

**"The Celts Are Here!":
To What Extent Does Celtic Supporter Activism
Constitute A New Social Movement?**



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Abstract

There is a dynamic and interesting intersection between football and activism. As the world's most popular sport, football can be a formidable platform for activism. In this master thesis I will explore activism conducted by the supporters of Celtic FC. Social and political activism have strong traditions amongst Celtic supporters and in the Celtic community. The football club was founded as a charity in 1887 by the marginalized Irish-Catholic immigrant community in Glasgow. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into the social and political activism conducted by Celtic supporter activists.

My research question was: *to what extent does Celtic supporter activism constitute a new social movement?* To find the answer to this, I conducted four field trips to Glasgow and Belfast. Here I used qualitative methods including 12 in-depth interviews, participant-observations and field conversations to gather data. This was in turn analyzed. I used new social movement theory as a theoretical framework. This theory considers both the structural and identity as being important to social movements (Peoples, 2019, p 17). I also explored the roles free space and collective identity play for social movements drawing on the work of Polletta (1999) and Polletta and Jasper (2001). In addition, I tried to reconceptualize new social movement theory as well as the roles of free spaces and collective identities by drawing on research in sport sociology on these concepts.

I found that that Celtic supporter activism to a large degree constitutes a new social movement. Both the structural and identity are important in Celtic supporter activism. Firstly, Celtic supporter activists often fulfils Peoples (2019) requirement for social movements which are: *“groups of people organizing to bring about – or resist – social change, using at least in part, non-institutional strategies and tactics”* and often having social injustice and social inequality as core concerns which they mobilize around (p. 17). Secondly, Celtic is and has always been an important free space for its supporters. Collective identities which in turn fuel Celtic supporter activism are formed here. I found specifically six collective identities which play prominent roles in Celtic supporter activism. These are the Irish, Catholic, immigrant, inclusive, left-wing, and working-class collective identities. Furthermore, my research indicates that activism often is an important and integral part of Celtic supporter activists' lives, where it becomes something which is more than activism.

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“When you pull on that jersey you’re not just playing for a football club, you are playing for a people and a cause” (Tommy Burns, Celtic player and manager)

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background and purpose

Football is much more than the world’s most popular sport. Football is about community, identity, hope and change. Football is filled with many stakeholders including players, managers, owners, media and politicians. However it is the supporters that are regarded as the the most important part of football. For example, Celtic manager Jock Stein declared that: *“football without fans is nothing”* (Miller, 2020). Football is also a sport with strong working class roots. In the late 19th Century it became the number one sport for urban working class communities in Great Britain (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1999, p. 3). However, since the 1990s there has been an intense and rapid commercialization of football (Giulianotti, 2002, p 25). Nevertheless, traditional football supporters are far from powerless. Totten (2015) describes football as a *“contested ideological terrain”* (p. 454) where football supporters push back. Furthermore, he explains that that sport can potentially challenge and resist dominant power structures and become a part of a broader social movement (pp. 454-456).

The purpose of this thesis is to gain insight into the social and political activism conducted by Celtic FC supporters. There are strong traditions of charity and grassroots activism in the Celtic communit and the club was established as a charity in 1887 by Glasgow’s Irish-Catholic immigrant community. In this thesis I am specifically exploring whether Celtic supporter activism constitutes a new social movement. My findings indicates that Celtic supporter activism becomes more than activism for the activists. Therefore I have attempted to reconceptualize the notion of new social movements, free spaces and collective identities by also drawing from existing research on football in sport sociology.

1.2. Research question

My research question is: *to what extent does Celtic supporter activism constitute a new social movement?* New social movements are characterized by a focus on the structural as well as identity (Peoples, 2019). In order to answer this, I created the following sub-research questions:

- a) *To what extent and how do Celtic supporters work to bring about social and political change?*
- b) *What are Celtic supporter activists` strategies, tactics, tools and methods?*

- c) *Which role do social inequality and social injustice play in Celtic supporter activism?*
- d) *Which role do Celtic supporter activists ascribe to activism in their supporter identity and what motivate their activism?*
- e) *How has Celtic become a free space for establishing collective identities which in turn fuels Celtic supporter activism?*

I hope that by using new social movement theory as theoretical framework, my research can contribute to the body of knowledge on football supporter activism in general and Celtic supporter activism in particular. The reason why I chose new social movement theory as theoretical framework is its emphasis on both the structural and identity (Peoples, 2019)

1.3.The structure of the thesis

Chapter two explores the theoretical framework for this thesis which is new social movement theory. I also look at the roles free spaces and collective identities play in social movements according to Polletta (1999) and Polletta and Jaspars (2001). The final section focus on free spaces, identity and activism in football and draws from existing research on football in sport sociology.

In chapter three I will take look at Celtic FC. This includes its establishment as a charity 133 years ago and how it has become one the world`s most famous football clubs. The majority of Celtic supporters are Scots of Irish-Catholic descent living in Western Scotland. Celtic FC also has strong links to Ireland where it has a strong fan base (McDougall, 2013; McGuirk, 2009). I will therefore look into the historical context for the Irish diaspora in Scotland and events that has influenced Celtic and its support. In the last section I will look at Celtic supporters` social and politica activism as well as their activism towards their club.

In chapter four I will present the methods I used when I conducted my research. I will start by looking at double hermeneutics which was my research approach as well as the concept of thick descriptions. I will then describe the data collection and analysis process including the field work and the qualittative methods I utilized. I will then take a brief look at reliability, validity and inference before I finish off the chapter by looking at the ethical considerations in my research and my own personal position as researcher.

In chapter five I will present the results of my field research in Glasgow and Belfast. The chapter also includes three stories about different Celtic supporter activism. In chapter six I will discuss these findings using the theoretical framework from chapter 4 as backdrop. First I

will look into to what extent Celtic supporter activism fulfils criteria for being a new social movement. I will also explore how Celtic has functioned as a free space where collective identities which in turn fuels the supporters` activism have been established. Chapter 7 is the final conclusion. Here I will answer the research questions and also provide suggestions for further research.

1.4. Reflection on terms and expressions

Beresford (1987) declares: “*There is no neutrality in Northern Ireland, at least in the terminological sense*” (p. 1) When I embarked on my field research, I made a made a conscious decision to avoid what one of my interlocutors called partitionist language. This thesis is a qualitative study of Celtic supporter activism in Glasgow and Belfast and I wanted to be linguistically in sync with this. As I conducted field work in Glasgow and Belfast, using this language also felt very natural to me. I am certain that if I had travelled there as a regular Celtic supporter this would be the vocabulary I would use.

I have specifically used the term North of Ireland to refer to the six counties which are still under British rule. As Beresford explains “*the use of of the term Northern Ireland places the writer on one side of the conflict, because there is no such entity*” (1987, p 1). I use the Irish name Long Kesh instead of the British name the Maze Prison to refer to the main prison used during the violent conflict in the North of Ireland. I also use the term Catholic to refer to the ethnically Irish community in the North of Ireland. I use the term republican or Irish republican to refer to those who want a united Irish republic¹. I use the terms unionist, loyalists² and Protestant intermittently for the “*opposite*” side. In the beginning I tried to use one term consistently, but found out that this was impossible as different people naturally use different terms. After consulting with one of my Belfast interlocutors, I decided to use the term Irish rebel songs to refer to republican songs whether these are historical or from the more recent violent conflict in the North of Ireland. As for the Irish diaspora in Scotland, I may use the words Irish and Catholic separately or together. I believe this will all make sense when one reads it in its its context. If I have felt that a term needed further explanations I have added footnotes.

¹ Nationalist or Irish nationalist is also used for this. See Murals of Derry (2008) for more information and glossary pertaining to this.

² Unionists want a continued British Union and the term loyalists implies being loyal to the British crown (Murals of Derry, 2008)

I am also using the terms anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry. In Scotland, the term sectarianism is often used to describe ethno-religious prejudice and discrimination. Bradley explains that this term is problematic as it is a catch-all phrase which: “*serves little educational, informative, genuine and accurate historical purpose*” and: “*provides a source for deception, lies, superficiality, masquerade and concealment in relation to ethno-religious prejudice and discrimination in Scotland*” (2019, p 15). However, he also points out the usage of the term sectarianism is so widespread that it has effectively become the “*the dominant discursive concept*” (2019, p 17).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

The theoretical framework for this thesis is new social movement theory. I will also look at the roles of collective identity and free space in collective action, and how they bridge the gap between structure which is emphasized in the earlier traditional social movement theories and culture which new social movements theories considers as well. I will draw from the work of Peoples (2019), Polletta (1999) and Polletta and Jasper (2001). Because football is deeply rooted in identity and emotions, it is interesting to explore how football supporter activism fits in with new social movement theory and its focus on identity. Another interesting concept in football supporter activism is how football can be a free space for supporters and from which in turn activism is launched. Therefore, I will explore existing research in sport sociology in order to reconceptualize the new social movement theory and the concepts of free spaces and collective identity.

My research question was: *to what extent does Celtic supporter activism constitute a new social movement?* I made the following sub-research questions to answer this:

- a) *To what extent and how do Celtic supporters work to bring about social and political change?*
- b) *What are Celtic supporter activists` strategies, tactics, tools and methods?*
- c) *Which role do social inequality and social injustice play in Celtic supporter activism?*
- d) *Which role do Celtic supporter activists ascribe to activism in their supporter identity and what motivate their activism?*
- e) *How has Celtic become a free space for establishing collective identities which in turn fuels Celtic supporter activism?*

2.2. Social movements and social movement theory

So, what exactly are social movements? In *the Palgrave Handbook of Social Movements, Revolution and Social Transformation*, Peoples (2019) define these as:

Groups of people organizing to bring about – or resist- social change, using, at least in part, non-institutional strategy and tactics (also known as unconventional politics. Most social movements have social inequality and injustice as core concern and mobilize around these issues (p. 17).

Peoples (2019) writes that prior to the 1960s functionalism was the dominant paradigm in American sociology. It had little interest in social movements which were considered to be crowd behaviour by irrational actors. Functionalism was inspired by the French sociologist Emile Durkheim's ideas of the importance of preservation of society and its structures, and how people therefore had to conform to social norms. At the core of functionalism was a view that: "*society worked well for the majority of its people..., social inequality was downplayed, and efforts to change the system (e.g. via social movements) were treated as dysfunctional as in another wise functional society*" (p. 22). This changed in the 1960s when there was a rise of social movements that highlighted the existing social injustice and inequalities. This led to a paradigm shift from functionalism to the conflict paradigm. Sociology thus went from ignoring social problems and social movements to recognizing and focusing on these. Social movements participants were considered to be rational actors and social movement as: "*legitimate form of political action*" (Peoples, 2019, pp. 22-23).

Resource mobilization theory and political process theory are two traditional social movements theories that explore why movements emerge when they do (Peoples, 2019, p. 23). Resource mobilization theory focuses on the role resources play for social movements emergences and for maintaining them afterwards. It should be noted that there needs to be a certain balance of resources for movements to emerge. In other words, not too few and not too many. If it is the former, the social movement will not be able to launch. If it is the latter, it will not be politically unconventional which is a characteristic of social movements (Peoples, 2019, p. 24). Political opportunity / Political process theory argues that for social movements to emerge the political climate needs to be optimal, thus drawing on social-structural insights. For a social movement to emerge it needs to be a certain amount of political opportunity. If this is too little, it will not

be able to form and become established. If there are too much there isn't a need for the social movement in the first place (Peoples, 2019, pp. 26-27).

The emergence of new social movement theory

Traditional social movement theories were criticized of focusing too much on the structural. For example, in the 2001 article, *Collective Identity and Social Movements* Polletta and Jasper explain that a too strong focus on how mobilization happen led to important issues being overlooked. Specifically, by focusing on how mobilization happen led to the question of why social movements emerge being ignored (p. 284).

This led to an emergence of new social movement theory. Buechler (1995) explains that this is a term for different theories that:

Have looked to other logics of action based in politics, ideology and culture as the root of much collective action, and they have looked to other sources of identity such as ethnicity, gender and sexuality as the definers of collective identity (1995, p 442).

Peoples explains that in new social movement theory, structural inequality continues to play a role, but identity has also become a factor (2019, pp. 28-29).

New social movement theory borrows from collective identity theory to describe how social movements today negotiate issues of identity and incorporate identity recognition into their initiatives. Identity has arguably always been important to social movements. Many movements have a cohesive, collective identity around which mobilization occurs. Central to this question is 'who does the movement represent'? (Peoples, 2019, p. 28),

2.3 The role of collective identity in social movements

Polletta and Jasper (2001) explore collective identities and how these explain why people mobilize. They define collective identity as:

An individual's cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and is distinct from personal identities, although it may form a part of a personal identity (p. 285).

They emphasize how collective identity could help answers questions about mobilization which traditional social movements theories could not because of their sole focus on structures and

the “*hows*” (2001, p. 283). They add that collective identity is different from interest and ideology. When it comes to the former it is not a rational calculation. As for the latter collective identity entails that people have positive feelings for the rest in the group. Even though collective identities can be expressed as culture, not all culture expressions are collective identities. They stress that collective identities are forms of culture which can be constructed on other forms. They are also relational and fluid and comes out of interactions with different groups and people. (2001, pp. 285, 298).

According to Polletta and Jasper collective identity can be used to answers 4 different questions. The first is: “*Why do movements emerge when they do?*” (2001, p 286). They state that resource mobilization theory and political opportunity theory took for granted that movements want access to political bargaining. However, during the 1980s social movements such as the peace movement and the LGBT movements gained hold. Cultural and political goals were combined by these movements. These movements differed from earlier traditional Western European class-based political mobilizations as they wanted to cultural changes and recognition of their identities (2001, pp. 286-287).

Polletta and Jaspers` second question pertains to motivation. Why do people join social movements, especially when there are no obvious incentives, and they can be free riders? They argue that collective identities explain this better than material incentives (2001, p. 284). Polletta and Jasper also note that collective identities don`t need to exist prior to mobilization. However, identity work is crucial for recruitment and maintaining membership. In turn, movement identities become similar to pre-existing collective identities. As a part of recruitment, social movements might use injustice and agency frame identities where the difference between the activists and the others are illuminated. They add that this is a double-edged sword as people may leave movements, they don`t feel represented by. It is also common is to construct movement identities from other independent collective identities (2001, pp. 290-292).

Polletta and Jaspers` third question is about how social movements select strategies and tactics as well as organizational structures. (2001, p. 284, 292). In earlier resource mobilization and political process theories used classical rational decision-making models cost-benefit, calculations and adaption to environmental restrictions were central. (2001, pp. 284, 292). However, critics explain: “*that activists also choose options that conform to `who we are` as pacifists say, or women or revolutionaries*” (2001, p. 292). However, this may not be

acknowledged as a strategy. Polletta and Jaspars disagrees with this as they consider making such identity claims can be a strategy. In addition, instrumental calculations are often dependent on “*the collective identities that are widely associated with particular strategies, tactics, organizational forms and even deliberate logics*” (pp. 292-293). They also point out that collective identities can be developed: “*based on those tactical tastes*” (p. 293).

Polletta and Jaspers` last question is directed at identity as an outcome of movements: “*How successful are movements? And how do they affect individuals, groups and broader structures?*” (2001, p. 296). Often cultural outcomes and not institutional outcomes have been focus points for academics. However, Polletta and Jaspars explain: “*Yet there are many kinds of movement impacts – institutional and extra institutional – in which identity plays a role. In some cases the impact is intended. In others a by-product of other aims*” (2001, p. 296). Frequently, changing identities is the main goal of the movement. Activists` individual identity is influenced by the collective movement identity. (2001, p. 296) Polletta and Jaspars explains that: “*Collective identities developed within movements may have lasting impact on institutional political arenas or organizational forms*” (2001, p. 297) Of course, the outcomes might not be successful and there might be backlashes against movements with a strong identity as well as the establishment of counter-organizations (2001, p. 297)

2.4. Free spaces for establishing collective identities

In “*Free spaces*” in collective action, Polletta (1999) describes how free spaces are used as a term for:

Small-scale settings within a community or movement that are removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies political mobilization....Free spaces seem to provide institutional anchor for the cultural challenges that explodes structural arrangements (p. 1).

She also points out that in studies of free spaces there is a binary where culture is inside the free spaces restricted to free and structure is outside of this. This division leads to the actual interrelationship between culture and structure being underestimated. (1999, pp. 17, 25). She states: “*discussions of free spaces have simultaneously underestimated the durability of culture and the malleability of structure*” (1999, p. 17).

Polletta points out that the term free spaces were originally coined by Sara Evans in 1979. Different words for these are amongst others “*safe spaces*”, “*havens*”, “*protected preserves*” and “*cultural laboratories*” (1999, p 1). Free spaces are conceptual spaces which dominant groups cannot invade. They are often small, intimate and with roots in long-established (1999, pp. 3, 6). Polletta argues that the concept is empowering as it provides tools for oppressed people to change their situation as: “*counterhegemonic ideas and identities come neither from outside the system nor from some free-floating oppositional consciousness, but from long-standing community institutions*” (1999, p.1). For some theorist including Sara Evans, free spaces are actual physical spaces for resistance while for others including Polletta free spaces may also be non-physical. Free spaces play an important role prior to mobilizations, as this is where consciousness, awareness, identities and interests are established (1999, pp. 1, 5,7).

Polletta points out that free spaces spread identities, tactics and frames from movement to movement and become lasting *outcomes of protest*, as they enable overlaps between movements when it comes to frames, identities and tactics. It may be chronologically or situationally between movements existing simultaneously, and as mentioned above for Polletta free spaces are not confined to physical places. She points out that not all oppressed groups have free spaces and also asks if groups that are not oppressed would need free spaces, and if free spaces always precede the arrival of social movements (1999, p 3-6, 25). She tries to answer this by developing an understanding of free spaces and their role in social movements including providing goals, planning and recruitment. She specifically does this by breaking them down into three structures of transmovement, indigenous and prefigurative structures that all function within discontent and opposition, which she refers to as structures of “*association and precondition for mobilization*” (1999, p. 8). She writes:

The three structures that I identify- transmovement, indigenous and prefigurative- can be compared along several dimensions. I argue that the character of the associational ties that compose them, respectively, extensive, dense/isolated, and symmetrical, helps to explain their different roles in identifying opportunities, recruiting participants, supplying leaders, and crafting compelling action frames (1999, p 2).

