're just never going to have to deal with issues that you're gonna have in much bigger countries or in larger states, you know, where people have to travel hundreds and hundreds of miles, because you just can't do that here. And over the years, we've looked at a lot of global activists and a lot of the problems that they've dealt with so it's with that perspective, we always knew, that even if we only had access in Dublin, that would deal with the vast majority of people. And I mean, that's obviously not good enough, you need to have local access. But with the GP piece, in the main, there is local access available. There are still some pockets, but they're working through them. They are getting there.

There were two aspects of Deirdre's response which I found particularly interesting. Firstly, I was struck by the idea that those directly involved in the upper echelons of the 'Yes' campaign had apparently made no plans to monitor the implementation of legislation or the operation of abortion provision post-referendum, particularly in light of the criticism they had received throughout the campaign with respect to their conservative approach and their failure to push the government further in expanding the terms for accessing abortion under the new legislation. Barring the publication of

their celebratory tome *It's a Yes! How Together for Yes Repealed the Eighth and Transformed Irish Society* in late 2019, *Together for Yes* had all but disappeared after the conclusion of the referendum campaign.

Secondly, I was struck by Deirdre's assertion that Ireland is "*so small*" and "*even if we only had access in Dublin*" that this would be adequate to deal with the needs of the "*the vast majority*" of abortion seekers. At the conference I had attended the week previously, organised by the Leitrim branch of the *Abortion Rights Campaign*, the sparse geographic provision of services had been earmarked as a huge obstacle for rural abortion seekers, those living in Direct Provision Centres and for people with disabilities unable to avail of the already limited national public transport services.

Listening to Deirdre, it became increasingly evident, not only that the bodily costs of organising, evidenced for example in the high levels of burnout across the activist community post-Repeal, have been unequally distributed across and between abortion activist groups; but that the repeal of the 8th amendment – whilst widely celebrated amongst the various factions of the pro-choice community in Ireland – held very different meanings for these diverse groups.

Indeed, whilst the repeal of the 8th amendment might be experienced as the removal of a weight or burden which shaped or mediated the embodied and affective experience of the feminised reproductive body as it moved through the world, for some of the activists I interviewed, the 8th amendment was one of many obstructions which continue to impinge their exercise of reproductive freedom. This analysis illustrates the importance of continuing to pay attention to the emotional and physical toll of activism on the protest body, in order to understand the subjective and collective consequences of concessionary 'respectability' tactics, but also so that we might better appreciate how regimes of reproductive coercion often cannot be dismantled in one fell swoop but instead, change shape and sustain themselves in more diffuse and nefarious forms, often at the expense of those who already the most marginalised in our communities.

Activism as a Reparative Act? The 'Embodied Consequences' of the Campaign for Abortion Rights in Ireland

In the weeks preceding the 8th amendment referendum, media articles had predicted a 'muted, sombre' acknowledgement in the event of a repeal victory (Finn 2018). Instead, May 26th, 2018, saw the grounds of Dublin Castle filled with triumphant activists and voters singing, dancing and waving flags and placards. Letters sent to the office of the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar and the Minister for Health, Simon Harris, in the weeks following the vote expressed outrage at Mr. Varadkar and Mr. Harris's participation in what was deemed an 'inappropriate' display of jubilation regarding the introduction of legal abortion on Irish shores (Hourihane 2018). Such efforts to tone-police the celebrations of the 'Yes' campaign continued into referendum weekend. As Muireann discusses below, in refusing to pander to demands to hold back on celebrations, activists laid down their intention to throw off the yoke of respectability they had been burdened with throughout the referendum campaign:

There'd been all this 'Oh no you can't celebrate' and 'it wouldn't be appropriate to celebrate'. And then people just being like 'My body, I'll celebrate if I want to!' and this feeling of like, dancing and casting off that restriction that had been there, for the months beforehand but also, for your whole lifetime. Having to be ashamed of your body and having to hide it away and just being like...it totally changed how I felt about my body, in a way I never expected. And it took me a while to figure out afterwards, like...a few of us met up the 27th or 28th and I remember thinking, we all looked different. Probably the relief, but we all just seemed to carry ourselves differently, and I felt different, but I didn't know how to articulate it 'cause it sounded a bit weird in my head. And I remember saying it to a friend of mine and she was like 'Oh yeah, I'm the same, I feel lighter' so yeah, just like freer or lighter or something. So yeah, I think just having a place where we were all together to party and dance was so important... I'm proud of what we did, repealing the 8th was a good thing. It wasn't done perfectly... but it was fundamentally a good thing to get rid of that from the constitution...to not have future generations of women growing up with that feeling, that their body is written into the Constitution.

Recounting her memories of the referendum, Muireann explains how her activist experience *"completely changed how (she) felt about (her) body"*. She juxtaposes the experience of openly celebrating the referendum results through activities like dancing, with the way in which she previously would have felt *"ashamed"* of her body and would have felt compelled to *"hide"* her body away. Britt and Heise (2000) explain how the experience of shame compels the subject to participate in 'hiding behaviours' while pride, on the other hand, facilitates greater engagement with 'expansive' bodily behaviours in public space (253-254). Moreover, they explain how the *collective* engagement of social movement actors in 'expansive' bodily behaviour in public space contributes to the creation of an affective atmosphere of pride (ibid). In this vein, it becomes clear why activists like Muireann felt it was important for Repeal campaigners to *"have a place"* where they could *"be together to party and dance"*. Not only did the physicality of the celebrations provide a mode of catharsis for activists; it constituted a final act of 'coming out' for Repeal activists, allowing them to define their bodily experience in *their own terms*, not as an object of shame, but as a source of power, pride and even, pleasure.

I wanted to know more about the ways in which Muireann's everyday life and bodily experiences had changed since the referendum. After pausing to reflect on my question, Muireann recounted meeting with fellow campaigners in the days following the vote and noting how they all *"looked different"* and seemed to *"carry (themselves) differently"*. Muireann makes sense of this transformation by describing it as the embodied effect of the *"relief"* they all felt after the campaign victory. Reminiscent of Mairead's description of the repeal of the 8th amendment as the removal of a *"weight"*, Muireann reflects on how both she and her colleagues felt *"lighter"* after the referendum. Muireann contrasts this *"lighter"*, *"freer"* feeling with a previous state of being wherein she felt that her body was *"written into the Constitution"*. The phrasal verb 'to write into' indicates a process of 'adding' something (usually a rule or condition) to an agreement, contract or law.⁴⁵ Describing her understanding of the fact that her body had been *"written into the Constitution"* through the 8th amendment,

⁴⁵ Merriam-Webster defines the phrasal verb 'to write into' as 'to add (something new) to a contract, law, etc. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary n.d.b)

Muireann (re)invokes the intimate connection between the feminised, reproductive body and the Irish nation-building project – wherein the compulsive reproduction of particular gendered and racialised bodies becomes a condition for the construction of the nation-state (Yuval-Davis 1997).

