

Travel for women rights: social movements and the construction of travel as activism in social media

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Abstract

Globalised social movements often require travel, but travel as a symbolic form of transnational activism has only been examined in certain instances. This paper employs the notion of political travel and, through a qualitative content analysis of social media posts during the 2018 pro-choice Irish referendum campaign, it shows how travel can be approached as a form of activism and resistance from a critical feminist angle in the context of a global campaign mediated by social media. Inspired by assemblage theory (De Landa, 2016), our findings show how different elements; people, spaces, objects are assembled to construct the framing and narrative of a social movement that fights for women rights. The individual accounts of travel experiences in social media contributed to the overall ‘aestheticization’ of the social movement. Also, the study offered insights into the meanings that, predominantly female, travelers, assign to their political travel, which are in turn shaped by personal and historical concerns.

Keywords: hashtag activism, abortion, political travel, pro-choice, social media, Irish

referendum

1. Introduction

Mobility forms part of the globalized interconnected world we live in, but we still know little about the role that travel plays in modern social movements, particularly those addressed to a global audience. We lack insights about how travel is framed in social media as a form of activism, political participation and resistance in the context of technologically mediated social movements. To explore this further we chose the campaign that took place right before the 2018 Irish referendum to grant women the right to a legal and safe abortion. This campaign specifically targeted Irish abroad for two reasons. First, there is a huge Irish diaspora as “no country in Europe has been as affected by emigration over the last two centuries as Ireland” (Glynn, Kelly and MacÉinrí, 2013, p.1). Furthermore, postal vote was still not permitted for Irish diaspora, whether in the case of referendums or elections. So, a large number of Irish living abroad was expected to travel in order to vote.

This empirical case also allows to see how different travel elements (people, places and objects) were assembled to frame the narrative and identity of the movement (De Landa, 2016). Travel elements acquire a protagonist role both in online and offline activist performances, e.g. women dragging suitcases at a pro-choice protest in front of the Irish embassy in London back in 2016. We also see how social media platforms not only have facilitated the movement’s organizational action in practical and symbolic terms, but also, they have allowed for an ‘aestheticization’ of the social movement through the careful creation of visual and textual social media posts in relation to travel (Caldeira, De Ridder and Van Bauwel, 2020). The qualitative content analysis of these

posts under common hashtags reveals how the movement's 'storyline' is built around travel elements and, often emotional, travel experiences.

The manuscript is organized as follows. First, we provide a brief overview regarding the diversity of resistance and activism in pro-choice movements to destigmatize abortion and give it a legal status. Second, we focus on the case of Ireland and their long pro-abortion positioning to provide a historical context. Third, we resume previous literature about travel, which aims to support political or social causes and we introduce the notion of political travel. Fourth, we explain the methodological design implemented. Finally, we present and discuss results regarding the role of travel in this social movement.

Pro-choice Social Movements

Women movements have been key drivers to attain legitimacy for women's reproductive rights. Their efforts were focused on establishing regulatory legitimacy supporting reforms in abortion policies, providing easy abortion access and attaining cultural legitimacy to eliminate any stigma associated to abortions (Blofield, 2013). Even in countries where abortion has been legalized for decades, it remains a taboo subject (Gerdtts et al., 2016; Kumar Hessini and Mitchell, 2016; Sanger, 2016).

Activism to facilitate abortion has varied; from practical help to women to strikes and protests in the streets and symbolic performances (Molek-Kozakowska and Wonke, 2019). Calkin and Freeman (2018) offer examples of activists helping Irish women cross borders, sending abortion pills to them in Ireland, or even providing abortion services in international waters like the case of the NGO Women on Waves. NicGhabhann (2018) describes how in 2016, pro-choice activists distributed abortion pills through drones as a symbolic act. In turn, Calkin (2019) explored how art was used in the context of Irish pro-choice campaigns. She examined three artworks, the "Metronome", "Out

of the Shadows” and “Case Studies” all of which focused on abortion travel and evolved around a central symbolic image of women with rolling suitcases and backpacks (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). The “Metronome” was silent to represent how women travelled in silence for getting an abortion in fear of being shamed. Instead, the “Renunciation” was another performance art project that consisted in 12 public readings of abortion travel stories in the material spaces of abortion trail, train and bus stations and the airport, which aimed to make abortion travel trauma more visible and heard (see O’Hara, 2020). These examples show the diversity of forms of resistance, from symbolic through artwork to practical through the development of emerging cross-border networks that offer access to abortion, to shift the stigma attached to abortion and/or bring about policy change. Particularly artwork made visible the claims and the struggle for reproductive rights, while also reclaiming public space which was traditionally occupied with imagery of the pro-life group focusing on the foetus or on representing women getting abortions as troubled and broken (O’Hara, 2020). Finally, all these examples also show how activism in pro-choice movements has traditionally involved mobility (real or symbolic) of things, e.g. medicines and suitcases, and people.

