

**Banning Bottled Water in Concord, MA:
How an Apolitical Commodity Became Political**

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In conformity with the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts, Anthropology

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Abstract

This thesis paper explores how various actors gathered around bottled water when a ban was put into place in Concord, Massachusetts. The objective has been to answer the following questions: How does an apolitical commodity become a political one? Specifically, how does bottled water move from being an apolitical commodity to become a highly political one? What does this mean for environmental politics? I situate my theoretical approach within Martha Kaplan's research with fountains and coolers. I use Bruno Latour to show in which ways this ban became a matter of concern, as well as how the ban and the plastic bottle are actors. I conducted fieldwork in Concord and I interviewed participants. My findings reveal that the ban brought meanings to the surface and challenged them or supported them in various ways. The discussions turned from the impact of bottled water on our environment to the political impact of bottled water companies and large corporations on local Concord issues.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

My interest in bottled water began after I saw the documentary *Blue Gold: World Water Wars*, (2008) directed by Sam Bozzo. The film exposes current environmental and political consequences of our planet's diminishing clean water supply and predicts that future wars will be fought over access to and possession of water. I liked to think of myself as somewhat 'environmentally conscious'; I used cloth shopping bags, I ate vegetarian and mostly local food from farmers' markets, and I had rarely bought a plastic bottle of water, mostly because it seemed like a waste of money and plastic. I preferred to tote around my reusable bottle and find free places to refill it. I had grown up drinking tap water and although I could taste subtle differences in the water from home versus when I travelled, it never bothered me and I grew accustomed to it. However, I had paid little attention to how often classmates, colleagues, and strangers I saw on the street were buying and drinking from plastic bottles of water.

After watching *Blue Gold: World Water Wars*, I developed a keen interest in this massive industry that, according to the film, was tricking consumers into paying for something they are already getting nearly for free. I learned that in Canada and the United States it costs less than a penny to turn on your tap and refill your glass or your reusable bottle. By contrast, it can cost anywhere between 500 and 10,000 times more to buy a bottle of water (Blue Gold 2008). Yet the bottled water industry is thriving. Americans are the global leaders in bottled water consumption. Every second of every day, over a thousand Americans buy and gulp a bottle of water, and each of those Americans throw a bottle away. This totals 85 million bottles per

day (Gleick 2010, IX) and 8.2 billion gallons of water annually (Etkin 2009, 191). These statistics left me feeling angered that a seemingly avoidable problem was causing such destruction to our environment. These plastic bottles are not simply “recycled and then melted down into a new bottle”, as one of my fieldwork participants suggested. The bottles either accumulate in landfills or are recycled using an extremely energy-intensive process.

For my thesis, I set out to find a researchable aspect of bottled water activism; a situation where people were actively fighting to do something about this growing trend. I thought it would be interesting to learn about how, given the above facts, people were going against the trend on more than a personal level. I stumbled upon a newspaper article that detailed how residents from a town in the Greater Boston Area had voted to ban the sale of single-serving PET¹ water bottles. I immediately knew I had location for my Master’s research, and I was especially intrigued when I learned that the initiative for the ban had been thought up and carried out by a grandmother in her eighties, Jean Hill, who wished to help her town reduce its plastic consumption.

I felt a strong connection with Jean even before I eventually met with her at her house to discuss what led her to the idea of banning bottled water in her home town of Concord, Massachusetts. I read in a *New York Times* article by Abby Goodnough (2010), and later confirmed myself, that it was Jean’s grandson who had shown her pictures online of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch. The patch, also described as the Pacific Trash Vortex, is located within the North Pacific Gyre. It is

¹ Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) is a thermoplastic polymer resin of the polyester family. It is used in synthetic fibers, thermoforming applications, and engineering resins (commonly in combination with glass fiber).

one of the five major oceanic gyres and is a gyre of marine debris that extends over an indeterminate area. I felt inspired by Jean's actions, especially because I shared a concern about the state of the environment with her, and bottled water had brought us together. This thesis is an analysis of how a concern with bottled water is dealt with concretely by various actors in Concord.