Transmovement structures are characterized by extensive ties and when it comes to mobilization, they are good at identifying opportunities, but weak when it comes to recruitment, providing leaders and mobilizing frames. They are networks of activists that reaches far

geographically, temporally and on an organizational level. Despite of this and the fact that many members are experienced activists, they are marginal in politics which can result in a esoteric radical ideology which are obstacles for recruitment. Examples of transmovement structures are the Highlander Folk School that teaches non-violence techniques and community organizing to activists. Another example are the American radical pacifists who were active in multiple organizations such as the anti-Vietnam War, New Left and Civil Rights movements (Polletta, 1999, pp. 9-10).

Polletta describes indigenous structures as isolated networks characterized by heavy ties. They are strong when it comes to providing mobilizing frames, leadership and recruitment from local communities. Their weakness is that because of being so anchored in local communities they struggle when it comes to identifying “*extra-local opportunities or mobilize extra-local participants*” (1999, p. 9). To begin with they are not formally oppositional. An example is the African American churches prior to the Civil rights movement taking off. However, their self-sustainment and heavy local ties also means that they potentially have a powerful revolutionary force (1999, pp. 10-11).

Prefigurative structures are characterized by symmetric ties and their strengths is that they can easily develop new claims and identities. There are: “*well-equipped to develop new identities and claims but unless they begin to provide non-movement service are difficult to sustain*” (Polletta, 1999, p. 9). Often these free spaces are smaller free-standing zones which are clearly oppositional and political, but where the latter is a broader concept and includes culture and the personal. They are very different from more mainstream society structures. Some examples are the feminist 1970s women’s only spaces and alternative food co-ops, credit unions and health clinics. Memberships in prefigurative structures are selective in order to strengthen new interpersonal ties (1999, pp.11-12).

2.5. Football, football supporters and activism

Football is the world’s most popular sport (Kuhn, 2019, p. 51). Football has been played in most cultures in one form or another. Today’s modern association football started in England’s private schools in the middle of the 19th Century. By World War I, it had spread all over the world. At the end of the 19th Century, football also became the main sport for the British urban working class (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1999, p. 3). By the 1870s, people had more free time as working hours were reduced and Saturday afternoons were off (O’Hagan, 2004, p. 97). In

the 1880s football turned professional, which made it a better alternative than factory work for working class men. This in turn attracted more working-class spectators who wanted to see their own play (Kuhn, 2019, p. 15).

In *Soccer vs. the state* (2019), Kuhn looks at the popularity of football and how this has become a part of social life all over the world. It is an easy sport to play and follow. Football clubs become important parts in local communities via personal connections. It involves personal narratives and magical experiences (pp. 1, 51). Kuhn exclaims: “*football occupies the minds and hearts of millions of people, and even for those who don’t share this passion, the sport is too big and influential to be ignored*” (p. xii).

Football has also always attracted a diverse set of stakeholders with different agendas including supporters, players, management, owners, sponsor, football associations, media, governments and politicians. However, it is the supporters who often are deemed to be the most important. Giulianotti refers to these as the game’s “grassroots custodians” (2002, p. 25). Alabarces explains that the role of football supporters is both pragmatic and symbolic:

On one hand, there is their participation in the match which they believe influences the performance and hence the score. On the other hand, the continuity of identity, depends exclusively, on the incessant return to the temple of worship where the symbolic contract is renewed (1999, p. 81).

Identities and free spaces in football

In *Football in the Making*, Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti describes how football clubs reflect “*a strong sense of local and civic pride*”. (1999, p 3). Football supporter activism has a long and diverse tradition and has often proved to be an effective and formidable platform for political and social activism. The role collective identities and free spaces play in social movements can help shed a light on sport activism in general as well as football supporter activism in particular.

Kennedy and Kennedy (2013) explain that football: “*carries with it the possibility of promoting the voices of the disenfranchised and the marginalized, and as such the potential is always there for nurturing solidarity against a dominant discourse that buttresses the existing social order*” (p. 117). According to Kuhn (2019), football’s important role in social life entails that it has power. It also appeals to deep rooted ideas of solidarity and unity (51-52). Football clubs CAN become free spaces for oppressed people. For instance, FC Barcelona has been a place where

Catalan politics and cultures were expressed during the Franco regime (Kuhn, 2019, pp. 133-134).

Bairner and Shirlow (1999) explain that sport is an important arena for how we construct and reproduce our identities, which often tend to be many, and communicate this to the rest of the world. In fact, sports functions as vehicles of identities: “*sports are vehicles of identity, providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others, whether latitudinally or hierarchically*” (Bairner & Shirlow, 1999, p. 152). One's self-identity as football supporter can be complex. In 2002, Richard Giulianotti published his well-known taxonomy of football supporter identities which are on a hot-cool and traditional-consumer scale. He identifies 4 ideal spectator identities. These are: supporter, follower, fan and flâneur (pp. 25, 30).

Sports including football is not only important for our individual identities but also for our collective identities. According to Bairner and Shirlow, football's important role in the formation of collective identities explains the “*interplay between sport and politics*” (1999, p. 156). Another example of this is how international games often are referred to as “*90 minutes nationalism*” (Armstrong & Giulianotti, 1999, p 3). Bradley (2006) explains that:

A sport field or stadium provides a site of contestation, a space for the construction, maintenance and expression of identity, a place and environment where teams are imagined as representatives of a community or nation. It is here that such codes and discursive practices become more sharply defined and explicit. A sporting can transcend the field of play generate social, cultural and political meanings far beyond the event and world of sport generally” (2006, p. 54)

Football supporter activism

Totten (2015) defines activism as an: “*activity either advocating on behalf of a cause or actions in pursuit of a cause. Both aim to bring about social or political change*” (p. 455). Furthermore, he defines sport activism as: “*advocating or acting for social change in sport or through sport: for social and political change elsewhere*” (p. 455). He further observes that football activism radically challenges: “*the dominant conservative and functionalist social and political values which permeates football*” (p. 455).

It should be noted that football is not always considered by everyone to be a suitable platform for social and political activism as it is looked upon by some as the stronghold of the

establishment and not a free space for marginalized groups. This is illustrated by Totten who has researched sport activism and political praxis amongst the left-wing supporters of the German club FC St. Pauli (2015). He discovered that some feel that football is no-go zone for left-wing activism due to it being highly commercialized. Another example comes from Kuhn (2019) who describes how in the early 20th Century, many socialists deemed football to be a tool used by the establishment to pacify workers into complacency (p. 19). However, they soon “realized that football was becoming an integral part of working-class culture and they reacted” (p. 20).

As for the argument that commercialization has rendered football a lost cause for left-wing activism, Mick Totten (2013) who researched activism and political praxis amongst FC St. Pauli supporters strongly disagrees with this view. He criticizes this as being simplistic and underscores that football is a two-way street where supporters can resist and refers to sport as: “a contested ideological terrain” In fact, he argues that the commercialization of football has led to a new forms of supporter activism and protest movements where radical football supporters are far from powerless. He explains: “Sport clearly has the potential to act as a part of a wider social movement, engage in resistance and enable challenges to dominant structure of power” (pp. 455-456).

There is a long tradition of using football as a platform for political protests. (Kuhn, 2019, p. 105). In *Introduction: reflections on the context of `Left Wing` fan culture* (2013) Kennedy and Kennedy explore football supporters` traditional grassroots radicalism. They point out that left-wing football supporters especially mobilize against racism and commercialization of football. These activists also include so-called ultras groups which are very visible and vocal supporter groups. They explain that [left-wing] ultras are focused on anti-racism, anti-fascism and resisting the commercialization of football (p. 122). Furthermore, they argue that: “Football clubs and their fans are often the last and most visible vestige of an alternative, collectivist approach to life in the atomized societies we now inhabit” (p. 129).

Chapter 3: Background

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will explore the background for Celtic supporter activism. First, I will take a look at how Celtic FC was founded as a charity in 1887 and the club`s subsequent development. Section 3.3. looks at the experience of the Irish-Catholic community in Scotland, which most

Celtic supporters hail from. This includes the An Gorta Mór: the Great Irish Hunger and the history of Irish immigration to the country as well as anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry. I will also look into the violent conflict in the North of Ireland which lasted from 1968 to 1998. The last section explores Celtic supporters` social and political activism as well as activism towards the club and football.

3.2. Celtic Football Club

The Celtic Football and Athletic Club was founded as a charity in St. Mary`s Church Hall in the East-end of Glasgow on November 6, 1887. Its initiators led by the Marist priest Father Walfrid came from the Irish-Catholic community. The goal was to fundraise for charities such as the Poor Children`s Dinner Table and soup kitchens run by the Marists and the St Vincent De Paul Society (Burke, 2004, pp. 102-104). O'Hagan (2004) explains that community and the belief in the dignity of all people is central to the Marists Brothers. This was in stark contrast to the individualism, self-help and ideas of deserving versus undeserving poor which were prominent in Victorian Britain (p. 95). Celtic FC was never confined to Catholics only. Its charities were based on need and not religion (Donaldson, 2016, pp. 28, 30). Bradley explains that Celtic has always had supporters, players and employees with different backgrounds and identities (2006, p. 14).

Celtic`s founders also had other goals besides charity. Burke (2004) states: "*the essence of Celtic, the quintessential spirit fashioned at its inception was forged by motives that were cultural, political and religious*" (p 102). The founders were connected to the various Irish independence movement such as the Irish National Land League. Its founder Michael Davitt laid the first turf of Donegal soil when Celtic Park opened in 1892 (McGuirk, 2009, p. 95). Celtic`s first match was on May 28th 1888 and the team soon became a success. In 1889, they reached the Scottish Cup Final which they won the following year (Celtic Football Club, n.d.). According to O'Hagan, a reassignment of Father Walfrid to London in 1892 led to a neglect of charity by the club (2004, p. 98). In 1893, Celtic went into private ownership which lasted to 1994. In this period the club largely left charity. However, the supporters never stopped (Hamilton, 2018, p. 51).

Over the years, Celtic has become a world-famous football club. According to a 2018 report from the Fraser of Allander Institute (FAI), the club is ranked as the 25th strongest brand in international football. During the 2016/2017 season almost 2 million people attended matches.

The club also contributed 165 million GBP to Scotland`s GDP and employed 507 people (pp. 3-4, 7). Celtic FC has many domestic and international sporting triumphs. The biggest victory was in 1967 when they defeated Inter Milan and became the first Northern European team to win the European Cup. Kelly and Bradley (2019) explain that the 1967 victory was not only *a great sport victory but a defining socio-cultural moment for a marginalized community and a recognition of Irish identity in Scotland* (pp. 1-2, 7).

Belfast Celtic

“When we had nothing, we had Belfast Celtic. When we had Belfast Celtic, we had everything” (traditional saying)

Belfast Celtic was formed in 1891. Celtic FC contributed generously to its Irish brother club which became a successful football club and charity (Flynn, 2009, pp. 32, 38). Football in Ireland had followed a different path from England and Scotland. In 1884 the Gaelic Athletic Association which promoted Gaelic sports and culture was formed. Football was often dismissed as a so-called garrison game by Irish nationalists. However, Belfast Celtic soon got a huge following in the Catholic community in Belfast and all over Ireland. (Flynn, 2009, pp. 11-12).

Belfast Celtic was impacted by political upheavals which forced it to withdraw from football twice (The Belfast Celtic Society, n.d.). The second withdrawal was permanent. This happened after a violent and scandalous 1948 Boxing Day match between Belfast Celtic and Linfield from the loyalist part of the city (Flynn, 2009, pp. 34, 12). After a tense match, a mob of Linfield supporters invaded the pitch and attacked the Belfast Celtic players. Star player Jimmy Jones was almost beaten to death and his leg was broken (Flynn, 2009, p 127-129). The same evening Belfast Celtic decided to withdraw from football (Belfast Celtic Society, n.d.). April 1949, the club permanently left football (Flynn, 2009, p. 15). In 2003, the Belfast Celtic Society which is dedicated to preserving the club`s cultural and historical legacy was formed. Amongst other things the society runs a museum and holds lectures about the club (The Belfast Celtic Society, n.d.)

The nineties: crisis, Celts for Change and return to charity

At the end of the 1980s, Glasgow Celtic was struggling both football wise and financially. By 1994 the club was on the verge of bankruptcy. Fear of losing their club coupled by frustration with its board of directors led Celtic supporters to organize on a grassroots level via the group

Celts for Change. They used different ways of direct-action including town hall meetings, demonstrations which attracted media attention. In turn this escalated the campaign for the board to be removed (Celts for Change, n.d.).

This happened on March 4, 1994, when Scots-Canadian businessman Fergus McCann came in as majority owner and the football club became a public limited company. With him at the helm, Celtic's tradition of charity was revitalized, and the stadium rebuilt (Fergus McCann, n.d.) Sports wise things also improved (Celtic Football Club, n.d.). In 2003, Celtic reached the UEFA Cup final and 80 000 supporters travelled to Seville to see this. Celtic lost but its support won the FIFA and UEFA Fair Play awards for: "*their outstanding behaviour as well as creating a carnival around the event itself*" (Devine, 2004, p. 151). In 2013, the club's current charitable arm the Celtic FC Foundation was established (Hamilton, 2019, pp. 50-51). The foundation has a wide socio-economic approach focusing on health, equality, learning and poverty. This makes it different from many other football clubs' foundations that primarily focuses on football-oriented activities and youth development (FAI 2018 p. 4).

3.3. The historical and Political Context of the Irish-Catholic community in Scotland and the Irish connection

An Gorta Mór: the Great Hunger

Since 1169, Irish history has been marked by English colonization and oppression. After the Reformation, religion became a factor as England turned Protestant while the Irish remained Catholic. The 1695 penal laws blocked Catholics from access to education, owning land, voting and other civil rights. By 1714 only 7 % of Irish land was owned by Catholics (CAIN, nd, a). In 1707 England and Scotland united and Ireland went from being an English colony to a British one, where Scotland would play an important role (Bradley, 2006, p 25).

The An Gorta Mór – *the* Great Hunger of 1845-1852 devastated Ireland. It started with a potato disease which destroyed crops all over Europe. This was catastrophic for the Irish who dependent on potatoes for survival. One million Irish died of starvation (Bradley, 2009, p 14). The historian Christine Kinealy (2009) estimates that perhaps as much as two million Irish were forced to emigrate during the Great Hunger (p. 64). In other countries affected by the potato disease, government interventions prevented starvation. However, the few steps which were eventually taken by the British rulers were so meagre that it had little to no impact. In fact, throughout the Great Hunger, food was exported out of Ireland to the rest of the union (Bradley,

2009, p 13-14). Another reason for the lack of relief was that the British government was heavily influenced by the principle of non-intervention in economics (CAIN, nd, b). Furthermore, poor relief in Ireland was inferior to the rest of Great Britain. Kinealy explains that it was: *“based on a general perception that the Irish poor were lazy and feckless and needed to be forced from their high dependence of potatoes”* (p, 55). The potato disease disappeared in 1852, but it had a devastating effect on Ireland (Kinealy, 2009, p 53). The survivors were often traumatized and had severe health problems. Their offspring too suffered the consequences of the Great Hunger for generations, especially when it came to mental illness (O`Neil, 2004, p. 90).

Irish mass immigration to Scotland

Proportionally Scotland received most of the Irish who fled the Great Hunger. A third of the 300 000 who fled to Great Britain ended up here, mainly in Glasgow and Lanarkshire. Irish immigration continued to be high until 1921. After World War II it increased again, especially from the North of Ireland and Donegal (Bradley, 2004, pp. 19,20). In *Playing for the Hoops: the George McCluskey Story*, Donaldson (2016) describes how the fleeing Irish often ended up in slums filled with diseases, squalor and extreme poverty. They were treated with hostility by the locals who feared diseases and undercutting of wages. Anti-Catholicism was also strong in Scotland and they met much discrimination and prejudice. An example was the so-called souperism where proselytizing groups demanded that Catholics renounced their faith in exchange for food (pp. 23-28). He explains that despite of the suffering and discrimination the Irish immigrants endured when arriving in Scotland they went on to build strong communities which would sustain them:

Yet the newly arrived Irish in Scotland had one thing that helped them to overcome these great hardships and difficulties: they had each other. The values, identity and culture that this community brought with it served it well during these times. These include solidarity and care for those in need, inclusiveness and openness, reaching out to others and supporter one another (2016, p. 26).

Bradley (2006) describes that over the years the Irish in Scotland has made large contribution to Scottish society. This includes the Catholic church, education, nursing, culture, politics, infrastructure and sports including Celtic. Celtic has since its establishment been the main environment where: *“Irish confidence, celebration and assertion takes place and where*

Irishness becomes manifest” (pp. 12,57). An estimated 90 percent of the Celtic support hails from an Irish and Catholic background (Bradley, 2004, p. 81).

Anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism in Scotland

Scotland became Protestant after a zealous reformation containing much anti-Catholicism (Burke, 2004, p. 102). Joseph Bradley explains that the widespread discrimination of the Irish diaspora in Scotland is to a large extent interwoven with pre-existing anti-Catholicism stemming from this reformation. With the influx of Irish immigration, ethnicity and race became a part of this pre-existing anti-Catholicism (2004, p. 23). In Scotland, Catholicism and Irishness is intrinsically linked as the vast majority of Catholics are of Irish descent (Kelly & Bradley, 2019, p. 3). During the last couple of decades there has been a decrease of structural inequality and discrimination, especially amongst younger generations (McBride, 2019, p. 219). One reason is education which has led to upward mobility for many Scots of Irish-Catholic descent. Another reason is the demise of the traditional heavy industries, which were replaced by new companies with foreign owners willing to hire Catholics (the John Grey Centre, 2014, p. 5). However, anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism still continue to be a part of Scottish society. For example, economic parity wasn't reached for the Irish-Catholic community until 2001, 100 years after it was reached in the United States (McDougall 2013, pp. 232-233). Catholics are also often targets for hate crimes. Statistics from 2018 shows that 57 percent of all hate crimes in Scotland were directed at Catholics who makes up only 15 percent of the Scottish population (Hate Crimes against Catholics, 2018).