[Insert Figure 1 and 2 about here]

Abortion and travel in Ireland: the issue in question

Despite the struggles of the pro-choice feminist movement and unlike other European countries, abortion was illegal in Ireland until 2018. The introduction of the eighth amendment of the Irish Constitution in 1983 reinforced and further legitimized the ban on abortion amidst contemporaneous movements for its liberalization in other European countries. Ireland was celebrated as an 'abortion-free territory', unlike other countries such as the Great Britain, to construct a collectively shared pro-life identity and convey

an alleged moral superiority (Calkin, 2019).

In the recent history of Ireland two cases have gained public attention and opened the debate about the eighth amendment (Fletcher, 2018). The first one is the X case in 1992: a fourteen-year-old suicidal rape victim who was initially prohibited to have an abortion and travel outside Ireland by a High Court injunction. Finally, the Irish Government accepted to pay the X's appeal cost proceedings to the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court established that there was "a real and substantial risk to the life of the mother" unless the pregnancy was terminated, so X was allowed to leave Ireland (Lawson, 1994: p. 175). The attention around the X case led to passing the thirteenth (Irish women were free to travel abroad for a legal abortion) and the fourteenth amendment (Irish citizens had the freedom to learn about abortion services in other countries). This regulatory change legally allowed, at least, abortion travel (Barr-Walker et al., 2019; Calkin, 2019).

Although the amendments of 1992 opened a window to abortion through travel for Irish women, the situation was still largely problematic for many of them. Women had to bear the costs of travel, accommodation, and medical procedures on top of the emotional and physical trauma this travel involved for many (Aiken et al., 2018; Gerdts et al., 2016; Jerman et al., 2017). Gilmartin and White (2011) criticized that the freedom of travel and mobility was only enjoyed by Irish citizens who could afford it. Still, illegal migrants and non-EU citizens that legally resided in Ireland under different statuses, e.g. student visa, they all had limited mobility which excluded them from the option of abortion travel.

In 2012, a second case gained much publicity and opened once again the debate. This was the case of Savita Halappanavar, who died as she was denied an abortion although she was suffering a septic miscarriage (Specia, 2018). Her death spurred reactions about legislation on abortion and brought more attention to the even greater

invisibility that migrant and ethnic minority women suffer in Ireland in matters of maternity care (Fletcher, 2018).

Travel as Activism? The notion of political travel

Although political and social issues have long motivated travel around the world, there is still much scope for further research on transnational solidarity and activist travel. De Jong (2017) claims that there has been an ‘absence of activism’ in tourism and mobility studies. We can find some examples. For instance, through development tourism, people seek to understand the in-situ experiences and realities of communities in the Global South and to raise awareness and ongoing support for them (Spencer, 2020). Study tours organized by Non-Profit Organizations such as the Global Exchange Reality Tours in Cuba allow for immersion in locals’ lives while providing economic support at the same time. However, international volunteering, which is supposedly aimed towards social change, has been criticized extensively due to its limited real transformative capacity (Henry, 2019). Moynagh (2008) is among the very few to employ the term of political tourism which seeks “to participate or to manifest solidarity with a political struggle taking place elsewhere in the world seeking an experience of broader social change and transformation” (p. 3). She refers to Che Guevarra as the prototype of a political traveler. Although Jobs (2009) does not employ the term of political travel, he studied how young people in the 1960s travelled between protest sites in Europe which forged their sense of politics and a common European political identity. Later, globalization brought more examples of transnational collective action against international political and economic institutions (Tarrow, 2001). Fisher et al. (2005) studied five globalization protests and found that 60% of protesters were non-locals. Post 2010, the protest camps of Syntagma square, Puerta del Sol, Zuccotti park and Tahrir square, among others,

became symbolic spaces of convergence for national and international activists, who came together from different places to create these improvised outdoors homes as a form of protest (Frenzel, Feigenbaum, & McCurdy, 2014; McCurdy, Feigenbaum, & Frenzel, 2016).

Also, festivals, like Pride parades, generate tourism mobilities that are politicized. De Jong (2017) examines the outward and return bus journeys for an Australian queer collective to a Sydney pride march. She explains how tourism mobilities and activism entangle to bring the group members together creating a sense of belonging. Additionally, she mentions how the travelling bus and its rainbow materialities increase the issue's visibility in the streets. Another example is the International Solidarity Movement which brings international civilians to Palestine to engage in solidarity and non-violent resistance along with locals against Israeli occupation (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2009; Coy, 2012). This is just one of the tactics used by international and local organizations to support human rights which they describe as an "international non-violent protective accompaniment" (Coy, 2012, p. 1). Other organizations mentioned by Coy (2012) are the Peace Brigades International and Christian Peacemaker Teams. In all these cases, a sense of global citizenship is built (Spencer, 2020) through political travel, although the term has been mentioned only a handful of times.