After asking herself what she could do to help reduce the amount of plastic produced and discarded, Jean submitted an article to Concord's Town Meeting in 2010 suggesting that the town make it illegal to sell plastic bottles of water. The article was one simple line: "Ban the sale of bottled water in town". The article passed, but was not approved by the Massachusetts State Attorney General's office because it lacked proper wording and clarity. It was unenforceable because it did not include any exemptions or details on how it should be enforced.

In the fall of 2010, Jean approached Maude, another Concord resident who had experience in submitting articles to Town Meeting, and explained to Maude that she wanted to resubmit the article for 2011's annual Town Meeting. Together they enlisted the help of a local attorney to draft a formal bylaw². This new bylaw is much more explicit as to what type of bottle is covered under the ban, what exemptions for emergencies are in place, and what the repercussions are for selling PET bottles of water including and less than 1 litre³ in town.

Jean and Maude then submitted this drafted formal bylaw at the beginning of 2011 in order for it to be a presented item at April's Town Meeting. The two women began a campaign called Concord on Tap in order to help get this bylaw drafted and

² See Appendix 1 for the official bylaw.

³ Jean decided that the ban should cover bottles including and less than 1 litre because, according to her research, this size was the most common of all formats purchased by Americans.

were joined at regular meetings by anywhere between six and eight supporters. In 2011 at April's Town Meeting, the campaign lost in a vote by residents with 265 for and 272 against⁴. Concord on Tap's team then rested, took the summer off, and decided in the fall of 2011 to try one more time in April of 2012 at the next Town Meeting.

The motion passed at Town Meeting on April 25, 2012 through an extremely narrow vote of 403 for the ban and 364 against the ban. After the written bylaw was approved by Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coaxley's office⁵, Concord became the first municipality in North America to ban the sale of plastic bottled water in containers of less than 1 litre. The ban officially went into effect on January 1, 2013.

Other than Concord's ban, there is one other town in the world that undertook a similar ban. In 2009, the town of Bundanoon, Australia became the first town in the world to ban "mass-marketed still water offered for commercial sale in sealed 'single-use' plastic bottles" (Bundy on Tap website). Concord is now the second town in the world to do the same. Both of the towns exempt carbonated water, soft drinks, juice, and any other beverage that is not water sold in plastic bottles from their bans. Concord's bylaw also allows exemptions to the ban during emergencies⁶.

I find it useful to map out the ban's process by picturing an hourglass shape. Jean came up with a very general goal of reducing plastic consumption in town, which then became more explicit by reducing the plastic bottles that specifically

⁴ Concord practices direct open voting at their Town Meetings; any resident of Concord who is a registered voter can choose to attend a meeting and cast a vote.

⁵ The release is too lengthy to be included in an appendix, but a copy can be accessed from Concord on Tap's website: <http://www.concordontap.org/resources/links>

⁶ See Appendix 1 for more detail.

carried water. The idea was further narrowed when the ban had to be made more specific by accounting for exemptions to the ban, as well as identifying which bottles of water could no longer be sold in town. After the ban took effect, the story opens up again when it began to reach a wide varieties of actors in town who then adopted the ban (or did not), interpreted it, and adjusted to it (or not). A large environmental issue was narrowed into this bylaw, was made to be very specific, and then it opened up again when it is lived by people affected by it. Public spaces and town infrastructure, such as public fountains delivering tap water, are also reshaped during this process.

I began research in Concord in late May 2013, nearly five months after the ban officially went into effect. Once I knew at what point in this story I would be entering the field, I had to develop a research strategy that would be useful in exploring how the story emerged and was still emerging from this ban, as told by various actors who had emerged with it. I ask: How does an apolitical commodity become a political one? Specifically, how does bottled water move from being an apolitical commodity to become a highly political one? This ban was thought of, developed, and encouraged by a small team of residents, but in the end any eligible voter who lived in town was able to vote for or against the implementation of the ban. I am thus interested in exploring how the people in town deal with this ban. Asking how the bottle became political, in this case as seen through a ban on the sale of plastic bottles, includes asking how people live with the ban and give life to it through talking about it, coping with it, connecting to it, and purposefully opposing it.

I also ask: what does this mean for environmental politics? Bottled water was originally framed as an environmental concern to push through a ban, one which

afterwards extends to other concerns which conflict and create a controversy. I wish to uncover what ways the ban allows residents to reconsider bottled water, and therefore both the plastic and the water combined into this product, in ways they may not have otherwise thought of. I want to know what was uncovered and brought to the surface via the forum of discussion that this ban created.