Listening to Muireann's testimony, I reflected again upon about how the referendum victory appeared to translate into the removal of a set of *embodied restrictions* or the elimination of a *blockage* which affected the literal movement of Muireann's body-in-space. Referring to the celebrations which took place on the night of May 26th, Muireann goes so far as to describe the experience of dancing with her comrades as a physical "*casting off*" of a set of constraints she had experienced not only in "*the months beforehand*" (presumably, referring to the limitations that had been placed upon campaigners by the 'Yes' campaign in terms of how they should comport themselves with members of the public) but throughout her "*whole lifetime*". After our interview, I thought further about Muireann's analogy of "*growing up with that feeling*" of having your body "*written into the Constitution*". I envisioned a body being physically held down to a page; wrestling against a string of words which wrangle their way around one's limbs, prohibiting one's movement, holding one firmly in place.

Speaking to Aoibhinn, I asked her as well to describe the ways in which her everyday experience had been transformed since the referendum. She spoke in similar terms to Muireann, explaining how she felt that was able to literally *move through the world differently* now that the 8th amendment had been repealed. As I discussed in Chapter One, Aoibhinn's described her life under the 8th amendment as characterised by the experience of both *fear* and *contingency*. Prior to the referendum, she explained, she "*always had the abortion fund in the bank*" or "*the ability to get that loan out of the Credit Union*". She described feeling as though her body was always already orientated towards England, towards 'travelling' to access a legal abortion in the UK. Moreover, she explained how, growing up, she experienced a sense of "*constriction and capture*" as though she was fighting against a set of hands on her body. I wanted to know more about whether and in what ways these feelings and experiences had been transformed now that the 8th amendment had been banished to the annals. She explained:

Yes, like before the campaign, before I was even aware of it, I always felt these hands on my body, and I was always a bit scared...Like, that feeling of constriction and capture and hands on me. That knowledge that people were protected by law to do whatever they wanted to my body. They could section me. Like, I have a mental health history, it's not an exaggeration, it's not unreal to say that I could be raped and then sectioned to be forced to continue a pregnancy. Like, if I was incarcerated, the reality of those things were with me all the time. I texted somebody on the 26th to say 'I'm walking around town like fucking Kanye' 'cause it was like, 'come at me!' do you know? I'm protected.

Remembering life under the 8th amendment, Aoibhinn described being constantly burdened with *"the reality"* of the fact that she could be *"sectioned"* or *"incarcerated"* and that *"people were protected by law to do whatever they wanted to my body"*. Indeed, as explained in Chapter One, the 8th amendment was directly transposed into the *Health Service Executive* (HSE's) National Consent Policy (de Londras and Enright 2018). This meant that upon becoming pregnant, medical practitioners were entitled to make interventions 'on behalf' of the foetus, without the consent or in contravention of the wishes of the pregnant person (de Londras and Enright 2018, 2). Doctors were permitted to force-feed or perform unwanted medical procedures on pregnant people, wherever these interventions were considered necessary protect the life of the 'unborn' (ibid).

Recounting how this reality was *"with (her) all the time"*, Aoibhinn reinvokes the relentlessness of the felt burden of reproductive oppression under the constitutional abortion ban. Her testimony is important because it forces us to (re)consider the subtle, nefarious but far-reaching effects of anti-abortion laws which have consequences not only in the moment wherein access to abortion is sought and denied, but which can create conditions which directly shape the everyday physical and emotional experience of the gestational subject. In the same way as the concept of 'abortion work' pushes us to expand the *temporal framework* within which we conceptualise reproductive violence, Aoibhinn's comparison of her embodied and affective life pre- and post-Repeal again highlight the diffuse temporality of reproductive inequality as it operates via anti-abortion laws, but also points to the

broadier meaning of abortion activism in terms of the potential *embodied consequences* of reproductive justice movements.

Referring specifically to her bodily experience (or to her experience of her body) under the 8th amendment then, Aoibhinn's testimony illustrates how, in an environment wherein abortion is systematically inaccessible, such as Ireland, the reproductive body (or, the potentially pregnant/pre-pregnant body) comes to be experienced as a 'fragile encumbrance' or a 'burden, which must be dragged along, and at the same time *protected*' (Young 1980, 147). Aoibhinn describes how this experience was transformed, however, in the aftermath of the referendum. Sitting up in her chair and puffing her chest outwards, Aoibhinn explained how, the day after the vote, she was "*walking around town like Kanye*". As she spoke, she demonstrated this walk, feigning steps and raising her arms before swinging them, exaggeratedly, from side to side.

Listening to Aoibhinn, I thought about feminist phenomenologist Iris Marion Young's (1980) description of 'feminine existence' as characterised by the 'failure to make use of lateral space' (137). Feminine embodiment, Young argues, is defined by 'inhibited intentionality', with women failing to 'put their whole bodies into engagement' (Young 1980, 145). Aoibhinn's account illustrates how the repeal of the 8th amendment transformed the literal, physical experience of how she, as a gendered, reproductive body-subject, moves throughout the world. Henceforth, her embodied experience was characterised, not by the sense of "*capture and constriction*" (as she described to me in Chapter Three when recounting her experience of growing up under the 8th) but by an openness, an expansiveness and intentionality that she hadn't previously known.

What Aoibhinn and her colleagues are describing here then is how, through their activism, Repeal campaigners successfully transformed their *everyday, embodied experience* and specifically, the literal *movement of their bodies-in-space*. Moreover, they transformed how they *felt about their bodies* and how they understood themselves *embodied subjects*. In the following excerpt, Muireann describes how her involvement in the Repeal the 8th campaign caused her to reflect upon and to thematise other aspects of her quotidian embodied experience in a more explicit fashion. She describes

how she began to reconceptualise reproductive rights as a “*very physical thing*” which signified what people or society “*think is OK*” to “*do to your body*”. Muireann explains how her involvement in the abortion rights movement helped her to “*connect the dots*” and to make sense of the other forms of bodily objectification and (gendered/reproductive) violence that women and feminised people in Ireland face:

I think...growing up, when you become aware of reproductive rights, it's a very physical thing cause it's about your body and what people think is OK, so I think it made me aware of wider issues of how women's bodies are treated in society and the low-level kind of casual sexual assault, cat-calling, the commodification of women's bodies that we experience our entire lives. So, it kind of made me join up those dots in a lot of ways, and the shame that surrounded my body and women's bodies my entire life, and then realising that there could be another way, realising that that didn't have to be the way. So, I think it was a feeling that my body had been under attack, for the duration of the campaign, but also my entire life as a woman, so realising that, but also realising that my body had also gotten me through this incredibly tense, difficult period...and you can see it in photos we took on the 26th of May, we just look so gaunt. Just these caverns under our eyes, everyone had lost so much weight. We just looked like physical wrecks. And so, the feeling that my body had been under attack but also the feeling that my body had gotten me through and we had gotten through it together. We had walked past those posters together, and we had come out the other side, and I wasn't going to be ashamed of it anymore.