In *Difference and Distinctiveness in Scottish football and society* Bradley describes how anti-Irish racism is carried out by omission, which he refers to as Irish diasporic invisibility and by problematizing Irishness in Scotland. The former is characterized by lack of knowledge and consciousness about the Irish community including its contributions to Scottish society. Irishness is also often considered negative, deviant and sectarian (2006, pp. 20-27, 56). Also, Scotland's role in the British oppression and colonization of Ireland which is “*crucial to understanding the position of the Irish and their offspring within British society, particular in Scotland*” is omitted from popular, academic and political literature including Scottish media. He points out how Celtic FC has been an anti-dote to prejudice the Irish met from Scottish society and refers to Celtic as a “*place of empowerment*” (2006, p. 59),

Bradley takes issue with the usage of the term sectarianism to describe ethno-religious prejudice and discrimination. The term emerged in the 1980s and 1990s and is now the main discursive

concept to describe and explain ethno-religious events and identities and Protestant-Catholic relations. He points out that implicit in the term is a false assumption of both sides being equally wrong (2019, pp. 16-17, 31). This ignores uneven power relations and the historical British oppression and colonization of Ireland. He argues that sectarianism is also reductionist because it focuses on religion and ignores the ethnic and racial elements (2006, pp. 24-25). In Scotland, sectarianism is also often further reduced to being football related and specifically the rivalry between Celtic and Glasgow Rangers who are known for having loyalis supporters. Bradley explains that this in turn glosses over the realities: “*The common sense view that sectarianism is only a problem involving the “Old Firm” provides a similar smoke screen that covers up the origins, history and manifestations of sectarianism in Scottish society*” (2004, p. 65).

There are many similarities between the anti-Irish racism and discrimination experienced by Irish diaspora in Scotland and the Irish-Catholic population in the North of Ireland. This is evident in the plantation of Ulster where Scottish Protestant displaced native Catholics (Bradley, 2006, p. 25). During the late 19th Century many of these Ulster Protestants emigrated to Scotland. This in turn increased sectarian hostility in Scotland (The John Grey Centre, 2014, pp. 4,5). *Catholics in Scotland and the North of Ireland* faced similar employment discrimination. For example, both were kept out of the thriving shipyard and engineering industries in Belfast and Glasgow (Bell et al.,1999) (Farrell, 1980, p. 16). Another example is how the city of Glasgow has more Orange marches than Belfast and Derry combined (the Herald Scotland, 2009). The Orange Order which was founded in 1795, is dedicated to preserving and asserting Protestant supremacy and has played a crucial political role in the North of Ireland (CAIN, n.d., c)

The violent conflict in the North of Ireland

The violent conflict in the North of Ireland lasted from 1968 to the 1998. During this conflict more than 3600 people were killed and tens of thousands injured (Angelos, 2019). Historically, the English struggled to control the Ulster region in the North of Ireland. In 1605 the Plantation of Ulster, which was an ethnic cleansing of the region, started. Native Catholics were displaced and their land given to Protestants settler, many from Scotland, on the condition that they would not learn Irish or intermarry (CAIN, n.d.,a; Bradley, 2006, p. 25). This led to the Ulster Protestants becoming a small yet powerful majority in the North of Ireland. After the Irish War of Independence ended in 1921, six of the nine counties in Ulster were partitioned off. The rest of the island became the Irish Free State, which in turn became the independent Irish Republic

in 1949. The six counties in the North have remained a part of the United Kingdom (CAIN, n.d., b).

The Catholics in the North of Ireland were subjected to much discrimination and oppression. This included widespread socio-economic discrimination and human rights violations including political repression. However, in 1944, the British Butler Education Act was passed. This ensured access to higher education for many working-class Catholics. Several of these would play central roles in the Irish Civil Rights movement. This movement emerged in full during the late 1960s and demanded socio-economic changes and civil rights for Catholics (Kerr, 2013, pp. 26-28, 41-44). Beresford describes that in turn a:

Protestant backlash ensued and as the territory staggered towards civil war. Britain was forced to move in with troops". Meanwhile loyalist paramilitary groups mobilized and on the republican side the Irish Republican Army³ was caught unprepared` (1987, p. 12).

In 1972, after a split in the organization, the Provisional Irish Republican Army emerged as the modern-day IRA (Beresford, 1987, p. 12). Sinn Fein became their political wing (Murals of Derry, 2008). By 1971, it was evident that the British forces not only did not protect Catholic communities, but also attacked these. In 1971, 11 unarmed Catholic civilians were killed by the British Parachute Regiment in Ballymurphy, Belfast. The following year the same regiment killed 14 unarmed civilians in Derry during a Civil Rights march, which became known as Bloody Sunday (McCann, 1974, pp. 9, 14).

Beresford (1987) describes how during the conflict there was mass incarcerations of Irish republicans. Long Kesh, which the British called the Maze Prison, was first an internment camp and then a prison. In 1972, the republican prisoners were granted special status by British authorities. This was similar to prisoner of war status and meant they could self-organize. Three years later it was revoked. This led to the Prison Protests of 1976-1981. First the blanket protest where the republicans refused to wear prison uniforms started. In turn, they were placed in cells 24x7 and only had blankets to wear. In 1978 the no wash protest started. This was followed by the dirty protests, where prisoners smeared feces on the cell walls (pp. 1, 13-19). In October 1980, the Irish republicans in Long Kesh used their weapon of last resort: hunger strikes. They were joined by female republican prisoners from the Armagh Women`s Prison.

³ The Irish Republican Army (IRA) first emerged during the 1919-1921 War of Independence. See CAIN, n.d.,b for more information on this.

Mistakenly under the impression that a deal had been reached the strike was called off after 53 days (Beresford, 1987, pp. 27-28).

The second hunger strike took place in Long Kesh between March 1 and October 3, 1981. The specific demands were the right to wear own clothes, the right to free association in the cell blocks, the right to refuse prison work, recreational and education facilities, and the restoration of sentence remissions. Ten men died on the hunger strike. This included leader Bobby Sands who had been elected to the Westminster Parliament (CAIN, n.d., d). Three days after the hunger strike ended, British authorities started meeting their demands and soon most were implemented (Beresford, 1987, p. 332) It is widely acknowledged that the 1981 hunger strike marked a turning point in the Irish struggle. It was a propaganda victory which led to much international support. It also made IRA go into a policy direction where Sinn Fein emerged as a major party (Beresford, 1987, p 332; CAIN, n.d. d)

3.4. Celtic supporter activism

Social activism and charity

In section 3.2 we saw how Celtic is anchored in a tradition of charity and social activism. O'Hagan describes the concept of charity as inseparably connected to the roots and mission of Celtic FC (2004, p. 93). Donaldson (2009) explains that the supporters have: “*maintained the ethos of charity and living in service of others as an inherent, meaningful and distinguishing feature of the club`s character*” (p. 280). In 2019, supporters set a new record when they donated £310 000 to club`s Christmas appeal. This went to vulnerable families, refugees, homeless people and women`s aid groups amongst others (Stuart, 2019). Many Celtic supporters and Celtic supporters` clubs are involved in charity and social activism domestically and abroad. The Green Brigade`s annual food drive is one example. In 2019, this raised £17,897 and 8 vans of food and toiletries (The Celtic Star, 2019).

133 years after Celtic`s foundation, Glasgow still struggles with poverty and poor health. The Glasgow effect refers to excess mortality. Specifically, Glaswegians are 30 % more likely before they reach 65 years than inhabitants in similar British cities (MacDonald, 2019). The Glasgow Indicator Project shows that Glasgow is one of the most deprived areas in Scotland. In 2017, childhood poverty rates were at 34%. In 2015, 17% of Glaswegian household had less than a £10 000 annual income (The Glasgow Indicator Project, n.d). Belfast, another city known for its strong support of Celtic, also has serious socio-economic problems including high

childhood poverty. For instance, in the Falls and Ardoyne areas in Belfast, childhood poverty is at 44% and 46% (Holland, 2019)

Political activism and causes

In *Kicking in from the left: the friendship of Celtic and FC St. Pauli supporters* (2013), William McDougall explores Celtic supporters' ideology which is characterized as left-wing containing working-class internationalism, anti-racism, anti-fascism and Irish republicanism. Furthermore, Celtic supporters are mistrustful of British nationalism. He adds that the Catholic community in Western Scotland who form the backbone of the Celtic support are known for being left-wing, and staunch supporters of the labor movement. This distinguishes them from other European Catholic communities which are known for being conservative. He further points out that since the late 19th Century Glasgow has been a politically radical city and that Western Scotland has formed the heartland of Labour (2013, pp. 230-234).

McBride (2019) explains that the political causes of Celtic supporter activists include Irish unity, Scottish independence, anti-racism, anti-fascism, solidarity with oppressed groups such as the Palestinians and protesting austerity. When conducting research for her PhD thesis on sectarianism in modern Scotland and the impact of the Offensive Behavior in Football and Threatening Communication Act on football supporters, she found that most of the Celtic supporters in her study: *“argued that politics and football are not easily separable, and that football is in fact often a most appropriate cultural space for expressing their political identities”* (pp. 217, 220-221). Celtic also has a very visible left-wing ultras scene. The biggest ultras: The Green Brigade was formed in 2006 (Quigley, 2019, p 162). It is left-wing, Irish republican, pro-Scottish independence, and anti-fascist. It is also famous for its colorful and controversial displays. The group is also heavily involved with charity (McDougall, 2013, p. 240). In addition, there is a smaller ultra: Bhoys⁴, which was formed in 2015 and includes former members of the Green Brigade (ACSOM, 2020).

Historically, the Irish community in Scotland has maintained political links to Ireland. A case in point is how Scottish born volunteers played an important role in the 1916 Easter Rising. For example, the leader of the Irish Citizen Army, the socialist and trade unionist James Connolly was born in Edinburgh (Coyle & Ó Cadhain, 2018, pp. 11-12). The violent conflict in the North

⁴ Formerly known as Bhoys SMV

of Ireland spilled over to Scotland on occasions. For instance, in 1979 the Ulster Volunteer Force⁵ bombed the Old Barns and the Clelland: two Irish pubs in Glasgow (Smith, 2019).

Celtic supporter activists are often associated with support of the Irish republican cause. Kuhn states that Celtic FC has: “*symbolic significance for Irish republican pride*” (2019, p. 134). McBride points out that there are many nuances of Irish political identities amongst the Celtic supporters that participated in her research. For some it remained a “*powerful political connection*” while others it was “*not as important*”. There were also those who felt that: “*politics - and especially British-Irish politics - should be kept out of football*” (2019, p. 221). Irish republicanism is a prominent feature of the Green Brigade’s activism. For example, the ultras displayed a banner of hunger striker and IRA member Bobby Sands next to Scottish national hero William Wallace during a match against AC Milan. In the essay *the team comes first*, member Paul Quigley asks: “*Why should Scottish society diminish and shame our legends and outstanding historical and political figures (Sands) while lauding their own (Wallace)?*” (2019, p 173). When it comes to Irish unity there are two important developments. First, the demographics in the North of Ireland are changing, and in ten years Catholics will be in the majority. In the 2016 Brexit referendum the majority in the North of Ireland voted to remain in the European Union. This in turn has led to increased calls for a referendum on Irish unity, which stipulations in the Good Friday agreement opens up for. With the support of moderate Protestants who would rather stay in the EU than the United Kingdom, there is also a chance that there will be a majority for Irish unity (Angelos, 2019).

McDougall explains that there is a distrust of British and Scottish nationalism amongst Celtic supporters. In the early 1990s there was a negative view of the Scottish National Party (SNP) which some supports also associated with Protestantism and the Orange Order. Traditionally, they also overwhelmingly supported the Labour Party (2013, p. 237). However, this has changed dramatically over the last couple of decades. McBride points out that during the last couple of decades the Irish-Catholic community has become increasingly pro Scottish independence. One reason is positive socio-economic changes and a decrease of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism, especially for the younger generations: “*for the moment at least, a political Scottishness as an identity, now more easily includes Catholics*”. During the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, there was strong support for independence amongst the Irish diaspora. However, she adds that social justice was an important factor. Therefore, the

⁵ The second largest loyalist paramilitary group (Murals of Derry, 2008, p 101)

support for independence should not be interpreted as a decrease of Irish identity, or even an increase of Scottish identity (2019, p. 219). In 2014 Scottish independence referendum 45 % voted for Scottish independence. However, the issue came back on the agenda two years later after the Brexit referendum. In this 62 % of Scots voted to remain in the European Union. It is predicted that Scottish independence will be a big issue in 2021. In fact, current polls show that the pro-independence side is leading (Eardley, 2020).

Anti-racism and anti-fascism is an important part of Celtic supporter activism and Celtic Park is known as a no-go zone for racists and the far right. McDougall explains that the Celtic support draw parallels between the racism and discrimination of Irish-Catholics to other forms of racism. Celtic supporters mobilized against racism after a late 1980s Glasgow derby where Rangers player Mark Walters were subjected to racial abuse by some supporters. (2013, pp. 236-237, 242). In Scotland, the far right is connected to Ulster loyalism and the British National Party got a foothold amongst Rangers supporters (Kuhn, 2019, p. 145) There are strong connections between the Celtic support and international anti-racist and anti-fascist football supporters including supporters from the Hamburg based football club FC St. Pauli (McDougall, 2013, p. 238)

Celtic supporters` political activism has attracted controversy. This is especially the case when it comes to Irish unity. McBride observes that there is a strong sense that Irish nationalism, politics and history do not belong in Scottish society and football (2019, p. 217). Celtic FC as a club has also become politically neutral over the years (McDougall, 2013, p. 242). The club has tried to curb the supporters` displays of Irish republicanism. One example is the Bhoys against Bigotry campaign against the singing of Irish rebel songs which Fergus McCann launched in the mid-1990s. This was met with: *"skepticism that the attempt to dilute the club's Irish identity was connected to increasing commercialization and the rebranding of the club"* (McDougall, 2013, p. 238-239). It should be noted that the club is caught between political supporter activists and football authorities. For example, in 2016 the club was fined by UEFA after supporters displayed Palestinian flags during a match against the Israeli club Hapoel Be'er Sheva. Celtic supporters responded to this by the #Matchthefine crowdfunding campaign where they raised £ 130 000 to Palestinian charities (Celtic fans raise more, 2016).

Resisting commercialization and other football related activism

Fighting the commercialization of football is a cornerstone of Celtic supporter activism. McDougall observes that this is not only perceived as a threat to football's working class

identity but also an assimilation of the community (2013, p. 239). There have been several campaigns to resist commercialization of football. For example in 2016, the supporter groups led by the Celtic Trust⁶ ran a living wage campaign where they successfully pressured Celtic FC to pay its employee a minimum wage (Celtic living wage commitment, 2016) . The same year Celtic became the first British club to reintroduce a safe standing section after liaising with the Green Brigade (Quigley, 2019, p 173) In 2020, the Celtic Trust joined the Bhoys joined forces to protest the high ticket prices in the *Twenty`s Plenty campaign* (ACSOM, 2020)

Celtic supporters also resist unwanted changes pertaining to football in general. This is evident in the mobilization against the Scottish Offensive Behavior at Football and Threatening Communications Act of 2012 (OBTC Act in short). This legislation which solely targeted football was passed by majority party SNP without support from other parties. It was widely criticized by legal experts, academics as well as human rights and religious organizations. It was pointed out that it discriminated against football supporters and criminalized the behavior of working-class youth. It was also criticized for being punitive and hardening social inequalities. The OBTC Act specifically targeted speech, banner/flags, gesture, singing and “*generally offensive*” behavior. There were also accusations of police being heavy handed and harassing supporters (McBride, 2020, 2-3, 8-11).

The OBTC Act had a big impact on Celtic supporters as it effectively prohibited expressions of Irish republicanism and Irish political songs. For example, in 2013 seven Green Brigade members were arrested for singing Roll of Honour – a song commemorating the 1981 hunger strikers (Quigley, 2019, p. 172 ; Kelly, 2019, p. 211). In 2011, Fans against Criminalisation which campaigned against the legislation was formed. The group engaged in protests, arranged petitions, lobbying and was active on social media (McBride, 2019, p. 11). It included several Celtic supporter groups including the Green Brigade and the Celtic Trust (Quigley, 2019, p. 169). In the spring of 2018, the Scottish Parliament repealed the OBTC Act (McBride, 2019, p. 13).

Chapter 4: Methods

4.1. Introduction

⁶ The Celtic Trust represents Celtic shareholders. For more information see [The Celtic Trust – A Celtic Supporters' Society](#)

In this chapter I will present the methods used in my research for this master thesis. My overall research approach for this master thesis was double hermeneutics. I will therefore start this chapter by looking at this together with Geertz's concept of thick description. I will then explore the qualitative methods which I used in the data collection and analysis. I will also take a brief look at reliability, validity and inference. I will finish the chapter by looking at the ethical considerations in my research and also my own position as researcher.

4.2. Double hermeneutics and thick descriptions

The intention of my own master project was to gain insight and knowledge of Celtic supporter activism. My research question was: *to what extent does Celtic supporter activism constitute a new social movement?* Therefore, so-called thick descriptions were important in my research process. Blaikie (2009) describes these as thorough descriptions of the phenomena being studied. (p. 211) Thick descriptions are often associated with the American social anthropologist Clifford Geertz. They illuminate social actors' motives and intentions as well as the wider social context they occur in. This is in contrast to thin descriptions which only describes the mechanics of an act and not its context and intentions. According to Geertz, thick description always involve a hermeneutic circle (Gilje, 2019, pp. 217-220).

Hammersley (2006) defines hermeneutics as: "*The study of how we understand the communications, actions and products of other human beings – especially those of past times or other cultures*" (p. 2). Historically, hermeneutics was used to interpret ancient texts. Hans-Georg Gadamer developed the concept further in the 20th Century. He argued that interpretations depend on the specific socio-cultural resources of the interpreter which are essential to understanding. For Gadamer interpretations increase our understanding of universal issues including ethics, politics and philosophy (pp. 2-3) Central to Gadamer was that each interpretation is dependent on other interpretation. The process is thus circular (Schwandt, 2011, p. 2). Hence the term the hermeneutic circle.