In this thesis, I am giving one story of bottled water, one story of a town's personal and internal conflict surrounding a broad environmental concern. One woman's general desire to do her part in reducing unnecessary plastic consumption rippled outwards after she took a legal route to reach others. This eventually affects and brings into question how her community considers bottled water, and in turn allows us to ask bigger questions about how bottled water's role shapes the way we relate to water, plastic, and our environment.

In Chapter 2: Theory, I explain why the methodological approach I select is the best way to consider this subject matter. To explain my theoretical approach, I give an overview of where bottled water came from, and use author Richard Wilk to uncover the ways the ornate cultural meanings of water are used in marketing and branding bottled water, and the forms of consumer resistance that oppose bottled water as a commodity. I locate this gathering in Concord around a controversy within the cultural biography of a thing, I discuss the reasons why I believe Concord residents recognize bottled water as a commodity, and I look at how this impacts my approach. I also draw upon Martha Kaplan, an anthropologist who studies water and its multiple social meanings, and I will situate my theoretical approach within her story of public water fountains and privately owned water coolers on a university campus in upper New York State. I also use Bruno Latour's work on matters of

concern to follow what is going on in Concord and, in particular, follow this instance of bottled water. Latour provides an approach which helps me to assemble everything that I perceive as being joined by this ban, and allows me to investigate how the ban turned an object into a thing.

In Chapter 3: Methods, I explain my methodological approach; how I collected data. I briefly review what I did before I left for fieldwork as preparatory work, and I give explicit details on how I developed a methodological strategy to meet the people involved with and drawn into this ban. This chapter tells of how I recruited participants for my study, clarifies how I gathered my qualitative data, and goes on to elaborate how I went about transcribing the thirteen interviews I conducted.

In Chapter 4: Results, I analyse the interviews I conducted according to the theoretical approach I apply, with relation to the fieldwork I did. The ban is a new matter of concern, and through my interviews I explore how it was environmentalized, politicized, and legalized over the course of its story (which is still unfolding). My study design and subsequent fieldwork allow for a glimpse into a moment of this ban's life course, and the results chapter elaborates on what I was able to uncover of interest during my interviews. I visit the main actors, both human and non-human, that shared memories and thoughts with me and brought this particular instance to life. I also include discussion on various topics that the actors brought forth and are of particular importance to how bottled water became a politicized commodity in Concord. I follow with comments on the actions being undertaken in town to cope with the ban by local businesses that are now required to comply with the bylaw.

And finally, in Chapter 5: Conclusions, I demonstrate what my project has accomplished by suggesting conclusions that can be made from my research, and predict what the future looks like for this ban in Concord, as well what this ban means for bottled water bans. In this section I show what I learned, what I would have done differently, and I suggest where we can go from here for future research. I also allow the actors from both campaigns to speak about where they plan on going from this place.

It is worth noting that the more I talked with residents and others affected by this ban, the more I began to grasp the innumerable amount of meanings a person can associate with a thing. What a bottle of water means to one resident in Concord is completely different from what it means to a neighbour. How a person uses, or does not use, a bottle of water impacts how a person relates to it. For example, to the residents who developed and carried out a campaign to ban bottled water in town, bottles of water can signify environmental nightmare, destruction of natural resources, privatization, consumerism, and media trickery. For the residents who oppose the ban, bottles of water can signify freedom of choice, Americanism, modernity, health and wellness, social status, and good parenting.

For both those for and against the ban, a bottle of water signifies so much more than simply water in a plastic bottle that contains water, and this came through when the ban was put into place. A lot of meanings for water and plastic bottles came to the surface in ways that could only have been uncovered when a ban is put in place. The ban signifies so much more than just restriction to bottled water, because bottled water comes to embody a range of associations such as fear, health and wellness, profit, or waste. It is not as simple as telling people to just drink

from the tap, nor is it as simple as saying asking for the right to choose what to purchase for a family.

I discuss two principal conclusions that I make. First, what I discovered is not only do people associate different meanings to a thing (in this case a bottle of water and a ban that restricts their right to purchase this thing) but that these meanings are not set and shift and evolve over time because they are impacted by significant events that occur.