Some research on this field has dealt with the global narratives that unite transnational activists and their socio-demographic profile (e.g. Almeida and Lichbach, 2003; Porta et al., 2006; Siméant, Pommerolle and Sommier, 2010). Others (Fisher et al., 2005; Walgrave and Van Laer 2010), mention how organizations related to the social movement facilitated activists' travel by providing information, subsidizing travel and housing. However, travel is often not found at the center of this research. When it came

to the “concrete conditions of activist internationalization [...] based on ‘a sociology of the plane ticket’ as it were, the research work grows scarce” (Siméant, Pommerolle and Sommier, 2010: p. 16). A few limited individual accounts of the activists’ transnational experience can be found (Jobs, 2009; Piccini, 2013). Piccini (2013) is one of the few authors that put the spotlight on the use of travel as ‘political praxis’ to experience ‘global revolt’. Jobs (2009) describes how practices and places related to youth travel, such as hostels and hitch-hiking, also became highly politicized. However, research regarding travel in the context of social movements and as a symbolic form of transnational activism can be further enriched. Furthermore, this topic is timely since we can observe different social media campaigns, like the one studied here, aiming to mobilize and involve global communities which results in people travelling domestically or internationally to live and accompany communities whose rights are under threat, to go to protests, rallies and referendums while posting information about it online (Neumayer and Rossi, 2018).

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The presented research aims to explore travel as a form of activism in the context of the Irish pro-choice campaign, right before the referendum regarding the Eight Amendment in 2018. Since most of the information on this subject is online, we limited our scope on the analysis of microblogging applications such as Twitter, social networking applications such as Facebook and the webs HometoVote and The London-Irish Abortion Rights Campaign (LIARC). This decision responds to the use of purposive sampling for data collection, which facilitates the selection of the most valuable information for an in-depth study (Patton, 2002). Social media platforms are commonly used in contemporary social movements (NicGhabhann, 2018; Tsatsou, 2018), with

Twitter and Facebook being popular platforms for activists (Sandoval-Almazan et al., 2014; Tsatsou, 2018).

In Twitter we downloaded posts under the hashtags #hometovote and #repealthe8th. We also analysed the London Irish Abortion Rights webpage and social media, and related Facebook groups, such as Abroad for Yes and NYC Repeal, and Facebook events such as a Repeal the 8th Melbourne Gathering. Then, we checked specific Twitter accounts like Chicago for Repeal. Some of the groups, e.g. Abroad for Yes, were private so we asked for permission explaining the objective of our study. Our final dataset included data from September 2017 until November 2019. Data were collected by both authors with the help of a research assistant. Although we checked various sources, our main data corpus is the one presented in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Both authors systematized and coded texts and images from tweets, Facebook groups, blogs and web pages of organizing actors. All necessary measures were taken to guarantee the anonymity of the users. We analysed the data using qualitative content analysis, through which, inductively, we developed the themes and categories related to this research. In line with grounded theory, we started with open coding to identify initial codes in relation to travel (travel meanings, travel elements, travel photos) (Glaser and Holton, 2005; Thorberg, 2017). At this point, we intended to become acquainted with data and interpret them under a novel lens avoiding interpretations according to existing preconceptions. Using the constant comparative method, we identified similarities and differences, categories that were becoming saturated and emergent ones and proceeded to cluster them (selective coding). We started with the analysis of text posts and continued with the analysis of visual elements.

Regarding the analysis of photos and videos, we employed semiotic analysis. Semiotic analysis “treats each picture in its totality” (Stepchenkova and Zhan, 2013: p.

592) to show how the image and its composition can communicate certain messages through symbols and signs. We studied the overall patterns of posted photos and videos (group versus individual photos, focus on people versus objects, background, use of travel elements and spaces, etc) and then each photo separately together with the accompanying post. In this process, we examined how travelers purposefully designed their posts (both visual and text) to represent specific meanings. So, for instance, we did not only check if the photo was a selfie showing a woman travelling in an airplane, but also what she wore, her expression and gestures, if the photo was blurred or not, the use of filters, what she wrote or did not write, what hashtags she used etc. Previous research in tourism has employed semiotic analysis (Hunter, 2016; Jenkins, 2003) to interpret visual images generated by tourists and/or organizations, travel companies.

3. Results

All eyes on Irish Diaspora: the work of organizational actors

In 2017 there were 3.601 million Irish citizens who reside outside Ireland (DFA Report, 2017). Thus, it is no surprise that the #Hometovote campaign specifically targeted the Irish citizens living abroad.

“Fantastic! Take one trip home to vote so that the 10 women every day who travel from the Republic of Ireland for an abortion, will no longer have to make that journey. Your vote matters.” (Home to Vote website, 2020).