Explaining how herself and her colleagues “*had lost so much weight*” and were “*physical wrecks*” in the weeks following the referendum, Muireann demonstrates how the process of social transformation is a ‘collective, embodied’ project which requires ‘hard work’ and an intensive ‘investment of bodily resources’ (Sutton 2007, 144). Importantly, Muireann’s testimony exemplifies the important role of the gendered body in the movement for abortion rights in Ireland, but also signifies how political activity around abortion rights allowed campaigners an opportunity to challenge or reconceptualise their own perceptions of their embodied capabilities. Recounting her experience of regularly being forced to walk past or encounter violent anti-abortion imagery, Muireann explains how whilst she felt that one on hand, her body had “*been*

under attack” through the campaign, she suddenly recognised that it was her body which had also *“gotten (her) through this incredibly, tense, difficult period”*.

In this way, Muireann describes how her activism helped her to develop a greater sense of confidence or trust within her body. Interestingly, Muireann’s testimony illustrates how, whilst she continued to understand her body as an *object* of surveillance and violence (which was consistently *“under attack”*), as a result of her activist experience, she came to appreciate and understand her body in relation to its agency, or capacity to engage in acts of resistance or social change (Young 1980). In other words, Muireann no longer understood her body purely as an object, but instead recognised and reconstituted her own subjectivity *in* its embodied state. This idea of ‘split subjectivity’, that is, experiencing the body as subject and object at the same time, is typical of the experience of feminine embodiment according to Young (Young 2005, 49).

Blaithnaid, a queer disabled activist in her late 20’s, also spoke at length about how her involvement in the Repeal the 8th campaign changed the way that she related to her body. Specifically, Blaithnaid explained how her activism endowed her with a greater degree of *confidence* in her bodily capacities, specifically increasing her awareness of the fact that she could harness her labour in order to change society and the cultural landscape. Like Muireann, Blaithnaid emphasises how the material labour performed by the activist body is so imperative to processes of social change. She situates the work of the Repeal the 8th movement in the context of a longer history of abortion activism and women’s rights organising in Ireland and makes a point to indicate the transnational connections and consequences of the Irish abortion rights campaign which she says has had a *“ripple effect”* across the world.

*It felt like I was on fire. It felt like I was unstoppable. I was fierce and I was probably the most confident I’ve ever been... it was that confidence and I still feel it, I still feel it here *points to chest* it’s not left. It’s still there, it’s still resounding and it’s in my chest. And it fuelled me and it’s still fuelling me...I looked around and I genuinely felt like the world had changed. And I had contributed to that change, and I had harnessed my labour – organizing and trying to*

get more and more people involved – I felt like I had the power to harness the labour of others, to achieve that change. Not just to work super hard, but I felt like I mattered. I felt like we changed the political landscape of Ireland, we changed the cultural landscape of Ireland. We were part of a historical movement that people are going to be talking about that for decades and decades and decades. We made that mark. And that was what started out as a couple of hundred people who had been around from the 80's who were super active. And it's just amazing to look at, to be part of, such an amazing movement that has really shaken the structures of Irish society and the wider international impact of that and seeing that ripple effect across the world...I'm fuelled now with a fire that was lit, that doesn't seem like it's ever going to go out.

In a similar fashion to Aoibhinn, Blaithnaid sat up in her chair as she spoke, in an apparent effort to literally take up more space with her body. She rolled her hand into a ball and banged her fist against her chest, as she described to me how being a part of the abortion rights movement had helped to feel “*fierce*”, “*unstoppable*” and “*fuelled her with a fire*” that “*doesn't seem like it's ever going to go out*”.⁴⁶ Analysing Blaithnaid's account, I remembered that the Irish word for ‘fire’, *éad*, also signifies the emotions of ‘jealousy’ as well as ‘anger’.⁴⁷ Listening to Blaithnaid explain how she felt “*fuelled with fire*”, I remembered my discussion with Saoirse who spoke despairingly about the anger which circulated amongst the pro-choice community in the aftermath of the *Together for Yes* campaign, lamenting that she didn't know “*what was going to happen to all that*” anger. Perhaps then, Blaithnaid's testimony was evidence of the potentially positive effects of that anger: she valued and appreciated her fire, her anger, and showed a way that it could be reinvested into activism and into the world.

Explaining how their quotidian embodied experiences *and* their self-understanding as embodied subjects were transformed as a result of the campaign to repeal the 8th amendment, Blaithnaid and her activist colleagues shed light on what I term the

⁴⁶ Listening to Blaithnaid, I was reminded of the work of radical ‘pyrofeminist’ scholars who advocated for the women's movement to be unafraid to ‘burn’ the established institutions down (Klages 1980).

⁴⁷ The name Éadaoin (of which the name ‘Aideen’ is the anglicised version) literally means ‘small fire’.

‘embodied consequences’ of the social movement for abortion rights in Ireland.⁴⁸ With the framework of the ‘embodied consequences’, I want to highlight then how activism in relation to abortion or reproductive rights operates not only to secure specific legal, political or policy outcomes, but in fact, serves to bring about new conceptions of embodied reproductive life and new understandings and relations to gendered, reproductive embodiment, in a broader sense. In this vein, when analysing the ‘embodied consequences’ of the movement to repeal the 8th amendment, it is important to examine not only how activists quotidian embodied experience, or their own self-understanding as embodied subjects has been transformed, but also, how the movement for abortion rights challenged or overhauled existing norms in relation to gendered and reproductive embodiment in Ireland, more generally.

Describing her involvement in the abortion rights movement as an *“earthquake...a good earthquake”* in her life, Eabha – a lecturer and mother of two, in her early 40’s - explained how her ideas about motherhood and relationship to her own (maternal) body were completely altered on account of her involvement in the Repeal campaign. She disclosed how six months after the referendum, her marriage *“broke up”*.⁴⁹ After her involvement in the campaign, she explains, she had to *“start asking some really tough questions”* about *“bodily autonomy”*, *“personal autonomy”* and *“shame”*. She elaborated upon how the campaign prompted her to question new ways of *“being a woman”*, since, for the previous *“two decades”*, she had *“bought into a way of being a woman that didn’t fit”*. Part of this progression, she shared with me, included a process of *“unpicking motherhood”*. I asked her to explain in more detail what exactly this entailed:

⁴⁸ With the concept ‘embodied consequences’, I am building upon Marco Giugni’s (2008) work on the ‘political biographical and cultural consequences’ of social movements (1582). Giugni argues that, within conventional social movement scholarship, it is the political or policy outcomes of a movement which are given the most sustained, analytical attention. Giugni argues that for social movement actors, however, their involvement in activism often produced more subtle, yet equally significant cultural effects *and* has biographical consequences for those who dedicate portions of their lives to political organising (ibid).

⁴⁹ This confirms research by Giugni (2008) on the ‘biographical consequences’ of social movements wherein he describes how social movement actors are more likely to be divorced, later in life, in comparison to their non-activist peers.