Blaikie explains that the concept of double hermeneutics is an important part of Anthony Giddens' structuration theory introduced in the 1970s and 1980s. Structuration theory is an attempt to: "*Establish a bridge the gap between traditions of social theory concerned with the experiences of social actors (agency) and traditions concerned with the existence of forms of social totalities (structures)*" (2009, p. 102). Gilje (2019) details how Giddens regarded both theories as insufficient. Agency theories do not how adhesive social structures are developed nor how they impact the intentions and attitudes of social actors. Meanwhile structure theories

do not explain the decision making process by social actors nor how they sway after from tradition and change social structure. Because of this he merged agency and structure theories in his structuration theory, where he focused on the interplay between these. Gilje explains that Giddens concluded that social actors create social structure which in turn forms the action and intentions of social actors (p. 221)

According to Gilje (2019), double hermeneutics describes the research process and interrelationship between social scientists and informants and how knowlegde is produced. Giddens brought attention to the two-way relationship between researcher and informants in the hermeneutic circle. In a modern society research often returns to the informants. This is a continous circle where information passes to and forth between the researchers and informants. There are also internal commication between different researchers and informants. The knowledge that results from communication and dialogue in the research community adds an additional layer of interpretations. The scientific knowlegde which researchers derive from informants are then passed back to them and becomes a part of their every day knowlegde (pp. 221-225). Gilje points out that double hermeneutics is effectively multiple hermeneutics because researchers also develop interpretations of other research. He refers to these as third order interpretations (2019, pp. 224-225)

Hermeneutics is characterized by being bottom-up, and where the researcher is a “*learner rather than expert*” (Blaikie, 2009, p 120). My main objective when I embarked on this project was to learn about and to gain insight into what Celtic supporter activism is. In short, I wanted to gain a wider understanding of this. Although I had obviously read up on Celtic and Celtic supporter activism prior to my fieldtrips, I was very much a blank slate when I started on the field research. For me the research process has been about circling in on what Celtic supporter activism is. Therefore the dialogue and communication I had with Celtic supporters in the field was crucial to my project.

4.3. Qualititative methods, data collection and analysis

The ultimate goal for my master project was to gain an understanding of Celtic supporter activism. Therefore, I decided early on to use qualititative methods. Aase and Fossåskaret (2014) describe qualitative methods as the approaches used by researchers to collect qualititve data. These are typically divided into quantitative and qualititative methods. The former looks at the prevelance of phenomons and tries to to quantify these. Qualititative methods on the other hand, is focused on phenomenons` meaning and goes into its contents to find the answers to

this. (pp. 11-15). From the very start of the project I decided to do fieldwork. Pole and Hillyard defines this as ;

A way of doing research where the emphasis is placed on the collection of data at first hand by a researcher. It relies on personal interaction or engagement between the researcher and those being researched in the research setting during which the researcher(s) will use one or a combination of particular methods to collect data over a prolonged period of time. (2017, p. 3)

In total I went on four field trips to Glasgow and Belfast in 2019. I used semi-structured in depth interviews, field observation, participant observations and field conversations to gather data during these trips.

Fieldwork in Glasgow and Belfast

I did my field work over a span of ten months where I took four field trips totaling 7 weeks. The first was in December 2018 and the last in September 2019. Because I work full time this was the only option for me. Initially, I had just planned to travel to Glasgow where Celtic FC is based. However, I quickly broadened the geographical scope to include Belfast after the advice of an Irish Celtic supporter. This was because of the club`s strong Irish identity and strong support in the city. I was also interested in exploring the Irish republican side of Celtic supporter activism.

I used the snowball sampling technique to gather data material during my field work. Here you ask people you speak with to refer you to other people who they think can provide insight into your topic (Blaikie, 2009, p. 179). I had a very good start to my master project as a mutual acquaintance put me in contact with an with an Irish Celtic supporter with extensive knowlegde about Celtic and its support. He became a mentor and introduced me to many Celtic supporter activists. This included a Belfast friend of his who became my main contact in Belfast. One of his Glasgow contacts put me in contact with a local Celtic supporter who became my main contact in Glasgow. I estimate that 75% of my interviews are either directly or indirectly linked to my mentor and local main contacts. The remaining 25% are via people I met on the trips. During my field work I also made field notes.

My first trip to Glasgow was very much a pilot to determine whether my research project was viable. I had never been in Glasgow before. I had one interview which was an interview with the Chief Executive of the Celtic FC Foundation. I also met with my Glaswegian main contact.

My Irish mentor had also introduced me to a leader of a big supporter organization who I met with and provided much background information. I had scheduled this trip to coincide with a Glasgow derby. As it turned out it was impossible to get a ticket for this match as it was an away game. However, my mentor arranged that I could watch a Glasgow derby with friends of his at a traditional Celtic pub not far from Celtic Park. This was a great introduction to the Celtic community and football in Glasgow.

My second fieldtrip to Glasgow was five months later. Here I attended my first Celtic match and had a couple of interviews. I also got tours of the city by my main contact. This was followed by a one week trip to Belfast. My main contact there and his family kindly invited me to stay with them and introduced me to the city and their community. I also stayed with them on my final Belfast trip. The primary purpose of the trip was to lay the groundwork for the second trip, but I had one interview as well. I also spent two days in Derry because of the unique role it has played in Irish history.

The final fieldtrip lasted three weeks. First, I spent four days in Glasgow, where I had one interview and a couple of meetings and some Celtic sightseeing. Then I travelled to Donegal for a couple of days. This was mainly a holiday, but I specifically wanted to spend it in the Donegal because this Irish region has strong links to Celtic. In fact, when I was there I met many Celtic supporters. I then travelled to Belfast. On this trip I was also shown around much. For example, my main contact gave me a ticket to a Belfast derby between Cliftonville and Linfield which was very interesting to watch, especially as I have never been to a Glasgow derby. A member of my own Celtic supporter club had also put me in contact with local Celtic supporters and activists who I met up with. The fact that I stayed privately with local people in Belfast was also extremely helpful. I could always ask for help, advice and background information which was great help for me. Because of this, I feel that the time in Belfast was just as productive as my time in Glasgow where I had much more time at my disposal.

It was a deliberate decision to do the fieldwork in intervals over the span of ten months. Fieldwork can be very intense as things happen fast and sometimes at the very same time. However, having intervals between the trips ensured that the impressions and knowledge settled. It therefore became a very organic learning process. It also helped narrow in and streamline the research process. When I was in Norway I also had frequent contact with my mentor and the main contacts as well as other people I got to know during my trips. In addition,

I consulted with my field notes. I also found social media to be an effective tool in keeping me up to date with what was happening in Glasgow and Belfast.

Participant-observations and field conversations

Aase and Fossåskaret (2014) describes that participant observation is different from observation because the researcher as the term implies participates in the activities. In turn she gets a different view into the subject matters which she would not get from interviews alone (p. 63). I became a participant-observer on several occasions during my fieldtrips. For example on my last trip to Glasgow, I went along with the volunteer group the Invisibles when they were out on the streets in Glasgow working with homeless and rough sleepers. This was very useful and enabled me to see first hand how the group works as well as the poverty and challenges which Glasgow's homeless and rough sleepers encounter.

On my second field trip to Glasgow I had a rather challenging participant-observer experience. I attended a silent counter protest against an Orange march arranged by Call it Out – a group which campaigns against anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry. This took place outside St. Alphonsus, a Catholic church not far from Celtic Park. There were many Celtic supporters and trade unionists amongst the counter protesters. I arrived early and went to a left-wing independent bookstore in the area. At the same time, a far right and loyalist pro-British rally ended nearby, and participants were coming our way to support the Orange Parade. The bookstore owner locked the doors and explained that earlier they had tried to break into the shop. Much to my horror, several loyalists gathered outside the shop, knocked on windows and rattled the door whilst making aggressive gestures. It felt uncomfortable and I was very relieved when they moved on. During the Orange parade itself, there was a large police presence. The police separated the street with the Orange march supporters on the southern side and the silent protesters on the northern side. During the march, racial slurs were consistently hurled at us from the other side of the road. During the protest, I met up with a long-time Celtic supporter activist who described the atmosphere as very tense. Experiencing this first-hand certainly gave me an understanding of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry which I would not have gotten from a second-hand source or from observing it from a distance.

Aase and Fossåskaret (2014) describes the field conversation is a non-planned every day casual conversations that happens in the field but not in a planned setting such as the interview. They considers it to be an integral part of both observation and participant observation. Field conversations gives insight into concepts that it never occurred to the researcher to ask about in

the first place. The researcher may in turn pursue this (pp. 31-32, 63-64). I found field conversations to be valuable for my research. For example the discovery that Celtic supporter activism is more than activism stemmed from a field conversation with supporters in a Celtic pub in the Ardoyne area of Belfast. In retrospect, I realize that this was something that some people in Glasgow had brought up as well. However, it was when a Celtic supporter asked me directly why I used the term activism that I realized that for many Celtic supporters activism goes very deep and is something more than activism. In my subsequent research I followed this notion up.

Interviews

My main method was qualitative in-depth interviews. I conducted 11 interviews with a total of 13 people. 11 interviews were in person and one was over the telephone. All of the interviews were taped. Most interviews were with anonymous interlocutors. However, I also spoke with representatives from two organizations: the Celtic FC Foundation and On the Ball. As these interviews pertained to the work of the entities, I did not ask person-sensitive questions and the interviews are thus on the record.

Specifically I used what Andersen refers to as conversation-based in depth interviews (2006, p. 279). This was because I wanted the information to flow easily. I did however have an interview guide but this was mostly for myself. Most of the interviews lasted around 90 minutes. Interviewing was new to me when I started on this research and I was a bit nervous during the first couple of interviews. With time, I started to feel more comfortable. However, I am the first to admit that I am not a professional interviewer. All of the people I interviewed were understanding and supportive.

Analysis

Seven weeks in the field and 11 interviews led to much material which had to be analyzed. As soon as I returned home, I started transcribing the interviews. The transcription process was quite time consuming. For example as many interviews took place in cafes and pubs with background noise which interfered with the quality of the tape. However, I found that spending time on the transcription process brought the material closer to me especially as time lapsed. From the transcriptions I made summaries which were then sent back to the interviewees. In a couple of cases they corrected things I had gotten wrong or misunderstood. I then started sorting out the data into themes and categories using Excel. I did have access to other analytic

systems via the University of Stavanger. I experimented a bit with this, but ultimately I found that Excel was just as useful. From this, general patterns started emerging.

4.4. Reliability, validity and inference

According to Roberts et al (2006) reliability and validity are: “*ways of demonstrating and communication the rigour of research processes and trustworthiness of research findings*”. In qualitative research validity is about whether we measure what we are supposed to measure. Reliability concerns the trustworthiness of the research procedure (pp. 41-45). As for validity Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that: “*The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their `confirmability`-that is their validity*” (p. 11). Reliability concerns quality control of the research process and the: “*underlying issue here is either the process of the study is consistent, reasonably stable over time and across researcher and methods*” (p. 278). My main data collection method was in-depth semi structured interviews and field observations. I do believe that my study measured what it was supposed to measure which is Celtic supporter activism and whether this constitutes a new social movement. I also took actions with regards to reliability. For example, as recommended by Andersen (2006) who argues that documentation is essential, I used tape recorders during the in-depth interviews (p. 291).

Blaikie (2009) operates with four research strategies to answer research questions: the deductive, inductive, abductive and retroductive research strategies. These can also be combined (p. 18). Blaikie explains that inductive research strategy begin with collecting data. The researcher then derives generalizations from this using inductive logic (p. 18). In the abductive research strategy: “*The starting point is the social world of the social actors being investigated, their construction of reality, their way of conceptualizing and giving meaning to their social world, their tacit knowlegde*” (p. 19) In order to understand the meaning and motives behind their action the researcher must get entrance to their world. Then she must do a redescription of the motives and meanings by using a technical language: “*Individual motives and actions have to be abstracted into typical motives for typical action in typical situations*” (p. 19).

I used a mixed approach of induction and abduction. I used an inductive research strategy as as I collected data when I was in the field. In the analysis process I generalized from these specific findings. However, there was also more abductive elements. For example, during my field work in Glasgow and Belfast, I gained entrance to Celtic supporter activists` world which

I in turn redescribed. In my personal opinion, the time I spent in the field enabled me to get an understanding of Celtic supporter activism which I could not get by staying at home. While my research strategy was mainly induction, I also believe that it contained abductive elements.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethics are crucial in research. Throughout my research I was very conscious of the various ethical considerations. Madsbu and Thomassen (2007) explain that it is important that research do no harm and that the self-determination, privacy and autonomy of individuals are respected (p. 16). Free informed consent was an important in my research. Most of my interviews were with individual supporter activists who are not public persons. Some of the questions I asked them was also of a person-sensitive matter. This included political views, religion, ethnicity and trade union affiliation. Anonymity was therefore very important. In this thesis, each of the anonymous interlocutors have been given a letter which reflect the order they were interviewed in.

Because these interviews contained person-sensitive questions I had to file my project with the Norwegian Centre for Research: NSD. After it was approved I started the interview process with the anonymous interlocutors. I adhered to the ethical guidelines set forth by the NSD and I also used their template for the information and consent form. This included a description, purpose of the research, points of contacts, information on the protection of their privacy as well as their rights as participant including the right to withdraw at any time.

Aase and Fossaskåret (2014) emphasize how important it is that people who has used their time and goodwill to provide information about their lives get access to the research results (p. 221) This is also very important for me. Had it not been for generosity and support of my guides, contacts and interviewees this thesis would never have been written. I was also met with much hospitality from the overall Celtic community and the local communities where I did my field work. During the field trips I made it clear to people I met that I was not there as a regular tourist but as a student who was doing field work for her thesis. I found that people took an interest in my project and were very eager to help. It is therefore important to me that the results becomes widely available. The University of Stavanger publishes master theses online which means that the will be available for anyone. I also specifically decided to write the thesis in English so that the people I met in Ireland and Scotland can go in and read this if they want to.

Throughout the research process I have reflected on my own subjectivity. I have been a Celtic supporter for several decades. Not only am I long-time Celtic supporter, but I am also active in left-wing politics as well as Roman-Catholic. While I have never been to Glasgow prior to the first field trip, I have attended supporter events. Here I have been struck by the enthusiasm and dedication of Celtic supporters. Over the years, I have also followed Celtic supporter activism in media. Therefore, the decision to explore Celtic supporter activism for my master thesis was a very natural one.

In other words, I was never going into this research process with a completely blank slate. There were a couple of times I had emotional reactions to events. For example, I was upset when I heard that one of the Celtic pubs that I was introduced to by Celtic supporters in Glasgow was burned down after an arson attack. As a Catholic I also found it uncomfortable to witness the Orange march first hand. However, when these ``episodes`` happened I was aware that my reactions were sparked by my own personal background. Madsbu and Thomassen explains that while complete objectivity is a research ideal, it can also be unattainable. Therefore, they propose that focus on critical thinking because it leads to fundamental questions being asked (2007, p 13). I do feel that I was able to engage in critical thinking throughout the project. I also felt that I was able to separate between being a private person who happens to be a Celtic supporter and being a researcher. There were also advantages of me being anchored in the theme I was researching. First of all, I was highly motivated to do this project. The fact that I already was a Celtic supporter also meant that I had an awareness of Celtic supporter activism. I therefore knew that it would make an interesting topic for a master thesis.

Chapter 5: Results

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from my field research in Glasgow and Belfast. It includes interviews with anonymous Celtic supporter activists and on-the record interviews with the Chief Executive of the Celtic FC Foundation and the activist group On the Ball. I will also draw from a walk along I did with the homeless volunteer group the Invisibles and field conversations. In addition, I will also present three mini cases which illustrates three very different examples of Celtic supporter activism.

➤ **The Story about the Invisibles**

I shadowed the volunteer group the Invisibles one evening during my final fieldtrip to Glasgow. They provide sleeping bags, mats, dry new clothes and other essential things to the homeless community. They also offer other help and advice and supports groups who are involved with more political homeless advocacy. Prior to the walk-along I had a long conversation about the group with one of its volunteers.

The Invisibles was formed in 2014 as a response to the large number of homeless and rough sleepers in Glasgow. They are out on streets twice a week engaging directly with rough sleepers and the homeless community. The volunteer told me that there is a homeless crisis in Glasgow. Rough sleeping is increasing and there is an epidemic of drug deaths. He believes there are many reasons for this including poverty, austerity, mental health, and addiction issues. The Invisibles is active on social media, where they also do appeals. They don't receive government funding, and their donations come from private individuals or organizations. They use the donations wisely because: "*somebody has trusted us*". They work with a wide variety of organizations including other homeless charities and advocacy groups, refugee organizations, local Catholic churches, the Celtic FC Foundation and St. Roch's. St. Roch's, like Celtic, is a Glaswegian football club which was established by the Irish Catholic community in 1920¹.

The volunteer described the Invisibles as a "*small tight group*" with a dozen members of both genders and different ages. Many members are Celtic or St. Roch's supporters. He said that this is an ideal size and added that they work well together and are like minded: "*We've got a lot of skill sets within the group and bring a lot of compassion in it and people who can just communicate with people who are on the streets*". Sometimes they bring family members along to help out. They get much support from Celtic and St. Roch's supporters and work closely with both football clubs. For example, there is an annual Christmas luncheon at St. Roch's for the homeless community and local pensioners. The Invisibles arrange gifts for the guests and the Celtic FC Foundation is also very involved with this event.

There have been several changes to the group's operations. Initially they provided pre-owned clothing to other charities. However, this was very time consuming and they started distributing the clothing directly to the homeless. After receiving a large donation, they switched to new clothing. The volunteer said that this feels more positive. In November 2018, the Invisibles made their biggest change when they started going out on the streets twice a week where they engage directly with the homeless community. The volunteer explained that this has taken them in a whole new direction:

“We are still kind of finding our feet, but we feel as a group that it is benefitting to the people who are lying in the streets and are cold and wet and may not want to engage with anybody else and we just get them through the night, and I think if we can keep that person alive this is what we`ll do”

Today their biggest items are sleeping bags, mats and blankets. The volunteer said that they have also built more connections and expertise after this change. *“I think we have built a good level of trust with people”*. This is very important for the group. They encourage rough sleepers to go to night shelters and connect them with groups who can help. When I asked the volunteer what motivates him, he answered that it was being out on the streets where he can speak to and listen to people. He added that there is a: *“great bunch of people who are within the Invisibles”* and that he also enjoys the organizational side of it. It is important to him and the group that they do good stuff, and they keep a low profile.