Obviously, travel was necessary so that the Irish diaspora could vote in the referendum. In practical terms, information was facilitated in the hometovote.com official website and social media regarding travel, particularly about prices and time schedules. Different organizational actors helped with the organisation of group trips (see Figure 3) and financial support networks for those that could not afford to travel.

The #AbroadForYes was a private Facebook group whose specific purpose was to raise funds for people with limited resources, like students.

“Ireland is a small country with a huge diaspora. Many Irish permanently residing abroad are now considered ineligible to vote, as they have been out of the country too long, but have expressed their willingness to support fellow Irish citizens abroad who do have a vote in the Thirty-Sixth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2018. #AbroadForYes formed in a bid to connect students with potential supporters and try get as many Irish citizens home to vote as possible, predominantly students studying abroad and might not have the funds to get home.” [Facebook page #AbroadForYes, 2020]

However, beyond the practical necessity of travel, the employment of narratives and elements related to travel were also symbolic and part of the broader narrative of the campaign. Travel to vote was juxtaposed to abortion travel as the two extremes of the social justice/injustice continuum. The LIARC sold tags with the slogan “Healthcare not Airfare.#TogetherforYES” (see [Etsy shop](#)). Also, the photo of women dragging suitcases at a pro-choice protest in front of the Irish embassy in London in 2016 has become iconic and a symbol of the campaign since then (see [Londonirisharc.com](#)). Photos and videos of supporters that could not travel were posted in different Facebook groups (e.g. Repeal NYC, LIARC) with the message “Be our Yes”.

Organizational actors intended to construct the sense of a larger community of support. According to Khazraee and Novak (2018), the creation of networks forms part of the collective identity construction. This collective identity is built on different motivational frames; appealing to people’s ‘irishness’ (“Ireland is a small country, with a huge diaspora”), agency (“your vote matters”, “take one trip

home”, “book your flight”, “get the boat to vote”) and injustice (“be our yes”, “for everyone who has been forced to travel”, “make the journey [...] so they no longer have to”) (Gamson, 1992).

Shortly before the referendum, the organizational groups encouraged people to post in social media using the hashtags #Hometovote and #Repealthe8th or #Together4Yes if the traveler was not an eligible voter (see Figure 3).

“The journeys have already started. If you’re heading [#hometovote](#) this week, make sure you let us know. Live tweet your journeys - and send us photos and videos from your trip.” (LIARC Facebook post 20/05/2018).

“We threw a welcome party for those arriving [#hometovote](#) at Dublin airport last night, complete with free bags of Tayto for every traveller. The video in this piece will put a spring in your step, as you head to the polling station this morning. Loads more people expected to make the journey back today. We’re so proud of you all.”

Vote YES! (LIARC Facebook group, post 25/05/2018)

In the following sections, we explore the posts of travelers under these hashtags. We identify three goals behind this organizational strategy of ‘hashtag activism’ (Bonilla and Rosa, 2015). First, organizational actors aim to ‘flood’ social networks to demonstrate that the campaign enjoys widespread support and, thus, cultural legitimacy. Second, it served to further humanize the movement. Many of the travelers shared their personal photos and stories explaining why they travelled and the importance of the journey. As it will be discussed later, this allowed for the ‘aestheticization’ of the pro-choice movement. Third, it transmitted a sense of collectiveness and togetherness to ‘glue’ the movement together. Besides exceptions, many travelers embarked on their journey alone, so posting about it under a common hashtag allowed them to form part of the same global community. To further reinforce the communal and collective

character of the travel taking place, organizational actors posted photos and videos of group trips they helped organize as well as videos of staged welcome committees in Irish airports.

Hashtag Activism and the Content of Individual Posts

For van Haperen et al. (2018: p. 410) “social media enable fast and far-reaching transmission of individual expressions without requiring the adoption of unifying collective action frames. The resulting connective action emphasizes the aggregation of diverse expressions of identity, rather than alignment of meaning structures or the forging of collective identity.” However, our analysis shows that, although individual travelers provided their own accounts of travelling, their motives and personal stories, the #HometoVote tweets followed a common thread both in visual and discursive terms. Similarly to what Khazraee and Novak (2018: p. 9) explain, these posts “reinforce and help shape the values and identity shared by the larger group”; they assist the formation of a collective identity.

In visual terms, #HometoVote tweets had an explicit focus on the travel taking place using photos in airports and bus stations accompanied by short phrases, like ‘On my Way’, or longer descriptions of the journey taking place or about to start. These photos may include or not the person travelling. Travel photography is ‘theatrical’ and produces “place myths, social roles and social relationships” (Larsen, 2005: p. 417). In this case, most of the photos apparently lack a ‘romantic gaze’ observed in other types of travel, which is attained through a careful staging of the place and the protagonist (Bærenhold et al., 2017). There is no posing of the travelers, often there is no one in the photo at all, or special filters used. Sometimes, photos are even purposefully blurred indicating that they were taken in a hasty manner. So, the first impression is that the photos’ purpose is to

realistically represent part of the travel taking place. But, the absence of any staging is also symbolic. The minimal aesthetics reproduced in the photos posted seems to consciously avoid embellishing the travel or the protagonist to emphasize the activist identity over any other identity, while keeping the focus on travel elements and symbols of the movement; the passport, the medium of transport, Yes stickers and T-shirts etc.