I had these ideas that you'd have to breastfeed until your boobs fell off, until your nipples were bleeding, didn't matter. It didn't matter if you never slept, you had to do this because that's what good mothers did. And you had to keep going and keep going until it broke you. And that's what I did. And it did. Literally broke me, to the point where I very nearly had to be hospitalised. Because I was told, that's what you had to do. That you could no longer have any needs of your own, that having needs of your own is a selfish thing. Because mothers, particularly in Ireland and I know it's elsewhere, but-I had internalised the idea that mums, mother's, didn't have their own stories, they were all about somebody else. And otherwise, you were a shit mom, a bad mum.

Eabha explained to me how after the referendum, she felt “stronger” and like she had “found worth” in things “outside of what society told (her) to do”. Her testimony confirms research by feminist social movement scholars, specifically that of Barbara Sutton (2010) who explains that, in the context of ‘sexist political cultures’, women’s activism can serve to ‘create alternative notions of embodied womanhood’ (174-175). In Eabha’s testimony, she indicates how she experienced this discourse around maternal sacrifice operates as constraint or burden which is *felt* directly in, or which has material consequences for her gendered, reproductive body. Analysing the discourse around maternal sacrifice, Pam Lowe (2016) describes how ‘normative ideas about women’s role as mothers’ constrain the choices women make (2). Specifically, Lowe explains, the idea of maternal sacrifice is central to the ways in which norms about gender and motherhood are constructed and function (ibid).

Under the rubric of maternal sacrifice, women are compelled to ‘put the welfare of children, whether born, in utero, or not yet conceived, over and above any choices and/or desires of their own’ (Lowe 2016, 3). As Eabha explains, she had previously understood that “being a woman” meant “breastfeeding until your boobs fell off...until your nipples were bleeding”, confirming the popular (gendered) assumption that maternity requires constant ‘corporeal generosity’ (Diproses 2002 in Hird 2007, 2). In relation to the idea of the ‘embodied consequences’ of the abortion rights movement then, Eabha’s testimony indicates how the campaign helped her to unpack and challenge these social norms in around maternity and maternal embodiment. In the aftermath

of the campaign Eabha explains, she began to reject idea of motherhood as a type of sacrificial embodiment and was instead finding “*new ways*” of being a ‘Mom’.

To conclude, the repeal of the 8th amendment produced not only a series of political, legal and policy consequences, but signalled a range of *embodied consequences*, for women and feminised people in Ireland, too. The victory of the repeal movement signified not only the introduction of legal abortion services in the State, but the ushering in of new modes of gendered and reproductive embodiment for women and gestating people. This analysis demonstrates how, through their activist practices, abortion campaigners in Ireland have successfully transformed the conditions of their quotidian, embodied, gendered experience; reconstructed their relationships to their bodies and reconceptualised their own self-understanding as embodied subjects; and finally, challenged, and overhauled accepted social norms and values in relation to gendered, reproductive embodiment. This research illustrates then how, in the Irish context, abortion activism itself can be conceptualised as a *reparative act* by which campaigners reconfigure the social relations which structure the conditions of their everyday embodied and affective experience in the world.

Chapter Eight: Concluding Remarks – Scholarly Contributions and Avenues for Further Research

Conceptual Contributions of the Research

This research offers several contributions to the study of social movements, to critical feminist studies in reproduction, to the fields of affect and embodiment theory, and to scholarship on abortion politics in Ireland and beyond. Firstly, this research explores the *quotidian embodied and affective experiences* of women and gestating people living under Ireland's constitutional abortion ban. Pre-existing scholarship on Irish abortion politics has focused upon how Irish laws have exiled abortion-seekers, forcing them to travel to access abortion services abroad (Rossiter 2009; Barry 1988). Other research in the areas of feminist legal studies and the sociology of health and medicine has investigated the role and effects of the 8th amendment which hung like a 'spectre' in the Irish healthcare system, inhibiting the decision-making capacities of medical practitioners and pregnant people (AIMS Ireland 2017, para. 3). In each of these areas, analytical attention has been focused predominantly on how the experience of the 'major' reproductive events of pregnancy, abortion or birth, have been shaped and effected in accordance with the country's laws.

Conversely, this research examines the *everyday* thought-patterns, bodily practices and emotional states of women and gestating people in Ireland as they are subjected to and mobilise against the 8th amendment of the Constitution. Applying a queer phenomenological approach to the study of embodied, affective experience, I have argued that the regulation of reproductive politics in Ireland can be understood as a system of *spatial, affective, and temporal* regulation which cumulatively acts as an assemblage of disciplinary forces upon the body of the gendered, reproductive subject. The (historical) injunction placed upon Irish abortion-seekers to travel abroad to access abortion care, I argue, is a *direction* which controls the *movement of the gendered body in space*, ultimately operating to orient the feminised, reproductive body towards boats, planes and foreign shores and away from belonging to the project of the Irish nation-state.

Based on the analysis of the testimonies of Irish abortion activists, this research suggests new ways to understand the *embodied experience* and *temporality* of reproductive injustice as it is manifested in the form of anti-abortion laws. With the concept of 'abortion work', I propose a framework to conceptualise the emotional and material labour carried out by women and gestating people as they plan for the possibility of needing to acquire an (illegal) abortion inside or outside the State. Inspired by Bertotti's (2013) model of 'fertility work' which describes the 'labour and responsibility' associated with adopting and managing contraceptive methods, I deploy the concept of abortion work to encapsulate the emotional, physical and psychological labour involved in preparing for and negotiating unplanned conceptions, and specifically in putting together abortion contingency plans (13). 'Abortion work', I argue, can be conceptualised as an *additional form of reproductive labour* imposed on women and gestating people in Ireland, and which is unequally distributed across racial and class divisions.

Borrowing from the work of Adams et al. (2009) on 'anticipation' as a 'common, lived, affect-state shaping regimes of self, health', I contend that the *fear* of unplanned pregnancy (and the potential disrespectability which accompanies it), combined with the *will to anticipate* potentially needing to access an abortion is experienced by women and feminised people as an *embodied burden* which in fact transforms the relationship of the subject to their reproductive body (247). Recounting their abortion contingency plans, which include (amongst other strategies) the proposal to throw oneself down the stairs, these activists reveal how the potentially pregnant body comes to be experienced both as a site of acute, gendered vulnerability and the location of a radical, resistant agency, at the same time. The framework of 'abortion work' then reveals another manner through which abortion laws discipline and subjugate women and pregnant people and specifically, demonstrates how *systems of reproductive violence are inscribed and felt*, at the level of quotidian embodied and affective experience.