Second, originally the ban signified taking a stand against environmental destruction, as Jean intended. After the ban went into place and repeal efforts began, many town residents became uncomfortable with the amount of outside influence the town was feeling from large, multi-national corporations such as Nestlé and the International Bottled Water Association. From then on there was a significant shift in the main discussion from environmental concerns to small town politics and the influence of outsiders. Due to the route Jean took to ban bottled water, as well as the controversy brought forth through efforts to repeal the ban, an apolitical object became a political thing. Jean's team framed bottled water as an environmental concern, but after pushing it through a ban and dealing with repeal efforts, the focus in town shifted from 'what can this ban do for the world', to 'what does this ban mean for my town'.

Chapter 2: Theory

I wish to bring a more thorough and grounded understanding of how people and water assemble in practice, more precisely around a ban, and what surfaces as a result of this assemblage. However, in order to effectively discuss a ban on plastic bottles of water, it is necessary for me to briefly explore where this immensely popular trend of making, selling, and consuming bottled water originated from and what are the current implications.

Plastic water bottles have not always been as popular as they are today; when the French company Perrier first launched a campaign in the United States in 1977, only sophisticated green glass bottles were to be found. Perrier linked their water product with exclusivity and health by paying celebrities to be seen drinking their beverage and by sponsoring the New York City Marathon in 1979 (Etkin 2009, 189). With the introduction of high-density polyethylene⁷ it became easier for manufacturers to mass produce lightweight, individually sized plastic water bottles which, in comparison with glass bottles, garnered relatively low production costs. “Plastic changed the social life of bottled water, it enabled it to move into places it had never been before, its material promise and possibilities dramatically expanded the uses for and identities of the bottle” (Hawkins 185).

High-end companies such as Evian and Poland Spring began campaigns to advertise their newly-portable brands. It was not until the early 1990s that large retailers such as the Coca-Cola Company and PepsiCo began to notice a slow decline in their carbonated and sugary beverage sales (Etkin 2009). With signs of a

⁷ A polyethylene thermoplastic prepared from petroleum.

more health-driven society emerging, popular soda brands decided to buy into this new market by introducing their own brands. The four big names today are Coca-Cola Company (Dasani), PepsiCo (Aquafina), Nestlé Waters (Nestlé Pure Life, Poland Springs, Ice Mountains, among others), and Groupe Danone (Evian, Volvic, among others). These four companies encompass what author Nancy L. Etkin has labelled “multibrand corporate consolidation”; together they now control 50% of global sales (Etkin 2009, 189). In 2003, bottled water surpassed coffee, tea, milk, and beer sales to become the second largest beverage category in the United States (Gamble 2009, 255), remaining only behind soft drinks.

Catherine Ferrier’s article “Bottled Water: Understanding a Social Phenomenon” (2001) was key to shaping how I approached the situation in Concord because through her overview of the bottled water market situation, I came to realize that I wished to draw attention to much more than simply the reasons people drink or do not drink bottled water. Ferrier’s article gave me ideas for topics to further investigate during my fieldwork, and in a way it gave me the desire to catapult forward from her existing analysis. Ferrier demonstrates a thorough analysis of the social phenomenon which is bottled water; she provides background information on bottled water and the bottled water world market in order to understand the growing trend. She explains the difference between the multiple products which make up the bottled water category (natural mineral water, spring water, and purified water are laid out in depth), she lists the various types of companies that make up the bottled water industry, and she speaks to the certain way of life that consumption of bottled water creates. Of particular interest to me was her discussion concerning the changes in way of life that allowed for bottled

water's popularity, such as increasing urbanisation, increasing standards of living and the automobile as a common mode of transportation (cases of bottled water are easier to transport into a home by means of a car, rather than walking or bicycling), and the demonstration that drinking expensive bottled water is a sign of a rise in the social scale (18). I allowed Ferrier's general insights to inform me, but I tailored my approach specifically for Concord's case and used her article as background information. I am interested in the pieces that had to fall into place which allowed for bottled water consumption to become a growing trend, but I wish to move on from that and ask more questions specifically about the ways in which discussions surrounding bottled water transformed through a ban in Concord.