✓ **The Story about On the Ball**

In 2018, Celtic became the first British football club to provide free period products at its football grounds. This was a result of the On the Ball campaign launched by three supporters: Orlaith Duffy, Mikaela McKinley and Erin Slaven. I met with Mikaela and Orlaith on my second field trip to Glasgow to talk about their activism.

On the Ball was launched in March 2018. Its objective was to persuade Celtic to provide free period products at Celtic Park. The first they did as a group was to schedule a meeting with Celtic FC. In the interim they held an online petition to see if there was overall support for this. This was shared by friends and families on social media and by the time they met with Celtic they had collected 3000 signatures. *“It just really took off. It really evolved”* Mikaela explained. Right after their meeting Celtic decided to provide free period products on its grounds.

An important part of On the Ball`s work is to raise awareness of period-poverty and that periods are natural bodily functions. They argue that because period products are basic hygienic needs, they should be free of charge in public bathrooms just like soap and toilet paper. Mikaela and Orlaith said that they deliberately targeted their football club because football is a place for social inclusion which often get overlooked by period-poverty campaigns. They also hoped it would inspire other places of social inclusion to follow Celtic`s example. Mikaela and Orlaith explained that football can be a vehicle for change. The two told me that it made sense that Celtic was the first club to get on the ball because it was originally founded as a charity. As for

supporter activism they think that Celtic is different from other clubs as it has a big Irish fan base and has stuck to its working-class roots. This is an important element of Celtic supporter activism. They underlined how important it is that working class people have a voice and can be heard when it comes to policy.

Initially, the purpose of the On the Ball was to campaign for free period products at Celtic Park. However, the campaign soon spread in an organic way. Today they football supporters how they can get their own clubs on the ball. By September 2019, 100 clubs in Scotland, England, Ireland as well as countries like Brazil, United States and the Philippines were officially on the Ball⁷. Many of these are smaller community football clubs which play important roles in their local communities and provide non-football outreach. On the Ball has also started to use their platform to do other things such as lobbying for policy changes. They also work closely with young people and youth clubs to raise awareness. “*We have a wee cup of tea and sit and have chat*” Orlaith said. They find that being football oriented is effective in getting the attention of boys. On the Ball considers working and empowering youngster as a very important part of being a grassroots campaign.

Running On the Ball is very time and work intensive. It is only the three of them who do this, and they do it in addition to their jobs. Their main tool is social media. Decisions are taken as a team and the three are equally involved. They share similar morals which they explained is an advantage when it comes to decision making. The campaign has also gotten a lot of media attention. They do not have a media plan as such but are very conscious of whether they will benefit. Ethics is another factor. For example, they won't do interviews with the Sun because of the tabloid's coverage of the Hillsborough tragedy.

We also discussed challenges which they encounter in their activism. For example, they compete in a very crowded field where there are many period-poverty campaigns. They have also experienced personal attacks. When they started, they made a conscious decision to never engage but rather educate. Sometimes they have changed peoples' minds. They have also experienced their share of sexism. For example, some men don't believe that they are “*real*” Celtic supporters and season tickets holders. What motivates them is knowing that they are making changes as well as empowering other people to go out and do the same. They are also motivated by feedback from people and organizations. They mentioned how great it is when

⁷ See Aitchison (2019) for more information on this.

they for example hear from girls who have been able to participate in activities because period products are available.

5.2. Social activism and charity

Celtic's charitable roots were a recurrent theme in interviews. People often emphasized how the club was founded as a charity to alleviate poverty and hardship by the Irish-Catholic community in Glasgow. Many underscored that Celtic's legacy of charity is continued today via the supporters and the club's own charity: the Celtic FC Foundation. A, from Glasgow, who has extensive knowledge of the Celtic's history, highlighted how supporters have always been involved with charity even in the period when the club was not. D from Belfast said that this shows how Celtic still represents the Irish community which it originated from: "*Communality is the very essence of Celtic. It is why the club was formed and why it has a charity fund*". He added that Celtic supporters' clubs also have their own charities. C, from Belfast said that Celtic illustrates that it is possible to be both a successful business and a charity: "*I think there's something lovely about that. Celtic started off as a charity and has retained that identity you know*". He added that this is especially noticeable today when football clubs are under much commercial pressure. K from Glasgow shared a story about a London sport journalist to illustrate Celtic's ethos of charity. The journalist said when he asked football supporters about their club, they would always bring up sporting triumphs, famous players etc. However, Celtic supporters were an exception as they always started by telling him that their club was formed: "*to put dinner on the table of the poor*".

The interviewees were involved in a diverse range of local and global causes. This included battling homelessness, period poverty and social exclusion as well Palestinian and African charities. I also met with the Chief Executive of the Celtic FC Foundation. He explained that Celtic has three pillars: football, charity and the commercial. He explained that football is what Celtic does and the commercial aspect is necessary for the club to compete. He emphasized that it is its pillar of charity which makes Celtic different from other football clubs:

"The third strand of our DNA is charity and that is the differentiator for us...That is what sets us apart from every other club in the UK, and probably most clubs in the world. So, for me as Chief Executive of the Celtic FC Foundation, when I go and tell the Celtic story to people it is not a hard sell because it is genuinely a fundamental part of who we are. It is genuinely in our blood".

He told me that the goal for the Celtic FC Foundation is to deliver meaningful project. For them football is not the end-goal but a tool to get people involved in issues such as for example food-poverty, inclusion and employability. He added that this makes the Celtic FC Foundation different from other football club foundations. The foundation uses the acronym HELP which stands for Health, Equality, Learning and Poverty to summarize its work. He said that they are very focused on poverty, and that health, equality and learning are drivers to combat this. Most of their projects are in northern and eastern Glasgow: *“This is because it is a) our home and life is very a-typical here. If you look across the country, life is very-very difficult in the East-end of Glasgow for many people”*. However, he emphasized that the club is not parochial and has projects in London, Ireland and in the developing world.

The Chief Executive pointed out that the foundation works in a space where they share the same values as many supporters:

“We have a social consciousness at this club, but we don` t own it. There are other parts of the football club, there are other parts of the fan base and our supporters who have their own social consciousness”.

He will often convey to Celtic Supporters` Clubs how they and the foundation collectively can make a difference. However, he is aware that they operate in a very crowded field where the supporters` clubs have their own causes and charities. Therefore, he focuses on: *“communication, dialogue and relationship building”*. D, who has worked with the foundation, described them as: *“Very helpful, very open and willing to contribute”*. The Invisibles volunteer told me the foundation is very involved and does more than donating funds. For example, it had been a match maker where they had put a major donor in direct contact with the Invisibles.

5.3. Political activism

Many interlocutors underscored that the Celtic supporter activists are involved with several causes and that many are left-wing. C described them as internationalists, anti-apartheid, pro-Europe and against the militarization of society and the world debt and known for solidarity with the Basque and Catalan people. They also have a strong connection to suffering people like the native Americans and Palestinians: *“I think the loss of homeland is something which strikes the Irish very deeply. An oppressive and bullying neighbor who is control of you is something that connects well with us”*.

The interlocutors also pointed out that Celtic supporters are anti-racist and anti-fascist. H from Belfast said that this was something which: “*completely divorces from the sectarianism and bigotry that exists in our city and Glasgow*”. The anti-fascist and anti-racist alliance between the Celtic and St. Pauli support was sometimes also brought up. E and M who follow the Hamburg club underlined that its support is political and left-wing as well.

Celtic supporters` strong support of Scottish independence and Irish unity were frequent topics. People were overwhelmingly for both and pointed out that these are now tangible. People in Glasgow often said that living in an independent Scotland is better than living in Great Britain. Many worried about Brexit and how it would affect their children when it comes to education and job opportunities. A couple interlocutors also cited more cultural and Scottish nationalist reasons for independence.

All of the six Belfast interlocutors had experienced the worst of the violent conflict in the North of Ireland. They often emphasized how important the solidarity from Celtic supporters and the Irish diaspora in the Scotland had been for them. C described Celtic matches as a great platform for expressing solidarity with the Irish struggle. E described how the James Connolly Republican Flute band was formed in 1976 as the first Irish republican flute band in Scotland because: “*There was a need for a Republican presence on the streets of Glasgow*”. He said the band did much fundraising for republican charities including for republican prisoners` families: “*It was fundamental to the values of the band to make sure the prisoners were okay, and their families were okay*”. He added that they continue with this.

The Belfast interlocutors frequently pointed out how close Irish unity is. Two factors mentioned where the demographic shift were Catholics will soon outnumber Protestants and Brexit.

There is now a new positive development in the North, where former unionists had to re-evaluate their position against Irish unity as being part of the EU is more important than being a part of the United Kingdom”. (D)

H, who is an active Sinn Fein politician, observed how people now are increasingly looking to the South and Ireland. He added: “*I think what we are seeing through is the final days of British rule in Ireland. It is an inevitability. It is not if, but when*”.

Another topic was the dynamics between political Celtic supporter activists and the official club. A and B explained that the club considers it problematic because it can lead to sanctions from sporting authorities. Some interlocutors mentioned UEFA`s fine against Celtic after

supporters displayed Palestinian flags during a match against Israeli Hapoel Be'er Sheva as an example of this. M described this fine as ridiculous. He added that everything is political. D brought up that Celtic supporters quickly reacted to this by launching the #MatchtheFine for Palestine campaign. Often the interlocutors countered criticism of mixing football and politics by pointing out that politics was a part of life. Therefore, politics is also a part of football.

“There is no use of me saying ‘you shouldn’t involve politics in sport’. Politics is a part of sport and sport is a part of politics: they are both intertwined, they are joined together... We have to resolve whatever problems we have with our club within Celtic Football Club, but we cannot be told to go away because there are too many of us. You are talking tens of thousands of people. You just can’t say ‘we are dissociating ourselves from you’” (G).

K from Glasgow considers the biggest challenge in modern football to be when supporters are told they cannot conduct activism. He explained that UEFA wants to attract the “*the nice middle-class families*” and is afraid that anything political will hinder this. He explained this is very problematic for a club like Celtic, which was formed for a socio-political purpose:

“Then to turn around a century later and say you can’t have a political demonstration or you can’t say anything political at a football game. Well, really, how can you say that to a club whose all formation and whose all ethos is political? So, for me this is the biggest challenge in football.”

The left-wing ultras group the Green Brigade often come up as an example of political Celtic supporter activism. H reckons the group was an “*answer to the state coming down on the political aspiration of Celtic supporters*”. A explained that the Green Brigade is very successful because it is very politically astute:

From my view the key to the Green Brigades successes which we have seen for some years now is that they are very politically – with a small p – astute, so they know which pressures the club is under...they won’t do anything too controversial unless they really want to.

He and B said the interaction between the club and the ultras is interesting. The club likes that they bring good atmosphere to the matches. However, they consider the pyrotechnics and political displays which they have been fined for to be problematic. The two have a relationship, but the communication is via informal channels and proxies so there can be

plausible deniability for both. ” *The Green Brigade wants to show their ultras credentials to the world, and the club needs to show their respect to the organizations*” B explained. They added that after the introduction of the North Curve standing section at Celtic Park which the Green Brigade took initiative to, tensions between them and the club has decreased significantly.

5.4. Anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry

Anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry was a frequent theme in interviews. K explained that propels Celtic supporters` activism. A emphasized that fighting anti-Irish racism is very important for Celtic supporters. He cited two reasons for this. Firstly, many supporters have personally experienced it. Secondly, many supporters believe there is discrimination of Celtic as a club because of its Irish heritage. He pointed out that being associated with Celtic can exacerbate Anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism. D voiced strong objections to the term sectarianism which is often used in the North of Ireland and in Scotland. He said that explicit in this term is that both sides “*are equally bad*” which is not the case. He considers the term to be a false equivalent, which covers up the big problems that results from anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry. He brought up that 57 percent of Scottish hate crimes are directed at the Irish and Catholics who only makes up approximately 15 percent of the Scottish population as an illustration of this.

The socio-economic effects of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry was also brought up in interviews. D told me that when he grew up in Belfast during the 1960s and 1970s, some Catholic areas had up to 70 % unemployment. Others brought up how Catholics were effectively banned from skilled labor jobs including the shipyards in Glasgow and Belfast. J described how he was fired from his job at a Belfast shipyard in the late sixties after his co-workers found out that he was Catholic. He told me that he had no recourse. Some interlocutors also brought up how they or their families had been subjected to violence. For example, G who grew up in a mixed Belfast neighborhood, told me that after the emergence of the Irish Civil Rights Movement, he was beaten up by the same children that he previously played with.

The Belfast interlocutors brought up how there is anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry in Scotland as well. H said that at times this was probably worse there than in the North. He explained that this was because the North had the Civil rights movement and later the republican

movement: *“which fought and still fights against it”*. A described how he and his friends felt very intimidated by Orange marches and the Orange Order when they were children.

The Glaswegian interlocutors said that anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry still exists in Scotland. However, many emphasized that it has decreased. A, who is forty-something, said that he has experienced little anti-Irish racism compared to his parents and grandparents: *“So yeah, I’ve had comments, but in all honesty if I take Celtic out of the context, I don’t know”*. He thinks the reason for this is that many Catholics have gotten access to higher education and better jobs as a result of this. He observed that his own children are a lot less intimidated by Orange marches than he and his friends were: *“They don’t understand them to the same degree and I think in that sense there is not so much racism”*. He also brought up how the Orange Order has decreased and become much less significant. He pointed out that today it is embarrassing to be linked to the Orange Order and people hide their memberships. He considers this to be a major game changer. K, who is the same age as A, also said that there is less anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry compared to what it was for his parents’ generation. He has experienced anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism but said that it has never stood in his way career wise. Like A, he reckons that the reason for this change is social mobility which resulted from access to education and better paying jobs. However, he also pointed out that this upward mobility has led to much anger amongst loyalists. He added that Celtic winning the European Cup in 1967 was a turning point as it smashed the glass ceiling for the Irish diaspora in Scotland: *“You don’t need to put up with this. Because you know what: you just proved that you are the best!”*. He said that there was still an undercurrent of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry this in Scottish society. C expressed concerns that there is a revisionism when it comes to Anti-Irish racism and Anti-Catholicism in Scotland which is led by establishment figures including leading academics. He considers economic parity in Scotland to be a false truth. The reason for this is that the well-paid heavy industry jobs that only Protestants got, are now gone because of outsourcing. He pointed out that Catholics in Glasgow and Belfast would never be employed in these jobs to begin with. The discrimination is still very much there he explained.

5.5. Overarching themes and features of Celtic supporter activism

The importance of awareness raising was a frequent theme in interviews. The Invisibles volunteer said that it is important for the group to raise awareness of homelessness and rough sleeping. On the Ball said it was important for them to remove stigmas surrounding periods and raise awareness about period poverty. E from the James Connolly Republican Flute Band

Govan said that awareness raising was important for to the band: *“There is no point being in a Republican flute band if you don’t know why you are in it”*. The band also runs political education classes. Interlocutors also brought up how crucial it is to raise awareness amongst younger generations. D explained that Celtic supporters are very focused on educating young people on inclusion, solidarity, anti-racism and anti-fascism. B told me that during the 2014 Scottish Independence campaign, the Green Brigade would be out on the streets reaching out to young people and disenfranchised voters to inform them of the issues.

Interviewees emphasized the importance of social inclusion. In my interview with the Chief Executive at the Celtic FC Foundation he told me that they have social inclusion projects for young people with Down’s syndrome, autism, and physical disabilities. These groups experience exclusion and the goal to make them feel welcome, included and a part of something. The Invisibles volunteer told me that the group is also involved with an annual Christmas luncheon for local pensioners and the homeless community at St. Roch’s football club. The Invisibles makes giftbags for the guests. He added that the Celtic FC Foundation is another involved partner.

D described Celtic supporter activism as bottom-up, structured and often internet based. He added that Celtic supporter activism is more organized today. He thinks this is because people see a need for someone to take the lead if necessary. His own strategies and tactics vary depending on the issues. He described them as a mix of long-term planning as well as responding quickly to time-sensitive things that needs to be prioritized. C who is involved with social activism project both locally and globally described it as very grassroots driven and bottom up: *“they tell me what they need”*. He added that there was however an organizational side to it. He described receiving much support and love from the people he works with.

C explained that there was a rebellious element to Celtic supporter activism which is very bottom up. Rather than waiting for somebody at the top or high-fliers to initiate something, Celtic supporters do it themselves he said. K also brought up this attitude. He explained that Celtic community had always had to look after themselves as the Scottish establishment wouldn’t. Often people brought up how it was the supporters who saved Celtic from bankruptcy in the mid-1990s by launching the Celts for Change campaign.

“I remember the meetings where people came together...it is an interesting thing in itself that ordinary supporters gathered in pubs, houses, community halls and churches and

discussed with each other: 'how are we going to save our club?' 'If they hadn't the club would have collapsed because it was badly managed'. (D).

K said that Celts for Change illustrates an important aspect of the culture in the Celtic community: *"We, the Celtic family has to look after ourselves because nobody else is going to do it for us"*. Therefore, it was the supporters themselves who took initiative and rallied to save their club. He added that another reason Celtic was saved by its own supporters, is that wealthy Celtic supporters have a close connection to the club because they are *"only first and second-generation wealthy"*.

Some people reacted to the term activism. They explained that what they do is such an integral part of their lives that they did not really look at it as activism as such. D described activism as something which Celtic supporter activists *"are"*. He added that growing up in Belfast during the violent conflict, meant that he and his generation was born into activism. Today, it is an important part of his life. C described the term political activism as rigid and more directed at political campaigning. This in turn omits the deep compassion that the Celtic support has: *"Celtic supporters have a deep sense of seeing someone who is in need and responding to this in a natural and normal way"*.