To better understand how women and gestating people in Ireland respond to, negotiate and resist these forces of reproduction coercion, and to emphasise the

agency of women and (potential) abortion-seekers, I chose in this research to explore the everyday embodied and affective experiences of Irish abortion activists. Highlighting the utility of locating activists in their bodily experiences as a point of departure, the framework of 'embodied infrastructure' which I have developed here provides a novel perspective on mobilisation theory, explaining how the conditions of activists' affective-corporeal existence; specifically, their *affective experience(s)* as well as their *embodied encounters* in the world influence and motivate their political engagement. Analysing the embodied infrastructure of the Repeal campaign, I explore the energising valence of feminist anger, the politicising effect of (middle-class) indignation, and the ethics and utility of (White) shame; and examine the experience of the activist body as it moves through social space, paying close attention to the consciousness-raising effects of the encounter with anti-abortion protest objects.

The framework of the 'embodied infrastructure', allows us to analyse not only the role of various affects in binding together participants inside of a mass movement but furnishes us with the tools to examine which (embodied) *feelings* catalyse political action. Exploring the response of Irish activists to the death of Ms. Savita Halappanavar – a migrant woman who died of a septic miscarriage after being refused an abortion in a Galway hospital in October 2011 – I explain how anger, as well as (middle-class) indignation and (White, postcolonial) shame played an important role in politicising members of the Repeal the 8th campaign. Contrasting the public response to the death of Ms. Halappanavar – a heterosexual, married, 'professional' migrant – with the lack of attention given to Black and working-class migrant women of colour who have died in similar circumstances, I argue that Ms. Halappanavar's death served to confront other middle-class women with the extent of the government's abandonment of women and pregnant people, to unsettle the learned racial positioning of White (Catholic) Irish people as 'saviours' of Black and Brown bodies, and ultimately jeopardised Ireland's identity as a 'progressive', secular, European State (O'Shaughnessy 2021, 9).

Building upon existing feminist research on anti-abortion clinic activism and on the role of visual media in (anti-)abortion campaigning, I analyse the *embodied encounter*

of Irish activists with 'Pro-Life' posters which depict the pregnant and foetal body and describe how activists experience such anti-abortion visual imagery in terms of the *content* and *intent* of these protest objects (Duden 1993, Lowe and Hayes 2019). Activists describe how such images serve as a manifestation and extension of a culture of violent surveillance of the gendered, reproductive body and thus explain their compulsion to contest the proliferation and domination of these material objects in public space. Moreover, activists reject the representation of reproductive embodiment depicted in these images, which violently objectify and fragment the feminised, reproductive body. Highlighting the politicising effect of the encounter with these protest objects, they explain how such imagery fosters a process of reconceptualization of their own embodied subjectivity. In this vein, I argue, social movements for abortion rights can be reconceived as locations for the propagation of *counterhegemonic gendered embodiment*.

Thinking further about reproductive justice movements as sites for the reconstruction of embodied subjectivity, this research draws from and builds upon the work of feminist scholars investigating the political and cultural consequences of women's *embodied protest activity* (Parkins 2000; Sutton 2007). Investigating the concept of 'coming out' as it relates to abortion politics, this research illustrates how 'coming out' for abortion can describe both a discursive and material *movement* which engages the embodied vulnerability of the gendered, reproductive subject. By verbally 'coming out' with one's abortion story or by 'coming out' with other activist bodies in the street, Irish activists engage in a politics of *bodily revelation* which transforms public perceptions and attitudes towards abortion as well as their own self-understanding as political subjects. In publicly and pridefully acknowledging themselves as aborting bodies, activists engage in a process of affective self-transformation, refusing the shame formerly imposed upon aborting bodies by the Church-State regime. Through physically coming out into the street, activists engage in a collective, physical demonstration of their political will and reassert their political subjectivity in an environment which has historically sought to exclude them on the grounds of their gendered, reproductive capacities.

Reaffirming the significance of corporeal protest activity, activists explain how physical, mass actions serve not only to foster and consolidate the collective identity and strength of the social movement, but they provide activists with the opportunity to *reconfigure* their quotidian embodied and affective experiences. Contrasting their experience of campaigning with their everyday physical and emotional states (characterised, as explained above, by feelings of fear, anxiety and anticipation), activists explain how expansive, public, bodily protest activities allow them to redefine their bodies as sites of activity, agency and pride. As I explained through my analysis of ‘abortion work’, since the expansive power of the 8th amendment literally shapes, limits and directs the movement of the gendered reproductive body in space, the physicality of protest activity – wherein activists come together to “*march and shout*” – provides a mode of catharsis for the embodied, activist subject. This research confirms then how embodied protest activity became an important avenue through which Irish abortion activists literally *enacted* their bodily liberation as part of the movement to Repeal the 8th amendment in 2018.

Additionally, in relation to bodily protest actions, this research is the first to offer a sustained analysis of the role of clothing and *dress* in the Irish movement for abortion rights. Exploring the significance of the ‘Repeal’ jumper which was launched in 2016 as a fundraising strategy for the *Abortion Rights Campaign*, I introduce and develop the concept of ‘gestural dress’, to explain how this item of clothing played an integral part of the Irish pro-choice campaign by instantiating new forms of *intimacy* and *sociality* which strengthened the collective identity of the movement. Exploring various activists’ relationship with/to the black and white sweatshirt, I argue that the wearing of the Repeal jumper functions as an *embodied consciousness-raising activity*, an *embodied act of solidarity* between activists and abortion-seekers, as well as an act of *situated bodily resistance* whereby campaigners create additional spaces – outside of formal political venues for non-violent defiance of the political status quo. In affective terms and borrowing from Elva Orozco’s (2017) musings on protest materials as ‘disobedient objects’, I propose the Repeal jumper as an ‘incendiary object’ which materialises the radical (pyro)feminist political consciousnesses of Repeal the 8th campaigners (Klages 1980).

Exploring the embodied and affective experience of activists as part of the abortion rights referendum campaign in 2018, I explain how the changeover from the grassroots repeal the 8th movement to the official political campaign was characterised by a transformation in the *modality of embodiment* engaged by Irish activists. In contrast to the politics of bodily revelation employed by grassroots activists in the earlier stages of the abortion movement, I argue that *Together for Yes* - the national civil society campaign which advocated for a 'Yes' vote in the 2018 referendum on the 8th amendment - mobilised a *politics of bodily concealment* in an effort to placate what they conceived as a conservative Irish public. Whilst existing studies have critiqued the conservative political framing as well as the Whiteness and Eurocentrism of *Together for Yes*, the analysis I provide explores the 'Yes' campaign within the framework of 'respectability politics' (Higginbotham 1993). Moreover, this is the first empirically based study to extensively examine the 'body politics' and 'speech politics' of the *Together for Yes* campaign and to explore how the emotional labour, impression management strategies and aesthetic performance required of campaigners 'on the doorstep' took a toll on the psychological and physical wellbeing of activists, both during and after the campaign.