In his article "Bottled Water: The pure commodity in the age of branding" (2006), Richard Wilk explains that "water has a special symbolic status in the world of goods, because it is like air, an absolute necessity for survival" (305). It is not merely a *part* of the natural world but rather *is* nature in the sense that every living organism on our planet relies on water. It is because of this fact – water is such a universal substance – that it inevitably raises moral and ethical issues (307). Throughout history, public struggles over access to clean drinking water, the recognition of water as a basic human right, and water as a public service have surfaced on every continent. Wilk notes that "during the last 20 years, as neoliberal economic policies and conservative philosophies of the market have become more dominant, the privatization of water has become a material and symbolic political issue that has sparked protest and popular movements in developing countries". For the wealthy, bottled water has come to represent waste, environmental catastrophe,

exploitation through marketing, and the “bankrupt absurdity of mass-consumer society as a whole” (305).

Consumers are faced with hundreds of campaigns each year put forth by bottled water companies that lead us to question the safety of drinking water from the tap. For example, Cleveland officials and many residents took offense to Fiji Water’s campaign in 2006 after seeing an advertisement by the water bottle giant in Esquire magazine: “The label says Fiji because it’s not bottled in Cleveland” (Gleick 2010, 15). However, studies have consistently shown that tap water in North America is overall not dangerous and is, in many cases, actually safer than bottled water due to stricter water quality standards and testing requirements (Anisfeld 2010, 196). The US Environmental Protection Agency governs municipal tap water, while the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates bottled water as a food product under the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act. The FDA supervision applies only to water sold across state lines and therefore between 60-70% of the American bottled water market may be exempt from FDA oversight (Etkin 2009, 190). In addition, approximately 60% of water bottled in the United States is purified water (drawn from surface or underground sites and treated through processes such as deionization, distillation, and reverse osmosis) which differs from regular tap water only in how it is distributed to consumers (Etkin 2009, 190). As we see further in this thesis, it is almost ironic to note that while the bottled water industry simultaneously “actively delegitimizes public water” (Parag and Roberts 2009, 633), it is the same water which the industry relies most heavily upon. Bottled water has transformed water from a public good into a branded commodity. Barbara Lippert, an Ad Critic at Adweek Media stated in the documentary “Tapped”, a movie about

exposing the dark side of the bottled water industry and its effects, "bottled water is the greatest advertising and marketing trick of all time" (Tapped 2009).

In this thesis, I speak of commodities and commodity fetishism. It is useful to note Karl Marx's contribution to this topic of study, particularly through his critique of the political economy of capitalism and commodity fetishism. In the first chapter of his book *Capital: Critique of Political Economy* (originally published in 1867), Marx explains that a commodity is a use-value as well as an exchange-value. As a use-value, the commodity is something that meets a human want or need of any kind, while the exchange-value of a commodity is simply an expression of its value (57). Marx's theory of commodity fetishism is presented in his same book at the conclusion of the analysis of the value-form of commodities. He does so in order to explain that the social organisation of labour is mediated through market exchange; the buying and the selling of commodities (goods and services). Marx understands fetishism as social relationships involved in production, not as relationships among humans, but as economic relationships among the money and commodities exchanged in market (81). Commodity fetishism alters the subjective, abstract aspects of economic value into objective, real things that people perceive to have intrinsic value. Therefore, in a capitalist society, social relations between people are understood as economic relations among objects; how valuable a given commodity is when equated to another commodity (85). Marx further suggests that the market exchange of commodities obscures the real economic character of the human relations of production between the worker and the capitalist (86). Later in this thesis, I explore further the notion of value, and the significance of shifts in value of water as a commodity.

By switching from drinking tap water to bottled water, consumers are able to show their choice method of hydration and often make the switch because of distrust in public sources of water. However, by supporting the bottled water industry, we are putting money into a for-profit business that does not have any interest in maintaining the quality of tap water, other than at the filtration plants where their water passes through before being bottled. Therefore, instead of supporting the restoration of public water facilities, which are in dire need of continual support, the facilities begin to degrade and because of the lack of support. These infrastructure backlogs have led to sporadic high-profile instances of unsafe water, contributing to a growing public distrust of tap water quality (Parag and Roberts 2009). John Vail also notes,

When people opt for private services, they often prove less willing to fund public goods, the quality of public services subsequently worsens, thereby weakening the very rationale for these goods and creating a vicious spiral of decline that grievously corrodes the public's trust of government services and damages the very possibility of cultivating a shared sense of community upon which a democratic citizenship is founded (2010, 326).