Previous studies on imagery (Deng, Liu, Dai and Li, 2019; Jenkins, 2003) suggest that travel photos document travel experiences and show others that “the trip was made...and fun was had (Sontag, 1979: p.9). However, while photos here may also serve as evidence of the trip taking place, they also purposefully downplay any ‘fun’ side of the trip to point out its purpose and functionality to serve a greater cause. This is also evident in the photos posted which include the travelers. Travelers may be alone appearing serious or proudly smiling with a thumbs-up gesture or pointing at their passport. Even in group photos people are secondary and symbolic artefacts play the leading role; for instance, a Tweet showing a group of friends holding a big Yes sign wearing T-shirts with slogans related to the movement. Furthermore, these images of confident empowered women that travel to support reproductive rights and publicly post about it could be juxtaposed to the silent and shamed women of the past travelling to abort aboard or the troubled and broken women of the pro-life billboards (O’Hara, 2020).

Meanings Attached to Political Travel

Travel as a Form of Resistance: Sacrifice and Heroism for Social Change

In relation to the motivational framing of injustice (Gamson, 1992), traveling back to

Ireland to vote represents solidarity to women and is seen as a form of resistance and fight for their rights. To articulate this, there are clear references to abortion travels and women liberation and empowerment, whereas the literary use of metaphors is interesting (Sampaio, Simoni and Isnart, 2014). In one tweet abortion ban is parallelized to as a curse on generations of Irish women which obliges them to leave their home and country. Drawing from Celtic mythology, this tweet presents the #hometovote campaign as the collective rising of ten thousand women who return and come together to drive the curse from the land. Overall, travel is narrated both as a form of activism and resistance to this injustice. The case of Savita Hallapanavar is frequently evoked by travelers/activists as a symbol for the movement infused with injustice meanings.

This clear framing of injustice creates the basis for the narrative of villains and heroines (Khazraee and Novak, 2018). Although, there are usually no explicit references to the pro-life supporters, travelers frame themselves as the heroes who travel to fight against the injustice that villains want to perpetuate. The construction of heroes is accompanied by notions of sacrifice, which are underscored by presenting travel as uncomfortable, tiring and inconvenient. Posts often mention how many kilometers travelers have been traveled, how many hours they have been spent traveling and/or how short the stay in Ireland will be, ‘not even 24 hours’ just to vote. These posts are accompanied by selfies showing tired, sleep-deprived faces. Some explain that although they feel exhausted, emotional, with jet lag etc. they see this trip as a ‘mission’, an obligation to themselves and to other women. Others explain other types of personal loss due to the trip. There are cases of students who put their academic obligations in second place, people who interrupted their vacation or their honeymoon, even who left a young daughter in the hospital or who go to vote in very delicate health circumstances. Many travelers not only proudly share the sacrifice made, but also seek to inspire and motivate others who may similarly find themselves in difficult circumstances to

exercise their right to vote. Such an example would be of a woman's post who is undergoing treatment for breast cancer: *'If I can you can. Well I hope I can.'* The notion of sacrifice is in accordance with meanings of activism and resistance, since travelers do not frame their trips as self-oriented rational decisions or hedonic experiences (Hirsch, 1990; Stern et al., 1999). Previously, de Jong (2017, 853) observed that, in much literature, tourism and activism are seen as antithetical, because "the deployment of leisure as an alternative space of activism troubles characterisations of activism as effort". This can further explain why travel is framed as sacrifice and effort both visually through photos and textually through posts. The non-hedonic aspect of travelling is emphasized to further accentuate its activist character. In accordance with this, non-travelers recognize the sacrifice made and offer their solidarity, e.g. some offer travelers a lift, while many simply express their gratitude for the trip made.

Travel as a Form of Participation in an Imagined Community of Change

The activists, both Irish based and the Irish diaspora, all form part of larger imagined community, which is not formed on the basis of frequent contact, interaction or on spatial compactness (Anderson, 1983). Instead, as Anderson (1983) explained, imagined communities are geographically scattered and share a common social identity. Tajfel (1981) suggested that social movements should be understood as 'efforts by large numbers of people, who define themselves and are also often defined by others as a group to solve collectively a problem they feel they have in common, and which is perceived to arise from their relations with other groups' (p. 244). Also, identification with the movement's collective identity has been found to be a unique predictor for participation in the social movement (Simon et al., 1998).