Compelling campaigners to replace the 'radical' vocabulary of 'choice', 'autonomy' and 'rights' with the more conciliatory language of 'care', 'compassion' and 'change', and by emphasising the 'suffering' of women and pregnant people under the 8th amendment, the victory of the *Together for Yes* campaign was contingent, I argue, on the successfully mobilisation of a shared culture of paternalism, classism and misogyny (O'Shaughnessy 2021). By focalising the experiences of White, middle-class, heterosexual women and couples with 'wanted' pregnancies who were forced to seek abortions in the case of medical emergencies, the 'Yes' campaign sought to prove its moral legitimacy by embodying the figure of the 'respectable', 'concerned' maternal bystander. The *burden of respectability* was, I argue, taken directly into the activist body; with activists having to "swallow" the sexism and racism they experienced on the doorsteps. As a consequence of this 'surface' and 'deep' acting, campaigners came away from the campaign feeling 'alienated' and disillusioned with the movement at large (Hochschild 1985, 35; Ahmed 2017, para. 21).

Exploring the 'fear of anger' within the *Together For Yes* campaign, I posit that the decision to deny and avoid expressions of anger was motivated not only by the desire to preserve gender-appropriate emotional repertoires (which was a necessary element of the performance of 'Yes' campaigners who sought to present themselves as 'compassionate' witnesses to abortion), but was further motivated by the objective of the 'Yes' campaign to distinguish themselves from the activism of women of colour reproductive justice groups – who, as a result of their racialised identity – are always already perceived as 'angry'. In this sense, the affective bonds of Whiteness played a hugely important role in securing mainstream political backing for the repeal the 8th campaign, I argue. This analysis complicates the idea of 'respectability politics' as either radical or concessionary, demonstrating how the emotions and affect this strategy induces in organisers – in this case, anger, outrage or even guilt – can become valuable sources of information for activist groups. Inspired by the work of Black feminist scholars, I argue that the anger which now permeates amongst and between activist circles in Ireland must be held, studied, respected and eventually, collaboratively transformed and put to work in the interest of (re)building a truly intersectional, reproductive justice movement.

Reflecting on their embodied experience of referendum day, activists conceptualise the repeal of the 8th amendment and the elimination of the constitutional abortion ban as the removal of an *embodied restriction* or the opening of a *valve*, leaving them feeling "lighter" and able to breathe more easily and to move freer through the world. Applying an intersectional analysis to the 'cathartic breathing' of White women activists who gathered in the days following the referendum at the memorial for Savita Halappanavar, I question whether the reproductive freedoms now available to some women and gestating people in Ireland have been built upon the 'concealment of the breathing needs of women of colour' (Tremblay 2019, 55). In the same vein and adding a critical evaluation of the outcomes of the Repeal campaign, I argue that the *embodied costs* of organising have also been unequally distributed between and across activist groups. Paying attention to the embodied and affective experiences of activists remains particularly important, I argue, to understand how regimes of reproductive coercion may change shape inside of this new legal landscape, post-Repeal.

Recounting their experiences of illness and ‘burnout’ after the conclusion of the referendum, the analysis of activists’ testimonies reveals once more the level of intense bodily investment and commitment required of reproductive justice campaigners, with the activists I interviewed explaining that their involvement in the movement for abortion rights in Ireland left them “*gaunt*”, “*exhausted*” and feeling like “*physical wrecks*”. Building upon existing research on burnout in Irish abortion activism post-Repeal of the 8th amendment, I put forward the idea that reproductive justice activism itself is not immune to unequal reproductive logics; warning that we must challenge this culture of martyrdom and these (misogynistic and racist) ideas about the incessant ‘corporeal generosity’ of the activist body (Fitzsimons 2021; Diprose 2002 in Hird 2007, 2). This will be particularly important moving forward, I argue, as Irish activists continue to fight for the expansion of reproductive freedoms, which remain limited under the *Health (Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018*.

Finally, developing the concept of the ‘embodied consequences’ of the movement for abortion rights in Ireland, this research illustrates how Irish activists have succeeded not only in securing legal access to abortion care in the country, but have in fact altered the *conditions of their quotidian embodied and affective experience*, reconstructed their relationships to their reproductive bodies and their own *self-understanding as embodied subjects*, and transformed *hegemonic norms around gendered and reproductive embodiment* in Ireland, through their activist practices. Activists describe a renewed sense of confidence in their embodied agency and in their capacity to harness their bodily labour to achieve social change. Moreover, they explain how their involvement in abortion activism caused them to thematise aspects of their everyday bodily experience in more explicit terms, and specifically to unpack and contest societal norms about how they should feel about or comport their embodied selves.

Comparing and contrasting their bodily lives pre- and post-Repeal of the 8th amendment, activists describe how their quotidian embodied experience is no longer characterised a sense of “*constriction*” and “*capture*” but is typified instead by an expansiveness, openness, and an intentionality that they formerly did not experience.

Illustrating how the consequences of the Repeal of the 8th amendment are manifested in the transformation of activists' *everyday* bodily and affective experience, this research brings new light to the *felt burden* of anti-abortion laws, and specifically expands the terms under which we understand the bodily consequences and *temporality* of reproductive violence under the law. In the same vein, this research proposes the reconceptualization of abortion activism itself as a '*reparative act*' wherein campaigners actively reconfigure the social relations which structure the conditions of their everyday embodied and affective experience in the world.

Limitations to the Research Design and Outlining Avenues for Future Research

The primary limitations of this research are methodological in nature. Forty-three activists were interviewed, ranging in age from early 20's to late 60's. Whilst I did not explicitly elicit information on socio-economic background, more than half of participants identified themselves as coming from a 'professional' or 'middle-class' background. Thirty-eight or 88% of the forty-three participants were 'White-Irish'. This signifies an over-representation of 'White-Irish' people who make up only 82% of the national population (CSO 2016b). Of the five additional participants, one identified as Asian-Irish, another was a migrant from a Black, West-Indian background and the remaining three were European migrants. This research also did not include any participants from an Irish Traveller background. The over-representation of participants from a White, middle-class background is undoubtedly correlated with my own identity and subjectivity and with my decision to engage a 'snowball' sampling technique. As critics of the snowball sampling method rightly identify, this method is dependent on a 'referral process' which often entails a strong 'selection bias' and risks producing a homogeneous participant group (Parker, Scott & Geddes 2019, 4).

According to the initial research design, I planned to travel across Ireland to conduct face-to-face, in-depth qualitative interviews with activists working in diverse urban and rural communities. Although the first half of the data collection was carried out

in-person, the restrictions imposed in March 2019 as a result of the COVID 19 pandemic – halfway through my fieldwork trip – which included a moratorium on face-to-face empirical research, meant that data collection had to be paused and the research design re-evaluated and rearranged at this point. When I recommenced data collection in January 2020, interviews were carried out entirely via online methods in order to protect and safeguard the health and safety of myself and the research participants. Having to collect data via online methods necessitates engaging with participants who had access to personal computers or smartphones and comprehensive network connections. This meant that activists without these resources were potentially excluded from the data collection process. In order to mitigate this, I conducted telephone interviews, in some cases.