The interlocutors often expressed concerns about the commercialization of football. Some were afraid of how this would impact Celtic. For example, D was adamant that he didn't want Celtic to end up as: *"just another commodity like so many other football clubs"*. He believes this would be the end of the club because it will lose its cultural identity. He did however emphasize that Celtic isn't at that stage yet. He used the discussion about selling the rights to the stadium, which he is very against, to illustrate this:

I think it would be a massive reaction against that, and I think you would see the same kind of reaction that we had with Bhoys against Bigotry or whatever, but it is hard to call because Celtic supporters are individuals too and like everyone else, we're influenced by the world we have around us and I understand that some supporters say 'If we had more money we could buy better players' but if we sell ourselves then we won't be Celtic anymore.

Another topic in conversations was how Celtic became a public limited company. D described this as a natural progression after the families who controlled the club brought it close to bankruptcy. B reflected that when this happened in the 1990s, there was a culture of large

companies, privatization, deregulation, and share issuing which desensitized people to this. He thinks there would have been bigger reactions from the support if Celtic had become a public limited company in the 1960s or 1970s. He is skeptical to the shareholder democracy concept and said one inevitably end up with an oligarchy. He also thinks there are better ways to influence the club rather than owning a “*small amount of shares*”. D pointed out that the relationship between the club and supporters is connected to who we believe represents the club. He himself believes it is the supporters. “*I think you always have a conflict with a plc when you are in a situation where the supporters are maybe more radical than the plc owners*” he added. Some also pointed that Celtic supporters tend to be understanding that Celtic FC had to operate as a business enterprise. “*You want successful people with your club as you want your club to be successful*” B said. A added that most Celtic supporters wish to focus on football and are satisfied with how the club is run.

5.6 What Celtic means for Celtic supporter activists

✓ **The story about the Long Kesh Celtic Supporters` Club**

The Long Kesh Celtic Supporters` Club was an unofficial supporter club set up by Irish republican prisoners in the Long Kesh Prison. Four of my Belfast interlocutors: G, H, J and M had been imprisoned and participated in the prison protests there. On my last fieldtrip to Belfast, I spoke with them about life in Long Kesh and what Celtic meant for them and their activism.

J pointed out that the republican prisoners mobilized and resisted from within the prison. G said that the Irish struggle was also “*fought from within the prison and ideas were sent out to the leadership of the IRA*” and that there was also an IRA leadership on the inside. They communicated via so-called comms: plastic vials containing notes that was bodily smuggled in and out of the prison. G added that the republican prisoners ran political education classes and weapons training which was done on a blackboard. During political status the Irish republican prisoners` were in the “*cages*”, where they self-organized. G describes a strong focus on Irish culture-and language. For example, each cage had a Gaeltacht: a designated area where they learned Irish and a workshop where they made handicrafts, often with Irish symbols. These were sold to fund republican charities.

Life after the loss of political status and following prison protests was brutal. “*From freedom to control your day-to-day activities to being locked up in a small prison cell with only a blanket*” G said. M credits the strong camaraderie amongst the republican prisoners for getting

him through this. These strong personal friendships and mutual support was also highlighted by other prisoners. J described people who; *“made a bad thing into a good thing...when things were looking down, they brightened your day”*. G said that everybody was treated as equal and that the republican prisoners shared everything.

G, who was imprisoned in 1975, was very involved in setting up the Long Kesh Celtic supporters` club. He said that it was not an official club in the sense that you signed on. The club grew after visiting Catholic priests became involved with it. He estimates that 200-250 of the republicans were Celtic supporters. M emphasized that not all of the republican prisoners were into Celtic and estimates that one third of those on the blanket protest were supporters. G added that the IRA leadership focused on Gaelic sports and regarded football to be a British sport. This included Celtic as well, despite of the team`s strong Irish roots and identity.

G said that the club had pins with the club`s name against a barb wire prison backdrop made on the outside. They were smuggled in and kept hidden from the prison authorities who regarded pins to be weapons. Later an US Celtic supporter club which he corresponded with sent him a linen Long Kesh Celtic Supporters` Club badge. He made personal and political friendships via this US club. After his release he did political activism for the Irish cause including the prisoners` situation in America. Here he also visited the US club who gave him a warm welcome.

H explained that Celtic was an incentive even after the prison protests started and it was impossible to follow football and have a supporters` club. However, the club was very much on their minds. For example, they always planned to travel to Celtic games. He added:

“Yeah, it was three years, so you know, during that period you heard nothing at all. You had no facilities. No communication, radio or newspapers, so you knew nothing, but if you took a visit, the first thing you would always ask your parents was “How`s Celtic?” You know, it was always a part of your life”.

The men lost ten comrades in the 1981 hunger strike. G told me that the hunger strike was a weapon of last resort, but that nobody had foreseen that ten men would die. He himself was released by then:

“I wasn`t caught up with the hunger strikes on the inside although here on the streets and through the whole of Ireland...It was a big turning point with the struggle: the armed struggle and political struggle here in the 32 counties and not just the North”.

H who was very involved with the hunger strike described it as a big awakening for people. He added how it also greatly influenced Irish r activism and his own life. G pointed out that within a year the prisoners` demands were met.

Celtic, community and meaning

Many talked about what Celtic means for them and the community. Several interlocutors brought up how Celtic has been a refuge for the Irish Catholics in Scotland and the North of Ireland. K described Celtic as a safe space for supporters, especially when considering the prejudice and discrimination they met from the rest of society. He drew parallels to football in the Soviet Union and Barcelona during the Franco regime, where football grounds were free spaces for oppressed dissidents and Catalans. He explained that although the experiences of the Irish diaspora in Glasgow was never on this level, Celtic Park was one of the few safe spaces in the city where: *“people would be amongst their own people and not be disfranchised”*. C became a Celtic supporter as a young boy in Belfast after their 1967 European Cup victory. He described this victory as a major game changer for the oppressed Catholic community in the North. It gave them something to take pride in and they started to realize that they had a voice: *“It was more than a football game; it was something which was done for the community”*. H became a Celtic supporter when he was a boy in Belfast in the sixties. He explained that although his politics wasn` t formed then, he was aware of the poverty and discrimination Catholics faced. He added that when he was older, he learned to combine his passion for football with politics.

Many of the Belfast interlocutors said it was very meaningful to attend Celtic matches during the violent conflict. C described this as *“wee bit of joy”* “in the midst of horrible and dreadful times. He underlined that it was not escapism as such, but more of a lift. D told me that Celtic matches gave people in Belfast something positive to look forward to during a very difficult and stressful situation. Several interlocutors also stressed how the Irish-Celtic connection went beyond football. C said that today he has a great affinity towards Scottish born Irish. Many also pointed out how the Irish community in Scotland are strong supporters of the republican movement. *“I see 50-60 year old men in Glasgow and they are completely Irish you know. They know more rebel songs than I do”* M said.

Several of the Irish interlocutors brought up how Belfast had their own Celtic: the Belfast Celtic. Many of their grandparents and parents had supported the club. G said he got his *“Celtic roots”* from his father who was a Belfast Celtic supporter. He explained that this family tradition and

Celtic`s Irish identity was the reasons he become a supporter. D remembers that when he was growing up, people talked about Belfast Celtic fondly and: *“as they were still playing down the road”*. He added that after Belfast Celtic was driven out of football, people in Ireland started supporting Celtic FC and formed Celtic Supporters` Clubs that organized trips to Glasgow to see the team play.

Another frequent theme was how integral Celtic is in the supporters` lives. Many mentioned that their children and grandchildren are Celtic supporters. They also described that strong personal friendships have been built via the club. G referred to this as the Celtic family and that this was what it was all about. He added that Celtic was much more than just a football club: *“It will never leave me to the day I die, and it has been a great incentive to my life”*. In field conversations with people who are not Celtic supporters, they often brought up how they still felt a connection to the club. For example, they would often point out how family members are supporters. C also referred to his fellow activists who are not Celtic supporters as being *“Celtic-minded”*, because they have the same core values as the Celtic community.

Irish, Catholic, immigrant, inclusive, left-wing and working-class identities

A, explained that the Irish collective identity and Irish history has always been important for Celtic community. However, he and B emphasized that Scotland`s Irish community is very much in sync with the rest of the Britain. D regards the Irish diaspora to be as just as Irish as himself. Interlocutors also often pointed out how the club has a strong supporter base in Ireland. The dedication of the many Irish supporters who travel the long distance to Scotland to support their team were brought up in interviews and field conversations. For example, G pointed out that Donegal based supporters make a 24 hour round trip to Glasgow to support their team.

Many brought up that the main founder of Celtic was an Irish Catholic priest. However, it was also emphasized that Celtic has always welcomed everybody. A couple of the interlocutors brought up how Catholicism impacts Celtic supporter activism. C said that the Celtic community`s sense of passion and the Catholic concept of social justice and solidarity is at the core of their activism.

A and B explained that for many Scottish born Celtic supporters, the Irish identity is often connected with the Catholic identity. This is because the vast majority of Catholics in Scotland are descendants of Irish immigrants A explained. B said that most of the Celtic supporters he knows are not active Catholics. However, because they have been raised Catholic this identity

continues to be important. He told me that he had been raised Catholic and “*feels culturally Catholic*” despite being very critical of much of what the Catholic church does. A, who was more aware of his Catholic heritage than his Irish heritage growing up brought up how attending mass and Catholic schools means that you get a bond to other Catholics. Both he and A think that the Catholic identity is closer for the Irish diaspora in Scotland than the Irish because it is more recent. K thinks that it is easier to focus on the Irish identity because it is: “*more hard work to maintain to the Catholic rather than the Irish*”. He believes this is the reason for the strong emphasis on the club’s Irish heritage. He expressed concerns that too much focus on this could be disenfranchising to Catholic supporters from non-Irish communities.

A theme in interviews was Irish republicanism amongst Celtic supporters. K estimates that perhaps 75 % of supporters attending matches supports Irish republicanism, and many of the remaining 25 % are neutral. He explained that for some supporters this is also very important. He himself is sympathetic to this cause but is concerned that it could become disenfranchising to non-republican supporters: “*You may be a Celtic fan, but you are not a A + Celtic fan because you know there is the Irish republicanism side to it*”. How Celtic FC tries to crack down on displays of Irish republicanism which in turn is met with resistance from supporters was also frequently discussed. H said: “*They can try if they want to you know, but they will never be able to break the political affinity that Celtic supporters have for the reunification of Ireland*”. The Bhoys against Bigotry campaign which attempted to ban the singing of Irish rebel songs often came up as an example of this. D described the campaign as a poorly thought-out idea and populist propaganda which underestimated the opposition it met from the support.

“I remember that very clearly. I mean, I’m speaking for myself, but I would say... and I think I’m right here, that there were a lot of Irish people who were really insulted by that because we’ve never been bigots and our fans don’t sing songs about bigotry. We sing songs about revolution and struggle and Irish history” (D)

Both in interviews and field conversations, supporters were often adamant that the official club could not tell them “*what to sing*”. The vast majority of those I spoke to considers these songs to be an expression of history and Irish identity. However, there was an exception. This was G, a republican activist who participated in the prison protests. He said he feels that there isn’t any need to bring IRA songs into the stadium: “*As much as I was involved with that years ago, we don’t need that in our political thinking and our social thinking, I don’t believe we need that*”. He added that with the Green Brigade it seemed like this was for show and that they

could be radical to the extreme. Another factor which he also brought up was that football has become more family oriented and there are more children attending games.

The relationship between the Irish and the Scottish nationalist collective identities and the realignment of Scottish politics was also a subject in interviews. B said that the SNP's old nickname "*the Tartan Tories*" had been "*partially true for a long time*", but now the party had made inroads into the working-class voters. He referred to this as a major realignment of politics. K told me how a decade ago there had been an: "interesting dichotomy" amongst his Celtic supporter friends, where they were for Irish unity and against Scottish independence. At the same time, they supported European left-wing independence movements such as the Basque. He explained that a reason for this was Celtic fans' strong ties to the Labour Party which is against Scottish independence. B observed that republican Celtic supporters are natural supporters of Scottish independence. K pointed out that there was more cultural reasons for why Celtic supporters have not identified with traditional Scottish nationalism: "*Supporting Scotland and supporting the SNP wasn't a part of our heritage in inverted commas*". K added that because of this many Scottish born Celtic supporters did not support the Scottish national football team as they viewed it as: "*the establishment's team*". This was also a topic in my joint interview with A and B. They used to attend Scotland games. but have since stopped and don't see themselves going back. B said he went to the 1990 World Cup supporting both Scotland and Ireland. He described receiving a very warm welcome from the other Ireland supporters: "*It was a very natural moment, a very natural welcome amongst the Irish fans*". He and A did however add that other reasons for the declining support of the Scottish national team is that it is time consuming to support a national team in addition to ones' regular team and that the team has declined sporting wise.

Inclusiveness is another collective identity frequently associated with Celtic and its supporter activism. How the club and its supporters welcome everybody was often brought up. For K it is Celtic's collective identity of inclusiveness which is most important. He underscored how the club was formed "*for out of the need of the poor in the East end of Glasgow*" and how inclusiveness had always been central. He added that that the club was "*Catholic with a small c*" and therefore "*all-encompassing and all embracing*". He wishes that it is more focus on this aspect of Celtic "*because it is a wonderful story*". Many interlocutors also brought up Celtic's anti-racist and anti-fascist ethos. E explained that for him personally: "*being anti-sectarian is the most important thing*". He added that the James Connolly Republican Flute

Band Govan has always welcomed everybody who is for Irish unity and has several Protestant members.

Celtic`s identity as an immigrant club was another subject. All of the four Glaswegian interlocutors: A, B, F and K are descendants of Irish-Catholic immigrants. People often underscored how it was the An Gorta Mór - the Great Hunger which led to mass-immigration from Ireland. They also brought up how these immigrants met much discrimination and lived in extreme poverty, which in turn led to the birth of Celtic FC. E drew some parallels from these 19th Century immigrants to the current Eastern European immigrants. He said the latter group is also met with mistrust, resentment and accusation of undercutting wages. He added that it was therefore important to show that it is the employers who are responsible for undercutting wages. He also pointed out that immigrants pay their taxes and national insurance. K said he wished that Celtic FC would emphasize its roots as an immigrant club more because it is a: *“fantastic story”*. He added that it has much potential for attracting newly arrived immigrants.

Interlocutors often brought up how Celtic supporter activist and Celtic supporters in general tend to be left-wing. A told me that Celtic is unique in Scotland and that there isn`t any other club with similar historical and political element. He added that although Glasgow Rangers also has a political identity, this identity is the polar opposite of Celtic because it is pro-British union and anti-Irishness. In my meeting with the Chief Executive from the Celtic FC Foundation, I brought up how we hear much about left-wing Celtic supporters and seldom hear about Conservative supporters. He answered that there are supporters who are Conservative or a-political, but they are less vocal and in the minority. He mentioned that there for example is a Celtic Supporters` Club for members of the British army. He emphasized that they are just as welcome:

“People come here to support us, to work with us, to play for us: it doesn`t matter who they are. It does not matter what their sexual orientation, what color they are, what their faith is, what their political views are. If you want to be here, then come and join us”

K told me that he believes that the number of radical left-wing supporters are less than most people think. He reckons that perhaps as high as 60-70 percent of those attending matches are just marginally left of center or neutral.

The vast majority of my anonymous interlocutors were firmly based on the left-wing of politics. This was also reflected in their activism. One example is E who described himself as a socialist and trade unionist. He expressed strong concerns about poverty and austerity in Scotland and thinks that much more should be done for the working class. He also pointed out that the James Connolly Republican Flute band is very socialist oriented. K brought up that there are left-wing elements to Catholicism in Scotland, especially during the 1970s. He thinks this is interesting because Catholic communities elsewhere are often conservative. In hindsight he realizes that there was political elements to his own Catholic education: *“But very much, when I look back on the ethos in the Catholic schooling which I got, I would say it was left of centre”*. This was reflected in how it had a strong focus on the common good. For example, the students would not only learn the facts of the creation of the welfare state, but also how this was a *“fantastic thing”*. A and B said that left-wing Celtic supporters view of multi-millionaire owner Fergus McCann, is an interesting one. *“And interestingly for a club who has a strong left of centre support, he has become a real folk hero, but I think that when he was in charge things weren’t always smooth”* A explained. M said that McCann was a businessman and not a philanthropist but added that he had indeed saved Celtic from going under.

The working-class collective identity of Celtic supporters and football supporters in general was another topic during conversations. D said that there is a strong working-class identity amongst Celtic supporters. He told me that the supporters he knows who travels from Ireland for games are mainly working-class, and added that the middle class is more focused on rugby. He also mentioned that the working-class identity of Celtic is illustrated in the many charitable collections at Celtic Park where people show up in large numbers to contribute. How football and football supporters are met with biases from society and press was also brought in some conversations. For instance, K thinks class prejudice is the reason why football which is a traditionally working-class sport is problematized. He said that this is an especially big problem in Glasgow he. For example, the press often presents the Glasgow derby as *“sectarian”* and *“a battle”* and overlooks the sporting aspects. He said that this ignores and dismiss football’s positive socio-economic contribution to Glasgow. *“How can football defend itself against criticism and lobby for support when nobody in football knows its values?”* he asked. He explained that therefore it is *“crucial that football knows its value”*.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss the empirical findings presented in chapter 5. I will place this against the context of new social movement theory which I presented in chapter 2. To recap, this chapter explored new social movement theory, the role of collective identities in social movements and how free spaces can be used to establish collective identities and launching collective actions. It also looked at research in sport sociology on identities, free spaces in football as well as football supporter activism. I will also refer to material from the background chapter.

6.2. Does Celtic supporter activism constitute a social movement?

To repeat Peoples definition from chapter 4, social movements are:

Groups of people organizing to bring about – or resist-social change -using, at least in part, non-institutional strategy and tactics (also known as unconventional politics). Most social movements have social inequality and injustice as core concerns and mobilize around these issues (2019, p. 17).

So, with this definition in mind, to what extent and how do Celtic supporter activists bring about social and political change? What are their strategies, tactics, tools and methods? Which role does social injustice and social inequality play in their activism?