Organizational actors adopt an array of strategies to build a collectively shared social identity; they create hashtags and invite people to post using them in order to co-

create the larger narrative of the campaign; they strategically refer to travelers as a distinct social group calling them *'the Repealers'* or *'The cavalry is coming!'*; they facilitate many of the cultural materials e.g. Repeal t-shirts, 'Healthcare not Airfare' tags, that evidence the identification with the group. After all, as Polletta and Jasper (2001) argue "collective identities are expressed in cultural materials: names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing and so on" (p.285).

On their part, travelers use the materials provided to reaffirm their belonging to the group. Most individual posts are selfies of women traveling alone sharing their personal stories or short messages like 'On my way'. But we also find text posts, photos and videos of encounters and gatherings during travel and afterwards, outside the polling stations or in street celebrations. For instance, one traveler describes the joy she felt when she met other Irish traveling from Buenos Aires to Dublin to vote. Another post is a photo of strangers wearing their Repeal T-shirts at Dublin airport who traveled from London on the same flight. A photo that became viral shows a group of older people carrying a banner that said 'Grandfathers say YES'. Physical gatherings can reinforce this sense of collectiveness and greater achievement in social movements (Ahmed et al., 2017). Whether group photos or selfies, these are digital performances on social media that communicate the belonging in a larger imagined community (Khazraee and Novak, 2018).

Another aspect of the collective identity constructed is its emotionality. Many posts have a clear emotional framings that reflects upon the larger emotional narrative of the movement. The emotions expressed, joy, excitement, pride, ecstasy, hope, all form part of the hashtag tapestry and reveal the emotional energy generated in the community (Jasper, 2011). Some examples include: *'I just feel so relieved, so overwhelmed with love for everybody.'* *'what happens in Ireland (...) is beautiful, powerful, sororous and unbeatable'*, *'If you want to recover your faith in humanity follow the #HomeToVote'*,

'it's so moving to see women travelling from all over the world to try and make sure other women don't have to travel in secrecy and shame again'. This rise in positive emotion has been observed in other social movements about women rights and allows for protesters to bond (Ahmed et al., 2017; Zavella, 2017; Fischer, 2020; Whittier, 2021). For example, Ahmed et al. (2017) describe how the collective anger because of a gang rape and torture of a student in Delhi transformed in collective solidarity, hope and optimism to effect real change as the protest advanced. In the particular case of this pro-choice movement, Fischer (2020) also explains that stories of abortion and trauma became public aiming to counter and resist the deployment of shame and, instead, to evoke empathy, compassion and care from the community. Furthermore, in previous work positive emotions of solidarity and hope are often facilitated by collective rituals such as chanting, storytelling and singing (Zavella, 2017; Whittier, 2021). In this case, visual and text posts under common hashtags serve this same purpose.

Travel as a Patriotic Act

Finally, the travel back to Ireland is presented as a patriotic act, as an act of care and love towards the country. As previously mentioned, in many posted photos, the passport is photographed together with a symbol of the campaign, e.g. a Yes sticker. The deployment of the passport in the photos certainly holds symbolism. First, it is a travel symbol. Second, it is a powerful cultural symbol since the passport is 'a certificate of citizenship' and national identity (Robertson, 2010: p. 21).

Travelers make the journey to convert Ireland into a better and more compassionate country. One traveler tweets that she 'joined in the sky alongside thousands of Irish women and men' to change forever the country's landscape'. In various posts the emphasis is placed upon the country, the nation: making Ireland a great country or showing how great it is. Previous historical links of the 'abortion-free' Ireland with

anti-colonial and pro-natalist Irish nationalist narratives to establish Irish moral superiority (Calkin, 2019) are questioned and rejected here. Travelers are scattered around the world, but they embrace their Irishness, while they also recognize their own agency in reassembling their national identity. In fact, some of the travelers explain in their posts that a year ago they travelled again to vote in another referendum to grant LGTB rights. The fact that some travelers entangle both rights movements reveals that their interest goes beyond abortion and LGTB rights, and centers on the modernization of the country.

[Insert Figure 3 about here]

4. Discussion and conclusions

Even though social networks have proven useful to coordinate simultaneous protests in different countries where locals participate (Gillan and Pickerill, 2008), in many other cases mobility and travel may still be necessary in order to support specific social and political causes, especially when it comes to traditional forms of political participation like elections or a referendum. Nevertheless, we still lack insights about the role of travel in the context of contemporary social movements, about how travel elements are assembled and represented under a common framing of activism and social justice. These representations are important because “how the movement is visualized for the public to consume and how the public is exposed to its argumentation” matter (Molek-Kozakowska and Wanke, 2019: p. 569).