This thesis identifies several important topics for future research into reproductive politics, which have relevance both within and outside of the Irish context. Firstly, with the concept of ‘abortion work’, which I have explored extensively in Chapter Three, this research transforms and expands our understanding of the *embodied experience* and *temporality* of reproductive oppression. Through the concept of ‘abortion work’, I have illustrated how ‘anticipation’ – which has become the organising principle of (reproductive) biomedicine and reproductive politics, more widely - has reached back *even before conception*, to shape and transform the affective experiences and intimate, everyday bodily *practices* of the potentially-pregnant body-subject (Adams et al. 2009; Franklin and Ragone 1998). ‘Abortion work’, I argue, can be conceptualised as a previously unacknowledged form of *gendered, reproductive labour* which is unequally distributed across class and racial categories, and which is imposed as a financial, emotional, physical, psychological and *embodied burden* on women and feminised people.

Further research is needed then, into the concept of ‘abortion work’, specifically in geopolitical contexts where abortion remains illegal or is practically inaccessible. At the time of writing, abortion rights face renewed contestation in a slew of countries worldwide. In September 2021, China’s government announced that it would ‘reduce’ the number of abortions performed for ‘non-medical purposes’ (Reuters 2021). In

Poland, pro-choice campaigners have called for clarification around the provision of abortion in cases where the pregnant person's health is at risk, after a 30-year-old woman died after being refused a life-saving abortion, in November 2021 (BBC News 2021b). In Latin America, abortion remains illegal in Haiti, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic (Alcántara and Estrada 2021). Whilst, in the US, the Supreme Court is currently hearing arguments regarding a 15-week abortion ban in Mississippi; with the results of this case potentially setting a precedent for the overturning of the constitutional right to abortion, under *Roe V Wade* (Glenza 2021). With access to abortion being rolled back in a number of countries then, increased analytical attention is required to understand how abortion-seekers differentially experience and negotiate these restrictions in their everyday lives, within their national and local contexts.

In relation to the Irish context, under the legislation implemented following the repeal of the 8th amendment in 2018, abortion remains criminalised and is accessible only in a very limited array of circumstances (Grimes and ARC 2021). The *Health (Regulation of the Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018* provides for abortion only up to 12 weeks 'on request', and beyond 12 weeks only where there is a risk to the life or health of the pregnant person or where the pregnancy in question entails a fatal foetal anomaly (ibid). Data published by the *Abortion Rights Campaign* Ireland (ARC) in September 2021 illustrates that whilst substantial numbers of abortion-seekers are now able to access terminations within the state, large numbers who do not meet the narrow eligibility criteria to access legal abortions continue to have to travel outside of the jurisdiction (Grimes and ARC 2021). Additional research is needed then to investigate how structures of reproductive injustice are sustained and perhaps reformulated within Ireland's new legislative regime, and specifically to explore how the burden of 'abortion work' continues to be unequally distributed amongst marginalised groups.

As I explored in Chapter Six, the decision to disband the grassroots abortion rights campaign and to reconvene various 'pro-choice' activist groups under the banner of *Together for Yes* – the civil society organisation which campaigned for a 'Yes' vote in the 2018 referendum – proved to be a highly contentious move. To this day, debate is

ongoing within Irish abortion activist circles with regards to the tactics of the official referendum campaign, and more specifically, in terms of the medical, legal, political and policy repercussions of *Together for Yes's* conciliatory strategy (de Londras 2020). In particular, the decision made by the 'Yes' campaign to concede to government's proposition to 'water down' the recommendations of the Citizen's Assembly and to put forward legislation which omitted the proposal for 'socio-economic' abortion up to 22 weeks, in place of a proposal which would allow abortion 'on request' only until 12 weeks has been strongly scrutinised by activist groups and medical and legal experts alike (de Londras 2020; Enright 2018; Grimes and ARC 2021).

In the run up to the abortion referendum in May 2018, Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Leo Varadkar reiterated that, in the event that the 8th amendment was successfully repealed and were abortion legislation eventually passed, terminations beyond 12 weeks would remain 'illegal except in very specific circumstances', whilst 'late term abortions' would be completely forbidden (Ryan 2018). The decision by the Irish government to invoke a 12-week gestational limit as part of the proposed abortion legislation (which is substantially more restrictive than abortion legislation in other European contexts, including the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and Spain) was motivated primarily by the fact that large volumes of abortion pills (which allow for termination in 'early pregnancy' - up to 12 weeks) were already being imported into the country at the time of the referendum in 2018 (Ryan 2018).⁵⁰ The *Health Act* 2018 would thus allow for 'medical abortions' (induced by mifepristone and misopristol) to be carried out 'safely' in the community under the 'regulation' of the person's GP (ibid). According to the Chief Medical Officer, the 12-week limit is to be 'strictly interpreted' (NWCI 2021, 19).

As ARC's recently published data demonstrates, the 12-week gestational time limit combined with Ireland's mandatory three-day waiting period between initial consultation and accessing abortion services cumulatively constitute significant barriers to reproductive autonomy for those seeking abortion services inside the Irish

⁵⁰ In 2016, more than 2,000 women in Ireland ordered abortion pills online (London-Irish ARC 2018).

State.⁵¹ Data published in 2019 indicates that upwards of 375 Irish residents travelled to access abortions in England and Wales, with the majority of these seeking care during the second trimester of pregnancy (NWCI 2021, 3). Further research is needed then to examine the effects of the 12-week gestational limit on abortion access, as instigated under the *Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018*, and to understand how *temporality* continues to act as a disciplinary force in the regulation of the embodied reproductive lives of women and gestating people in the Irish context. As I have argued elsewhere, ‘time works as a coercive force in *two directions*’ for abortion seekers who are compelled to secure terminations as early as possible but to refrain from making ‘quick decisions’ (O’Shaughnessy 2019, para. 14).

Erdman (2017) argues that whilst temporal categories and measurements (such as gestational age) feature heavily in the regulation of abortion, these remain a ‘relatively undertheorized dimension of abortion and human rights’ (para.1). Despite the recommendations of the *World Health Organisation* and the *Guttmacher Institute* that all gestational limits constitute an unnecessary barrier to healthcare, gestational limits are fast-becoming the primary-method by which to regulate abortion access across different geopolitical locales (Erdman 2017). The trimester framework is premised on the ‘growing countervailing state interest in prenatal life’ (Erdman 2017, para. 13). Not only does the reification of the trimester framework contribute to public (mis)understandings of pregnancy as a linear process of autonomous foetal development but it precludes public and policy support for second and third trimester abortions which become morally ambiguous medical practices at best and culturally stigmatised and structurally disenfranchised at worst.