Bringing about social and political change

My findings strongly indicate that Celtic supporter activists are effective when it comes to bringing about social and political change. They are involved in a wide variety of activism where the commonality is that they combine supporting their club with social or political activism. They also show that resisting negative changes by bringing about positive changes are two sides of the same coin for Celtic supporter activists. In the previous chapter we saw how activism directed at the former is often done by activism for the latter. We also saw how Celtic supporter activists focus on social inclusion and awareness raising. On the Ball and the Invisibles are two examples of this. The Invisibles was formed as a reaction to a very visible increase of rough sleepers in Glasgow. The group resists this unwelcome societal change by bringing about positive change. This is done on an individual level by providing material such as sleeping bags, mats, clothes as well as advice and support to homeless and rough sleepers in Glasgow. They advocate for societal changes as well. On the Ball also started as a resistance to

unwanted societal changes. In this case it was period poverty and the social exclusion this leads to. Like the Invisibles, they are eager to see changes on a macro level. These two groups illustrate how Celtic supporter activism fulfils People's first criteria for social movement, which is to: "*bring about -or resist unwanted-societal changes*" (2019, p. 17).

In the story about the Long Kesh Celtic Supporters' club we saw how the members of this unofficial Celtic supporters' club resisted when British authorities removed the Irish republican prisoners' political status. While this was not Celtic supporter activism as such, many Celtic supporters did participate. One of the protesters: M estimated that one third of the protesters were Celtic supporters. In chapter five the interlocutors described extreme and brutal conditions. In 1981, they lost ten comrades in the hunger strike. H described the hunger strike as a big awakening for people and something which has heavily influenced Irish activism. G declared that it was a turning point for entire Ireland. He also emphasized that the prisoners' demands were met within a year. Moreover, Irish republican Celtic supporter activists are clearly inspired by what happened during the prison protests. For example, in chapter 3 we saw how Irish republican Celtic supporter activists commemorate the hunger strikers. This is demonstrated by the singing of Roll of Honor: a song about the men who died on the hunger strike and the Green Brigade's Bobby Sands display (Kelly, 2019; Quigley, 2019, p. 172).

Celtic's ethos of charity was a frequent interview topic. In almost every single interview people highlighted that Celtic stands out because of its focus on charity. They often emphasized the club was originally founded as a charity and as a result of grassroots activism conducted by the local Irish-Catholic immigrant community. Indeed, K's anecdote about the sport journalist who proclaimed Celtic supporters to be different from other football supporters because the first thing they will say about the club is how it: "*was formed to put dinner on the tables of the poor and needy*" is a vivid example of this. Today, both Celtic supporters and the official club via the Celtic FC Foundation continue this long tradition of charity and social activism. The central role social activism plays in Celtic Community is also illustrated in how A described that supporters have always being involved in charity even when the football club was not. In chapter five, we also saw how the interviewees spent much time, resources, and energy on activism. For example, D explained that activism is an integral part of Celtic supporter activists' lives: "*who we are*". C described Celtic supporters as very compassionate and that they have: "*a deep sense of seeing someone in need and respond to this in a natural and normal way*". I will therefore argue that Celtic supporter activism in many ways becomes more than activism.

Celtic's charitable division: the Celtic FC Foundation, is a noteworthy case in modern football. Unlike most other football foundations, it takes a broad socio-economic approach (FAI, 2018). The interaction between the foundation and the support is a dynamic one where the two have a strong and mutually beneficial partnership. For example, a volunteer from the Invisibles told me that the foundation does more than funding by functioning as a matchmaker, putting them in direct contact with a donor. In my interview with the Celtic FC Foundation, it was underscored how they are mindful that the supporters have their own charities and causes. The foundation also brought up that life in Northern and Eastern Glasgow is very difficult and atypical compared to the rest of the country. Indeed, we saw in the background chapter how socioeconomically both Glasgow and Belfast is lagging behind the rest of Britain. Poverty was also evident in my own field research. For instance, we met many rough sleepers when I shadowed the Invisibles in Glasgow's city center. Alleviating poverty and hardship thus continue to be a focus for Celtic supporter activists just as it was for the community activists who founded the club in 1887.

In his 2013 article, William McDougall declared Celtic supporters to be left-leaning, anti-racist, anti-fascist, and against commercialization of football. He also described how they support Irish republicanism and are suspicious of British and Scottish nationalism. However, he does add that the Celtic support are becoming more pro-Scottish independence. (p 230, 237) My own findings were very much in line with this. It was widely acknowledged that much of its support is left-wing, although the club itself is politically neutral. For example, A explained that the club is unique in Scotland because of its historical and left-wing political element. However, there are also conservative or politically neutral supporters. K differed from most of interlocutors as he thinks the number is smaller than most think. He reckons that perhaps as high as 60-70 percent of those attending matches are just marginally left of center or neutral. On the other hand, most of my own interlocutors could be characterized as firmly left wing. Here I will point out that I did use snowball sampling and not random sampling which could have skewed this.

Interlocutors frequently told me that fighting racism and fascism is of utmost importance for Celtic supporters. They were also overwhelmingly for Scottish independence. They often brought up the last decade's realignment of Scottish politics in connection with this. The decline of the once powerful Scottish Labour Party, which is against independence, has led to many Celtic supporters now voting for the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP). However, this is still an uneasy relationship in some ways. Some stated how members of the Irish-Catholic community

don't feel represented in Scotland. The Offensive Behavior at Football and Threatening Communication Act is another example of this. McBride (2019) points out it was the SNP which single handedly legislated the act which singled out football and its working-class supporters. This was in turn met with the Fans against Criminalisation (FAC) campaign where several Celtic supporter organizations including the Green Brigade mobilized (Quigley, 2019, p.169). It is not unlikely that this may potentially complicate alliances for Scottish independence. After all, as B pointed out, republican Celtic supporters including the Green Brigade are natural supporters of Scottish independence.

In chapter five we saw that Irish republicanism is important to many Celtic supporters. In fact, the Irish interlocutors brought up the strong support they had received from the wider Celtic supporter community during the violent conflict in the North. Today, there are major developments with regards to Irish unity. Interlocutors pointed out that this is now very tangible because of a changing demographic in the North of Ireland and also Brexit. For example, D explained the latter means that moderate Protestants may vote for Irish unity in a future referendum because they want to be a part of the European Union.

There is little doubt that Celtic supporters' political activism attracts more controversy than its social activism. Irish republican activism is often considered to be especially controversial by the Scottish establishment who considers it to be "*sectarian*". As we saw in the background chapter, the club has also gone to great lengths to distance themselves from it. This in turn was often criticized by my interlocutors. For example, when we discussed Fergus McCann's Bhoys against Bigotry campaign, D told me that many Irish supporters were offended by McCann's insinuation that about bigotry amongst the support. Overall, my interlocutors also took issue with those who criticize political activism in football in general. For example, K made a very compelling argument when he explained how this is especially problematic for Celtic supporters because of Celtic's ethos of being formed for socio-economic and political reasons.

Celtic supporter activists often resist the commercialization of football and function as a counterbalance to this. If they feel the club goes too far with commercialization they will protest. For instance, D reckons that there will be a big reaction from the support if Celtic sells the rights to the stadium. On the other, my findings show that Celtic supporter activists are understanding that the club needs to be commercial in order to survive. This is rather intriguing considering that Celtic supporters are known for being radical and left leaning. B's explanation how by the 1990s people in Scotland had become desensitized to deregulation, privatization,

large companies and share issuing, is no doubt a major reason for this. The fact that the supporters were close to losing their club to bankruptcy in the early 1990s is probably another major factor. An alleviating factor for supporters when it comes to commercialization, is that the club via the Celtic FC Foundation is very involved with charity. As C pointed out that Celtic FC proves it is possible to be both a successful business and charity. D stated that the fact that the club has their own charity, shows that it still represents the Irish community it came from.

Non-institutional strategies and tactics

A recurring theme in my interviews was how Celtic supporter activists use what Peoples refer to as non-institutional tactics and strategies also known as unconventional politics. Using ones' affinity for a football team to launch activism is certainly unconventional. In addition, political football supporter activism can be risky. It is certainly more risky than more traditional political participation such as for example joining a party or writing a letter to your member of Parliament. This is also the case for political Celtic supporter activists. For instance, in the background chapter we saw how the Scottish Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Act from 2012 to 2018 singled out football supporters. This included the arrests of seven Green Brigade members for singing Roll of Honour (McBride, 2019: Quigley, 2019). Nevertheless, this does not seem to curb Celtic supporters' political activism. My interlocutors mainly took the view that authorities and football clubs shouldn't restrict political activism. For instance, K told me that he thinks biggest challenge in football is when supporters are told they cannot engage in activism. He thinks this is especially problematic for a club like Celtic because of its political formation and ethos.

The advantage of football supporter activism is that the sport's extensive reach means that it is an efficient way of getting the message to a wide and diverse audience. For example, On the Ball finds that being football oriented is helpful in getting boys' attention on period poverty and social inclusion. Football can also be a tool in facilitating further activism and establishing political alliances. An example is the anti-racist and anti-fascist alliance between Celtic and St. Pauli supporters which was brought up by some of the interlocutors. In the Story of the Long Kesh Celtic Supporters' Club, we also saw how G formed a personal and political relationship with members of an US Celtic Supporters' Club.

A key element of Celtic supporter activism is that it is grassroots activism. 133 years ago, Celtic FC was established by the community for the community. Today, Celtic supporter activism is

bottom-up and there is a significant anti-establishment aspect to it. For example, C explained how it has a “*rebellious element which is very bottom-up*” where the supporter activists will just go ahead and do things themselves. K’s observed that because the Celtic community has not been a part of the Scottish establishment, it always had to look after itself. He explained that this is the reason why Celtic supporters take initiative and do it themselves. He specifically brought up the Celts for Change grassroots campaign as an example which illustrates this culture.

Awareness raising is another prominent feature of Celtic supporter activism. This was for example illustrated in the stories about the Invisibles and On the Ball. The Invisibles focus on raising public’s awareness of rough sleeping and homelessness. Removing stigmas surrounding periods and raise awareness of period poverty is a central part of On the Ball’s activism. It was also pointed out that raising awareness amongst younger generation is a central part of Celtic supporter activism. For example, D explained that educating young people about inclusion, solidarity, anti-racism and anti-fascism has always been important in Celtic supporter activism. Another example was On the Ball who frequently visits youth clubs where they engage directly with young people.

Social injustice and Social inequality

The findings from my field research show that rallying against social inequality and social injustice is an important aspect in Celtic supporter activism. This is in line with People’s third requirement for social movements which is to: “*have social inequality and injustice as core concerns and mobilize around these issues*” (2019, p 17). My results also show that resisting anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry is a driving force in Celtic supporter activism. A explained that fighting anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry is very important for the Celtic support. Not only have many supporters been subjected to it on a personal level, but many also believe that Celtic is discriminated against as a club by football authorities and other supporters.

It was also widely acknowledged that Celtic supporter activists’ own collective historical memories and individual experiences of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry makes them empathetic to the plights of other oppressed groups and minorities. This in turn is put into action via their supporter activism and collective action. For instance, C pointed out that Celtic supporter activists and the Irish in general have a strong connection to suffering groups such as the native-Americans and Palestinian because of their own history of colonization and

oppression. People also frequently emphasized how central anti-racism and anti-fascism are to the Celtic support.

The similarities between the anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry in Scotland and the North of Ireland was often brought up by interlocutors. In chapter five we saw how these are manifested in discrimination, prejudice and even violence. Most of the interlocutors had experienced this on a personal level as well as on a collective level. H even said that at times this probably was worse in Scotland than in the North of Ireland. This was because the Irish community in Scotland didn't have the Civil Rights Movement and later the republican movement, to fight for them. It was widely acknowledged that anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism had resulted in severe socio-economic inequalities. For example, D described that when he was growing up in Belfast in the 60s and 70s, some Catholic neighborhoods had up to a 70 % unemployment rate.

It was widely acknowledged that things had changed for the better with regards to anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholicism. However, it was also pointed out that these are still there. Glaswegian interlocutors A and K who are generation X told me it had been much worse for their parents and grandparents' generation. They reckon that access to higher education, which in turn lead to better jobs and upward social mobility is the main reason for this. This is consistent with the findings of McBride (2019) presented in chapter 3. However, K also pointed out that this upward mobility of the Irish community has led to much loyalist anger. A also brought up how being connected to Celtic can exacerbate anti-Irish racism. C took issue with the notion that economic parity had been reached in Scotland. He considers this a false truth and explained that it had happened as a result of downward mobility. Specifically, the well-paid heavy industry jobs that Protestants had a monopoly on was outsourced.

D made an interesting point when he problematized the usage of the term *sectarian*. He said that the usage of this word glosses over the problems of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry. Implicit in the term is that both sides are "*equally bad*". However, he pointed that it is simply not the case as it is the Irish-Catholic community who bears the brunt of this. He mentioned as an example how 57 percent of hate crimes in Scotland are directed at this community which makes up less than 15 percent of the Scottish population. This is in consistent with Bradley's assertions that implicit in the term sectarianism is a false assumption of both sides being equally wrong and that as a discursive concept sectarianism glosses the realities of anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry (2019, pp. 16-17, 31).

6.2. Celtic as a free space from where collective identities for Celtic supporter activists are established.

My findings show that Celtic has been a free space for supporters and followers since it was founded 133 years ago. Celtic FC is very meaningful for supporter activists. Not only is it their football club, but it becomes what Polletta (1999) calls an “*institutional anchor*” (p.1). for their activism. Interviewees frequently highlighted that Celtic was founded as a charity by the Irish-Catholic community in Glasgow to help the poor. In chapter 4 we saw how Joseph Bradley (2006) refers to Celtic as a space of empowerment. The club has an “*inspiring and welcome appeal*” and is a symbol for marginalized people all over the world. For the Irish diaspora in Scotland where anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry has been widespread Celtic has been the “*primary environment where Irish confidence, celebration and assertion takes place and where Irishness becomes manifest*” (p 14, 57-59).

How Celtic always has been a free space for the oppressed and disfranchised Irish Catholic communities in Scotland and the North of Ireland also came up in interviews. K drew an analogy between Celtic Park and football grounds in other oppressed societies which had also functioned as free spaces. For the Belfast interlocutors, who had all grown up with oppression and decades of violent conflict, Celtic is very meaningful. C described Celtic as a lift or “*a wee bit of joy*” during horrible and dreadful times. He also pointed out how Celtic matches are as a great platform for expressing solidarity with the Irish struggle. In both chapter 2 and 5 we saw that although things have improved there is still anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry. Therefore, Celtic continues to function as an important free space.

In this section I use the term Celtic in a very broad sense. It is not only the football club and its grounds, but everywhere the Celtic community comes together. This includes physical places such as Celtic Park or Celtic pubs and non-physical spaces such as for example conversations between supporters or social media. This is in line with Polletta’s assertion that free spaces also include physical spaces (1999). An example of this is D’s childhood memory how people talked about the Belfast Celtic as: “*they were still playing down the road*”, decades after the club was forced to shut down.

Polletta (1999) described free spaces as small, intimate and roots to a longstanding community. Furthermore, they are: “*removed from the direct control of dominant groups, are voluntarily participated in, and generate the cultural challenge that precedes or accompanies mobilization*” (p. 1). Celtic as a football club is of course not small. However, some Celtic free

spaces such as for example a Celtic supporter clubs or local Celtic pubs are smaller. But even in its largest manifestations, Celtic is still deeply rooted in community. This is reflected in how the interviewees highlighted how Celtic was founded by the community for the community. In fact, D described communality as the very essence of Celtic. Celtic supporter activism is often very close and personal. There are strong friendships and camaraderie in the Celtic community. In my field research, I heard countless examples of how close personal relationships were forged via Celtic. This is illustrated in G's statement that *the Celtic family* is "what it is all about". Another example is C's strong affinity for the Scottish-born Irish because of their warm welcome and solidarity during the violent conflict in the North of Ireland.

In chapter five we saw how Celtic's 1967 European Cup victory was much more than a football triumph. K explained that this victory marked a turning point in Glasgow, where things started to change with regards to the discrimination and prejudice against the Irish Catholic community. C, who was a boy in Belfast at the time, described the triumph as a victory for the entire Catholic community in the North who realized they had a voice. This in turn exemplify Polletta's requirement that free spaces generate cultural challenges that precedes or accompanies mobilization (1999).

Polletta explains that free spaces provide resources that enable repressed people to mobilize in order to change their circumstances. In here counterhegemonic ideas and identities are established (1999). In the Story of the Long Kesh Celtic Supporters' Club where the republican prisoners forged strong identities and engaged in collective action. For example, they ran Gaeltachts and political education classes. I will also argue that the Long Kesh Celtic Supporters' Club too was a tool for this. For example, mutual support of Celtic led to a personal and political friendship between G and members of an US Celtic Supporters' Club. We saw also saw how H explained that although his politics hadn't been formed when he started supporting Celtic, he was aware of the poverty and discrimination in his Belfast community. Later, he learned to combine his passion for football with politics. The conditions during the prison protests were brutal. In chapter 5, we saw how M explained that the strong camaraderie amongst the republican prisoners got him through this. Indeed, these strong friendships and mutual support was highlighted by the other republican prisoners. It should be noted that Celtic too was an incentive. This was the case even after the prison protests started and the Irish republicans could no longer follow football let alone run a Supporters' Club. For example, in chapter 5 we saw that H described how the republican prisoners would plan to go to games after

their release. He also said that the first thing they would ask their parents when they visited, was how the team was doing.