Our study aimed to contribute to this gap by focusing on the case of the social media campaign before the 2018 referendum in Ireland and in the context of the pro-choice Irish social movement. In our analysis we have drawn particular attention to the symbolism that travel holds, rather than its practical importance. We take the example of the suitcase, an easily identifiable travel element. The suitcase has been long used in

the Irish pro-choice movement: in the artworks examined by Calkin (2019), in the protest organized by Amnesty International in 2015 in Dublin, in the solidarity march in London 2016 or #Choice4Xmas and in the campaign of the London Irish Abortion Rights Campaign. In all of them, the suitcase is a symbol that highlights that women were forced to travel to access a legal and safe abortion (see NicGhabhann, 2018). The use of this object in the protests puts travel at the heart of the pro-choice campaign communicating travel of this type as something unwanted and forced. However, in the social media campaign before the referendum, travel becomes politicized and acquires different positive meanings aimed to transform the social and institutional structures to legitimize abortion rights (Kumar, Hessini and Mitchell, 2016). Travel elements like the suitcase or the passport are used, but to communicate empowerment, social change and adherence to the collective of resistance.

Then, we reintroduce the notion of political travel. Although we are not the first to coin the term (Moynagh, 2008), we underscore the need for further research on this field which would be of value for social movements and travel studies researchers. In our empirical case we observed how Irish diaspora was encouraged to travel and constitute themselves as political tourists. Also, we provide detailed accounts of the individual political travel experiences which, when put together, build a common storyline. The analyzed posts, especially under the #Hometovote hashtag, composed both by visual and non-visual elements, emphasized constantly the activist purpose of the travel. Taking and posting a photo is a deliberate strategy when travelling (Deng, Liu, Dai and Li, 2019). Visual content sharing while travelling often serves as a form of online sociability or for impression management purposes and identity building (Belk and Hsiu-yen Yeh, 2011; Lo and McKercher, 2015; Munar and Jacobsen, 2014). Travelers' individual posts, visual and discursive, allowed co-creating a larger narrative of the campaign defining its 'aestheticization' and emotionality. As

Khazraee and Novak (2018) describe it, it “resembles a play performed by a very large cast in which each actor only recites a short line, but the whole play is a significant and coherent public demonstration” (p. 9).

Thus, these findings extend our notion of political travel. Travel is studied as a ‘political praxis’ that permits activists to form a part of global, imagined ‘communitas’ (Piccini, 2013). In previous research on political travel, cosmopolitanism was one key motivation for the activists. Jobs (2009) mentions that young travelers “had come to conceive of themselves, not merely as members of a particular nation, but as a continent-wide, transnational social group” (p. 376). There are similar arguments made by other authors (Anheier, Glasius and Kaldor, 2001; Cohen, 1992; Fisher et al., 2005; Tarrow, 2002) who claim that political travellers are ‘rooted cosmopolitans’; concerned with what happens in their country and outside of it, holding an international orientation but still feeling part of their nation-states. But, our empirical case shows a different angle: here political travel is also motivated by a sense of national identity and patriotism. The issue of abortion appears to be holding back Ireland from embracing modernity, especially since Ireland has progressed in other economic and social aspects but remained among the few countries in its ‘neck of the woods’ that still banned abortion. Our political travelers build an alternative image of their nation which, in turn, allows them to construct a positive prototype of themselves as Irish; depicting modern Irish as altruists, solidary and patriots that fight for women’s rights. As Brendan Howlin, an Irish Labour Party politician, wrote in a tweet ‘the past is another country.’ Finally, we can see the assemblage of objects and the space for the ‘aesthetization’ of the pro-choice social movement in social media. This includes aspects such as the staging of imagery shared, the scenery used and the cultural artefacts employed. Regarding the physical places which embody symbolic meanings in relation to the movement, these changed over time. Before the referendum, campaigning took place

in the streets, but the main symbolic places for supporters were the Dublin airport and port, once again related to travel (e.g. photos and videos welcoming travelers in the Dublin airport). During the vote, the polling stations became the background for posts in social media, whereas later on after results were out, celebrations took place in the streets, such as the one outside Dublin Castle which is another symbol of Irishness (Beesley, 2018). Throughout the campaign the mural of Savita Halappanavar in Dublin was used as a collective symbol for the movement with posts of people paying their respects and leaving flowers and candles. As Köhler and Wissen (2003: p. 942) argue ‘this is not accidental: groups stemming from all part of the world need ‘places’ to constitute themselves as a movement.’ Figure 4 explains how digital and physical spaces were used throughout this globalised movement and served for organization, participation, protest and symbolic activities, as well as for collective empowerment (Mattoni and Treré, 2014).

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

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Table 1: Data sources systematization

Twitter hashtags

Hashtag	Number of tweets	Number of Comments	Number of Retweets	Number of likes
#Hometovote	443	7208	132423	700183
#Repealthe8th	2514	31362	332299	1505376

Facebook group

Name	Total Members	Status	Formation	Objective
Abroad for Yes	6184	Private and visible	Abril 2018	To connect students with potential supporters helping out with the funds to go home.