Whilst the existence of gestational limits has been studied as an ‘obstacle’ to accessing abortion in various contexts, the variable ways in which abortion activists and groups *conceptualise time* in relation to pregnancy and gestational limits on abortion remains an unexplored area of research (Cohen and Joffe 2020). In the aftermath of the 8th amendment referendum, abortion activist groups in Ireland remain divided as to how

⁵¹ Clinical guidelines attached to the *Health (Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018* mean that pregnancy is dated as of the last menstrual period (Grimes and ARC 2021).

to advocate in relation to amendments to the 12-week gestational limit. The *Abortion Rights Campaign* has called for the abolition of all time limits in relation to abortion provision, whilst the *National Women's Council of Ireland* has asked for the 12-week limit to be 'reviewed' but has failed to indicate to what period of gestation the limit should be extended (Grimes and ARC 2021; NWCI 2021, 54). Further research is needed to examine how various abortion activist groups in Ireland organise around the conception of time in relation to abortion, and to understand how these gestational limits are experienced, negotiated and understood by reproductive justice collectives, legislators, health professionals, as well as by abortion-seekers themselves. With the *Health (Termination of Pregnancy Act) 2018* up for review in late 2021, what recommendations will various policy and activist groups make in relation to the gestational limits and how is consensus reached around the social, medical and moral significance of these mandates?

To conclude, applying queer feminist phenomenological methods to analyse the testimony of women and people growing up in the shadow of the 8th amendment, this research provides an alternative, embodied, affective history of the movement for abortion rights in Ireland. This research reveals that the struggle to repeal the constitutional abortion ban in Ireland was not only a struggle to secure reproductive rights. It was a struggle to alleviate an ongoing and violent condition of gendered, racialised, embodied *vulnerability* and *labour* forcibly imposed on women and gestating people; to reconfigure and transform the relation of the feminised reproductive subject to their bodies; and ultimately, to allow the potentially pregnant embodied subject to *move through the world* free of the burden of coerced reproduction which has historically constituted an integral part of the Irish nation-building project.

By restoring women, pregnant people, abortion seekers and feminist activists to the centre of knowledge production and political debate in relation to reproductive politics, this research attempts to contribute to feminist scholarship on reproduction and embodiment, by generating a 'non-patriarchal account of the reproductive process' (Franklin 1991, 203). Re-affirming and advocating for the epistemological, political and ethical utility of participant testimony to make 'visible those forms of

power that had previously been concealed', this research deploys a collaborative, feminist methodology which locates activists within and prioritises their embodied and affective experiences, to create alternative, phenomenological models of reproductive and gendered bodily life (Ahmed and Stacey 2001, 4).

For the abortion rights movement, a foundational element of their work has been attempting to break the silence which has historically characterised the Irish abortion debate, to 'learn to talk' about abortion and about the affective, bodily experience of living under the 8th amendment (Griffin et al. 2019, 48). In a country where, for centuries, pregnant women and their children were compulsorily removed from the social landscape through incarceration in Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes or through forced emigration; where Catholic Church teachings prevented and actively stigmatised any level of openness and transparency around sex and reproduction; in a country where women's accounts of their lived experiences continued to be treated with scepticism and contempt, giving testimony in relation to one's intimate, bodily life arguably constitutes a type of radical feminist activism in itself.

To conclude, as abortion rights continue to be contested, both in Ireland and across the globe, feminist scholars must continue to try to find new ways to challenge the hegemony of the foetal image which functions to marginalise and disenfranchise women and pregnant people within both the medical and political spheres (Duden 1993). By refocusing the feelings, thoughts, emotions, vulnerabilities and everyday bodily experiences of women and people in Ireland living under and mobilising against systems and structures of reproductive oppression, this research delineates one method whereby we might shift the terms of scholarly and legislative debate. In providing an alternative account of the *embodiment of abortion politics*, this research paves the way for a more politically grounded, theoretically engaged, and affectively attuned study of reproductive injustice which has further application both in Ireland and beyond.

Appendices

(A) Call for Participants



Aideen O'Shaughnessy
@aioshaug

...

#CallForParticipants

I am seeking people involved in reproductive justice/rights & women's health activism in IE for face-to-face interviews on 'embodied experience'. Please DM me or contact aco39@cam.ac.uk

#PhDResearch #FeministSociology #Repealedthe8th

10:37 am · 21 Nov 2019 · Twitter for iPhone



Aideen O'Shaughnessy
@aioshaug

...

Hi folks! As part of my PhD research, I am seeking to interview ppl involved in abortion rights activism in Ireland about their experience living under the 8th amendment. Interviews are anonymous, confidential, will be conducted online & take approx 45 min-1hr. Pls share widely!

3:51 pm · 16 Dec 2020 · Twitter Web App

(B) Interview Guide

Name of Researcher - Aileen O'Shaughnessy, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Cambridge.

Title of PhD project - 'Bodies of Change': Analysing the Embodied and Affective Movement for Abortion Rights in Ireland.

Semi-structured Interview Guide

- (A) When did you become involved in abortion rights activism and what has your participation involved? What motivated you?
- (B) When do you remember first learning about the legislative and political situation in Ireland regarding abortion rights? How did it relate to the wider situation/history for you?
- (C) What was it like living under the 8th? Can you describe the emotional experience of the years preceding the referendum? How did you relate the 8th to your own life/experience?
- (D) What was your experience of the 2018 repeal the 8th campaign? What were the most memorable campaign experiences? Why was demonstrating/physical activism important?
- (E) What did the successful repeal of the 8th amendment mean to you on a personal level? On a symbolic level?
- (F) How have you experienced the period directly following 'Repeal'? How have things changed or stayed the same? Does daily life feel different in any way?

(C) Participant Consent Form

Consent Form PhD Research - Name of Researcher: Aideen Catherine O'Shaughnessy

Description

I am a PhD Student in the Reproductive Sociology Research group, in the Department of Sociology, at the University of Cambridge. My research is interested in the experience of abortion rights activists in the Republic of Ireland: specifically, I want to examine how living under the 8th amendment affected people's experiences and understandings of gender and reproduction, as well as analysing their lived experience of being involved in the repeal the 8th campaign. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, these interviews are being conducted entirely online, as part of my PhD project.

The interview will take approximately 45 mins to 1.5 hour. Your participation is entirely voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time, without repercussion – this includes removal of any interview data furnished to that point. All data gathered including interview recordings and transcripts will be held in the personal possession of the researcher. The transcripts will be anonymized. Transcripts and interview recordings will be held in secure storage for 3 years post-completion of PhD (to allow for additional analysis) and will be subsequently destroyed.

Should any of the data gathered be used in my PhD thesis or in any subsequent publications or presentations arising from this research, any identifying information relating to your interview will be removed and you will be provided with a pseudonym. If you are interested in receiving further information in relation to my research project, please feel free to contact me at the following mail address: aco39@cam.ac.uk

Please tick:

1. I confirm that I have understood these instructions and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymized and only used for academic research.
4. I understand that my interview will be recorded.
5. I agree to take part in the above project.

Please see Cambridge University information on the protection of research participant's data:

<http://www.information-compliance.admin.cam.ac.uk/data-protection/research-participant-data>

Name of Participant Date Signature

Name of Researcher Date Signature

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