Polletta (1999) operates with three structures of “*association and precondition for mobilization*” (p. 8). These structures are transmovement, indigenous and prefigurative. She focuses on the “*the character of their associational ties that compose them*” (p. 8). This in turn explains how they play different roles when it comes to tasks which are essential for mobilization (1999, p. 9) This in turn begs the question of which structure fits best with Celtic as a free space. This is a difficult question to answer because there is not one single structure which fits all. Specifically, Celtic combines elements from transmovements and indigenous structures. Transmovements have: “*a wide geographical, organizational and temporal reach*” (Polletta, 1999, p 9). In chapter five, we have seen how Celtic has a strong supporter base in both Scotland and Ireland. In fact, more than half of my interlocutors were from Belfast. In chapter 5 D explained that Belfast Celtic supporters not only started rooting for Celtic FC after the demise of their Belfast club, but also organized in supporters` club so they could travel to Scotland to see their new team play. This illustrates how there is a strong organizational reach as well. Celtic FC was established 133 years ago, and its support is multigenerational which shows there is a wide temporal reach. For example, many people I spoke to brought up how their children and grandchildren are Celtic supporters as well. On the other hand, there are also elements to Celtic that fits with indigenous structures. These are marked by heavy local ties and self-sustainment (Polletta, 2019, p 9-11)

In chapter 4, Armstrong and Giulianotti (1999) explain that football clubs reflect: “*a strong sense of local and civic pride*” (p. 3). This was also evident in my findings where we saw Celtic supporter activists can mobilize much support in the overall Celtic community. An example is how three supporters formed on On the Ball and was rallied much support from fellow supporters when they started their campaign. Another example is the Invisibles where many members are Celtic and St.Roch`s supporters and also gets much support and donations from these two football communities. This is in line with Polletta`s description of indigenous structures strengths when it comes to mobilizing frames, recruitment and leadership from the community. As for self-sustainment we saw how K pointed out that the Celtic community has always needed to look after itself because nobody else would. Indeed, it was the self-sustainment of a marginalized the Irish-Catholic immigrant community that led to Celtic FC being established in the first place.

Celtic as a free space provides a crucial context for Celtic supporter activism. It provides what Polletta refers to as “*institutional anchor* for the cultural changes that explodes structural arrangements” (1999, p 1). Furthermore, Bradley explains that sport: “*transcends the field of play and creates social, cultural and political meanings far beyond the event and world of sport generally*” (2006, p 54). Therefore, I will argue that football is a potent free space for establishing and spreading collective identities which in turn fuels supporter activism. This is especially the case for a football club like Celtic with its strong connection to an oppressed immigrant community. Below I will explore some of the collective identities in Celtic supporter activism.

Collective identities in Celtic supporter activism

In chapter 4 we saw that Polletta and Jaspars (2001) defined collective identity as:

An individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and is distinct from personal identities, although it may form a part of a personal identity (p. 285).

In chapter four we saw how sport and football are important for identities. For instance, Bairner and Shirlow (1999) states that football is “*one of the most powerful in terms of identity formation and reinforcement*” (1999, p 152). In my interviews collective identities were frequently brought up. Especially six collective identities often came up in connection to Celtic supporter activism. These were the Irish, Catholic, immigrant, inclusive, left-wing and working-class collective identities.

I found that Celtic FC’s Irish collective identity is important for supporter activists regardless whether they live in Ireland or Scotland. For example, Scottish born B described how it was a very natural moment when he joined the other Ireland supporters during the 1990 World Cup. In chapter 5, we also saw how the Belfast interlocutors also frequently brought up the close connection they had to the Scottish born Irish. In fact, D said that he considers the members of the Irish diaspora to be as Irish as himself.

In the story about the Long Kesh Celtic Supporters’ Club we saw how Irish republican prisoners had strong focus on Irish identity. This was manifested in different ways including running Gaeltachts where they learned Irish and making traditional Irish handicraft. G added that the IRA leadership there was not keen on football. They considered this to be a British sport and a

“*Garrison game*”. G pointed out that this even included Celtic FC which is known for its strong Irish roots and an Irish identity. This must be regarded in view of the cultural and social position of Gaelic games and the Gaelic Athletic Association. In chapter 2 we saw how Flynn described how the latter was formed to promote Gaelic games and culture. However, this doesn't seem to have curbed the enthusiasm for Celtic amongst the republican prisoners who continued supporting Celtic from the inside and also ran an unofficial Celtic Supporters' Club.

Celtic has a strong Catholic identity. Many interviewees brought up how the club's main founder was a Catholic priest. However, it is important to note that it is not a Catholic club as such. My interviewees stressed that everybody has always been welcomed by Celtic including non-Catholics. Nonetheless, the Catholic heritage is evident in Celtic supporter activism. C emphasized how the Catholic concept of social justice and solidarity forms the very core of this. K who like many other Celtic supporters in Glasgow attended Catholic schools described an ethos where the common good was emphasized. Not surprisingly the Irish and Catholic collective identities tend to go hand in hand. As A pointed out the vast majority of Catholics in Scotland are descendants of Irish immigrants. Glaswegian interlocutors A, B and K differed on which of these two identities were closer to them personally. A and B feel the Catholic is closer. This is because it is nearer in time and has been a part of many Celtic supporters' upbringing. K on the other hand, thinks it is the Irish because the Catholic collective identity is harder to maintain. It should be noted that the Catholic collective identity does not necessarily mean being an active practicing Catholic. B said that most Celtic supporters he knows are not active Catholics. However, he and A pointed out that Catholicism has been an integral part of many supporters' childhood.

There are big changes in the relationship between Scottish nationalist and Irish collective identities. In chapter 2 we saw for example that McDougall describes the Celtic community as traditionally being distrustful of Scottish nationalism and the Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP). However, the attitudes to Scottish independence and the SNP have now changed (2013). Glaswegians B, E and K brought up the political realignment in Scotland, where the Irish working-class community has left the anti-independence Labour Party for the SNP. As K pointed out, being for Irish unity and Scottish independence is no longer mutually inclusive. In chapter 2, we also saw that McBride (2020. p) pointed out that social justice was a crucial factor in the support for Scottish independence. As we also saw in the previous section, Celtic supporter activists' relationship to the Scottish nationalist establishment can be ambivalent. In chapter five, we saw that there is still anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry in Scottish

society. In chapter 2, we saw how Celtic supporter activists mobilized against the much criticized Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications Act, which targeted working- class football supporters (McBride, 2020). It will be interesting to see the interaction between pro-independence Celtic supporter activists and more traditional Scottish nationalists now that Brexit has led to a new Scottish independence referendum being back on the agenda.

Many Celtic supporter activists have an Irish republican sub-identity. The vast majority of my anonymous interlocutors could be characterized as republicans. The Scottish establishment often takes aim at this identity which it considers to be “*sectarian*”. For example, the OBTC Act cracked heavily down on the singing of Irish rebel songs (Kelly, 2019; McBride, 2019). Celtic FC has also tried to curb its supporters` Irish republican displays. My interlocutors often pointed to Fergus McCann`s Bhoys against Bigotry campaign as an example of this. Many were very critical of this approach which met widespread opposition from the support. Of course, the club is in many ways caught between the supporter activists and football authorities. As A and B pointed out, it can be fined and sanctioned for the actions of its supporters.

K, who himself is sympathetic to the republican cause, raised an interesting point when he expressed concerns that the Irish-republican sub-identity might lead to non-republican or neutral supporters feeling excluded. This is something Peoples brings up when he discusses representation in social movements. Here he states that there must be a balancing act in social movements where outsiders are included (2019, p.29). Of course, this applies to Celtic supporter activists as well when they join outside social movements such as for example the Scottish Independence Movement. However, at the end of the day, the discussion of Irish republicanism at Celtic Park boils down to whose grounds it is. Is it the supporters or the official club? This in turn illustrates Totten`s argument that football is a “*contested ideological terrain*” (2013, p 455-456). We must also not lose track of that those who want recognition of their Irish republican identity is a large group. In chapter five we saw that K estimates that perhaps as much as 75 percent of those attending matches are republicans and that many of the remaining 25 percent are neutral

Being inclusive is another central collective identity. In chapter five we saw how this is an important aspect of Celtic FC and Celtic supporter activism. For example, the Invisibles, On the Ball and the Celtic FC Foundation are very focused on social inclusion. K said that it is the inclusive collective identity which is the most important. He added that he wishes there was

more focus on this “*because it is such a wonderful story*”. Many also emphasized Celtic’s strong anti-racist and anti-fascist ethos. An example was how the Celtic support took a stance against racism, fascism and apartheid in the 80s and 90s. Inclusion is an important aspect of Celtic supporters’ political activism. For example, G underscored the importance of protecting the rights of unionists after an Irish reunification. For E, being “*anti-sectarian*” is of utmost importance. He added that his Irish republican fluteband has always welcomed everybody who is for a united Ireland and have several Protestant members.

Left-wing, working class and immigrant are collective identities often associated with Celtic supporter activists. Football in general has strong roots as a working-class sport. In addition, Celtic’s core support comes from the working-class Irish immigrant community who are well known for their left-wing politics (McDougall, 2013). Indeed, the vast majority of my anonymous interlocutors were left-wing. McDougall points out that being left-wing distinguish the Catholic community in Scotland which most Celtic supporters hail from. Other Catholic communities in Europe tend to be conservative (2013). K also brought this up. He said that for example there was a left of center ethos in his Catholic education.

The working class and immigrant aspects are also important for Celtic supporter activists. For example, the highlighted how the club was formed by the Irish-Catholic community that had settled in Glasgow in the wake of the Great Irish Hunger. E drew parallels between the exploitation of these immigrants and how modern day Eastern European immigrants are treated including how they are accused of undercutting wages. K said he wished that Celtic FC would emphasize its roots as an immigrant club more because it is a “*fantastic story*”. He brought up an important argument when he said that this has much potential for attracting newly arrived immigrants. D explained that there is a strong working-class identity amongst Celtic supporters. This is illustrated in the large number of people who show up for the charity collections at Celtic Park. On the Ball pointed out that Celtic has stuck to its working-class roots and that this is important part of Celtic supporter activism. Interviewees also often brought up the immigrant collective identity. K brought up an interesting point when he described how football supporters’ working-class collective identity leads to biases from Scottish authorities, press and other institutions. K’s solution that football should be aware of its huge socio-economic contributions is in my opinion very important.

In chapter four we saw that according Polletta and Jaspars (2001) collective identities can answer 4 questions which the traditional social movements which were focused on the structural

could not answer. The first is: “*why social movement emerge when they do*”(p. 284). A question has been whether identity comes before the mobilizations (286, 290). They pointed out that new social movements have cultural goals in addition to political goals and do continual identity work (p. 291). The second is about peoples` motivation to act. The third question was about movements` choice of strategies, tactics and forms of organization. The fourth question was: “*How successful are movements? And how do they affect individuals, groups and broader structures?*” (p. 284).

My findings do show that Celtic supporter activists do indeed have both political and cultural goals. This is consistent with other new social movements. For example, the Invisibles and On the Ball want to get the structural in place with free sanitary products and provisions to the homeless community respectively. In addition to this they also want to change the culture, stigmas and false myths which surrounds this. Therefore, raising awareness and social inclusion are important parts of their activism. We also saw that interlocutors explained that being subjected to anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry is something that fuels Celtic supporters` activism. Indeed, Celtic supporter activists` strong empathy and solidarity with other marginalized and oppressed groups were frequently brought up in interviews.

I will argue that in Celtic supporter activism, collective identities come before mobilization. After all, it was the Irish-Catholic immigrant community who rallied to establish Celtic in the wake of the Great Irish Hunger and mass-immigration to Glasgow. Celtic in turn became a free space where collective supporter activist identities were established. In chapter four, we saw how Bradley (2006) explains that a sport stadium or sport field becomes: “*a space for the construction, maintenance and expression of identity*” (p. 54). We also saw that Bairnier and Shirlow who refers to sport as “*vehicles of identities*” (p. 152), emphasize that football is the most powerful sports for construction and reinforcements of identities (1999). Therefore, being football oriented means that Celtic supporter activists also do continual identity work.

The third question is how movements chose strategies, tactics and organizational forms. As discussed in section 6.2 Celtic supporter activists tend to use non-institutional strategies and tactics. Moreover, Celtic FC itself started as started as grassroots activism in 1887 by a marginalized immigrant community. Today Celtic supporter activists are continuing this heritage. For example, the social activist groups the Invisibles and On the Ball are examples of grassroots activism. As for the last question there is no doubt that Celtic supporter activists are overall a successful movement. In chapter 5 we have seen several examples of successful

campaigns ranging from charity to pure political activism. My overall conclusion is therefore that Celtic supporter activists' collective identities do indeed play an important role in their activism.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1. Introduction

The purpose of this master thesis was to gain insight into Celtic supporter activism. I used new social movement as a theoretical framework when I explored this. In this discourse new social movements are characterized by a focus both the structural and identity (Peoples, 2019). I also looked at the concepts of free spaces and collective identities and free spaces in social movements drawing on the works of Polletta (1999) and Polletta and Jasper (2001). Finally, I attempted to reconceptualize new social movements, collective identities and free spaces by looking on research in sport sociology on this. This included research by Bradley, Totten, Bairnier and Shirlow amongst others. I conducted four field trips to Glasgow and Belfast where I had 11 in-depth interviews. I also used methods as observations, participant-observations and field conversations. This was in turn analyzed.

My research question was: *to what extent does Celtic supporter activism constitute a new social movement?* To find the answer, I created the following five sub research questions:

- a) *To what extent and how do Celtic supporters work to bring about social and political change?*
- b) *What are Celtic supporter activists' strategies, tactics, tools and methods?*
- c) *Which role do social inequality and social injustice play in Celtic supporter activism?*
- d) *Which role do Celtic supporter activists ascribe to activism in their supporter identity and what motivate their activism?*
- e) *How has Celtic become a free space for establishing collective identities which in turn fuels Celtic supporter activism?*

7.2. To what extent does Celtic supporter activism constitute a new social movement?

The three first sub questions pertained to Peoples (2019) description of traditional social movements as:

Groups of people organizing to bring about – or resist- social change-using, at least in part, non-institutional strategy and tactics (also known as unconventional politics) Most social movements have social inequality and injustice as core concerns and mobilize around these issues (p. 17).

Sub-question a asked: *to what extent and how do Celtic supporters work to bring about social and political change?* My findings show that Celtic supporter are skillful and efficient in bringing about social and political changes. Social activism as well as political activism play an important role in the Celtic community. Celtic supporters` social and political activism are diverse and their causes are often both local and global. Celtic supporter activists also often work to bring about changes on a on a macro-level by raising awareness of the issues.

Sub-question b: *what are Celtic supporter activists` strategies, tactics, tools and methods?* applies to Peoples` second requirement for social movements, which is the usage of non-institutional strategies and tactics. My research indicates that Celtic supporter activists are inclined to use these. The very notion of using football as a springboard for activism is in itself unconventional. However, because football is the world`s most popular sport and Celtic is a world- famous team, Celtic supporter activists reach a wide audience. My results also point to bottom-up, anti-establishment and rebellious aspects to Celtic supporter activism. This is turn is reflected in their strategies, tactics, tools and methods.

Sub question c: *Which roles do social inequality and social injustice play in Celtic supporter activism?* concerns Peoples` last requirement which is that most social movements have social inequality and injustice as core concerns and mobilize around these. My research show that social inequality and injustice are major concerns for Celtic supporter activists who rally around these. Many Celtic supporters have personally experienced anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry. In addition, many also feel that Celtic FC is discriminated against because of its Irish roots. This is in turn drives their activism. Solidarity with other oppressed groups is a cornerstone in Celtic supporter activism

I also explored collective identities of Celtic supporter activists and what Celtic means to them. This was to ascertain to what degree they fulfil criteria for being a new social movement. The last two sub questions were therefore: *Which roles do Celtic supporter activists ascribe to*

activism in their supporter identity and what motivates their activism? and: *How has Celtic become a free space for establishing collective identities which in turn fuels Celtic supporter activism?* My findings also show that it is Celtic supporter activism is deeply rooted in the wider Celtic community. The fact that Celtic FC was formed as a charity and a result of grassroots activism by a marginalized Irish-Catholic immigrant community is very meaningful and motivating for supporter activists. Being inclusive is an integral part of Celtic supporter activists' ethos. Close personal relationship, identities and alliances are also forged via support of the club and activism.

It is evident that Celtic has functioned as a free space for the Irish diaspora in Scotland. Today, it continues to be a free space. Although, anti-Irish racism and anti-Catholic bigotry have decreased it is still there. Bradley (2006) refers to Celtic as space of empowerment and a primary environment where: "*Irish confidence, celebration and assertion takes place*" (p. 57). After Belfast Celtic was forced out of football in 1948, the Glasgow based club also became an important free space for the oppressed Catholic community in the North of Ireland. It is evident that Celtic was and continues to be a deeply meaningful place as well as source of motivation for the Belfast interlocutors who lived through the worst of the violent conflict in the North of Ireland. My findings also show that Celtic is a free space where collective identities have been established and which in turn fuels Celtic supporter activism. In chapter four we saw how football and identity often goes hand in hand. When I was conducting my research, I found that especially six collective identities are prevalent amongst Celtic supporter activists. These were Irish, Catholic, immigrant, inclusive, left-wing, and working- class collective identities.

Another significant finding is how important and integral activism is to the Celtic community. However, the values are largely the same. There is a strong spirit of activism and charity in the Celtic community. Celtic FC has a long tradition of charity and was formed by the Irish-Catholic immigrant community in the wake of the Great Irish Hunger. Today, the club is very involved with charity via its charitable foundation: the Celtic FC Foundation. On an individual level, many described activism as a natural and integral part of their lives. An Irish interlocutor referred to activism as something Celtic supporters "*are*". I will therefore argue that Celtic supporter activism becomes more than activism.

The overall conclusion of my thesis is therefore that Celtic supporter activists to a very large extent constitutes a new social movement. My research show that they are very much focused on structure including structural inequality. Identity too is important for Celtic supporter

activists. Their activism is anchored in different collective identities associated with Celtic and Celtic supporter activism.

7.3. Suggestions for further research

Celtic supporter activism is a wide and far-reaching topic which warrants further research. Therefore, it might be interesting to do case studies on specific campaigns and their results. Another theme for further research could be a comparative study between Celtic supporter activists and supporter activists from other football clubs. For example it could be interesting to do a comparison to a smaller community club like St.Roch`s F.C. which also was formed by the Irish-Catholic immigrant community and Celtic. When I was doing background research on the Long Kesh Celtic Supporters` Club, I wasn`t able to find any published material. However, how Celtic kept the Irish republican prisoners` spirit up in harsh circumstances is a fascinating story. A comparative study on the similarities and differences between roles football via Celtic and Gaelic games played amongst the republican prisoners would certainly be interesting to read.

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