Webpages (n=6)

Name

HometoVote; London Irish Abortion Rights Campaign; European Women Lobby; ENGENDER; Union of Students in Ireland (USI 60); Abortion Support Network

Blogs (n=11)

Name

1. London Irish Abortion Rights Campaign
2. Spain Amnesty International
3. Canada Amnesty International
4. European Women Lobby
5. ENGENDER
6. How to use abortion pill
7. University of Westminster Student Blog
8. Police Press University of Bristol
9. Rosie's Rants
10. Catherine Cronin
11. The Bandwagon

Source: Authors elaboration.

Figure 1. “Metronome”



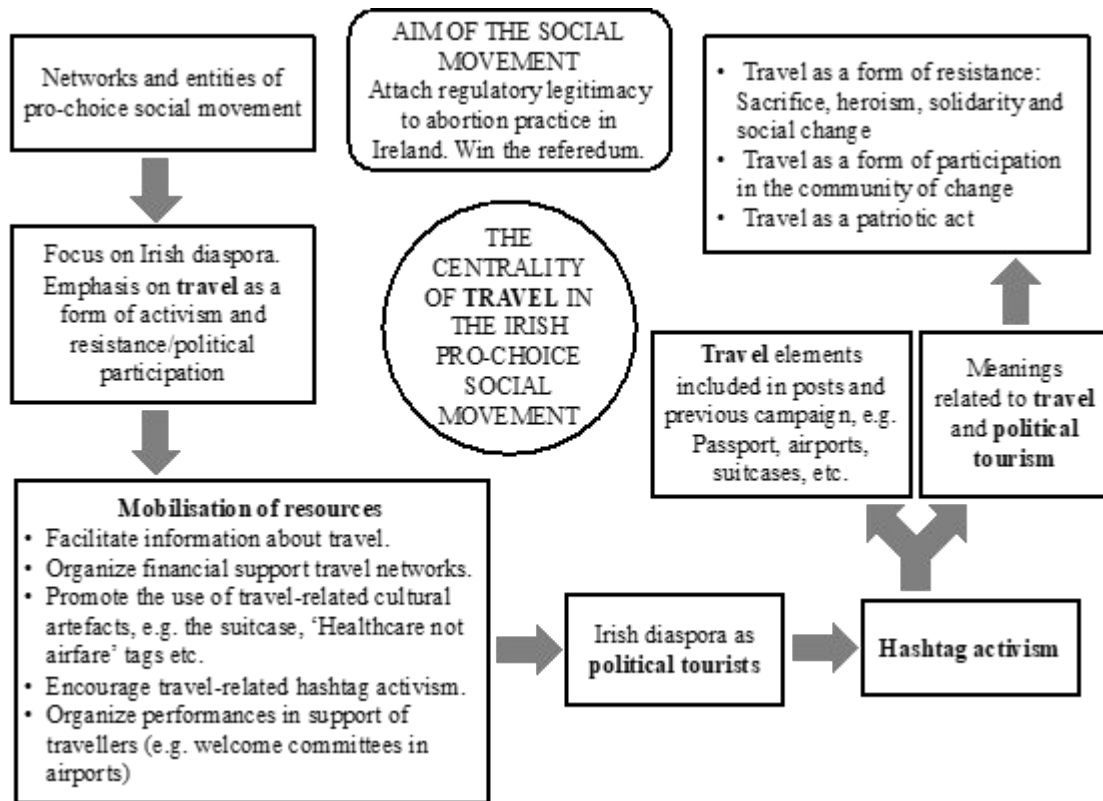
Source: https://secretweb1337tbh.abortionrightscampaign.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/ARC_PhotoCall_Dail4.jpg, credit: Katie Gillum (photos free to use)

Figure 2. Out of the shadows



Source: <https://willstleger.wordpress.com/2017/01/03/out-of-the-shadows/> Credit: Will St Leger, permission to use granted by the artist

Figure 3. Travel in the Irish Pro-choice campaign



Source: Authors elaboration

Figure 4. Use of physical and digital spaces

	<i>Prior to the referendum</i>	<i>The vote</i>	<i>After the referendum</i>
<i>Physical Space/ Main symbols</i>	<p>Campaigning in streets Airports, ports, train stations The mural of Savita Hallapanavar</p>	<p>Polling stations</p>	<p>Celebrations in the streets and squares (e.g. outside the Dublin castle).</p>
<i>Digital Space</i>	<p>Messages in favor of the cause Photos and videos in the places/symbols in social media and blogs</p>		<p>Messages/photos of celebration right after the referendum in social media and blogs Messages/photos to celebrate anniversary of referendum's result in social media and blogs</p>
<i>Practices of social movements</i>	<p>Participation: Involving others in the movement Organization: Plan and coordinate action in relation to the movement Protest: Perform actions that entail a public protest Symbolic practices: Develop discourses and meanings in relation to the cause and the movement</p>		<p>Collective empowerment Perceived agency</p>

Source: Authors elaboration