Wilk explains, "The progressive expansion of water as a commodity is as much the result of a failure of governments to fulfill public obligations, as it is due to the craftiness of the marketers of bottled water" (307). And further, Wilk notes that unlike with, for example, food products, it is more difficult for consumers to vote in the marketplace for and against certain products or certain companies when it comes to water. "Water in some ways disenfranchises the consumer-citizen of the modern 'consumer's republic'" (Wilk, 315) because if you wish to oppose bottled water, you can only make the invisible choice by drinking tap water. Although Wilk states that "the only way to announce publicly that you abhor bottled water is to

carry a refillable plastic bottle around” (315), I disagree and wish to put forth the example of Concord. I agree that on an individual basis it is difficult to display your choice through a purchase in the way you may choose organic over non-organic produce, but I wish to continue Wilk’s thoughts and demonstrate that as a community it is possible to collectively vote for an alternative.

The core of Wilk’s paper focuses on bottled water as a commodity and the way in which water is rooted in historically grounded cultural meanings. This in turn becomes fuel for both marketers who want to sell bottled water and, as I explore in Concord, those who wish to oppose it (307). I let this argument shape my theoretical approach by arguing that the meanings people in Concord associate with a thing directly impact how they relate to it and, therefore, how they either oppose or accept the ban on bottled water. One of these meanings, which I elaborate further on through an exploration of Kaplan’s case study in this chapter, centers on health and purity: both of the body and of the home. Wilk suggests that if bottled water has come to represent purity, vitality, and cleanliness, in doing so it has cast a shadow on tap water which to some bears thoughts of dangers and filth. “If we think of the house and home as extensions of the body, personal and intimate, then anything that crosses the boundary between the public world and the house is potentially dangerous and impure” (311). I suspected that water for consumption in Concord enters the home in one of two ways; it is either taken from the tap, or it is purchased and either brought home by the homeowner or it is delivered to the home. In both cases, as Wilk explains, water crosses the boundary of public to private, and through personal consumption becomes a symbol of healthiness, or unhealthiness, depending on what the consumer believes. I applied these thoughts to my own

investigation by noticing how my participants view both sources of water in their homes and their communities.

Wilk comments that at some level, social scientists can at least attempt to make sense and reason out of bottled water. However, we cannot lose sight of what he suggests is the “ultimate absurdity”: the environmental destruction through waste and water extraction and the inequality of the bottled-water trade (319). Water is taken from often already depleted sources and transported to regions which have access to safe drinking water. The plastic bottles are typically used only once and then discarded and moved to one of the heaping piles of plastic waste around the globe, or recycled through an energy-intensive process at public expense. Wilk notes:

We have a world economy in which more than a billion people do not have access to any kind of regular clean water supply, while another billion are spending huge amounts of money on water that provides only a tiny marginal benefit in their lives. Just a part of the money spent on bottled water each year would be enough to provide clean water systems for many of those who go without. (319)

Although I find it difficult to make sense out of bottled water for many reasons that exceed simply the environmental impacts of the entire process, Wilk did shape my way of approaching what is going on in Concord because my initial research before entering the field had suggested Concord on Tap focused mainly on concern for the environment at the beginning of the campaign, but I had to move beyond this reasoning and attempt to understand why there was so much resistance to banning bottled water which ‘provides only a tiny marginal benefit in their lives’.

To move beyond attending solely to bottled water as a commodity, I partly follow Igor Kopytoff (1986) who gives insights on the ways a thing becomes a commodity. His approach will help situate my own, even though I am interested in a

different approach; namely how a commodity becomes a 'thing' as people problematize its very necessary existence (such as through a ban). I draw upon Kopytoff's article "The cultural biography of things: commoditization as process", found in Arjun Appadurai's edited collection *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective* (1986). Kopytoff employs an almost identical definition of a commodity as we saw earlier with Marx. Kopytoff understands a commodity to be "a thing that has use value and that can be exchanged in a discrete transaction for a counterpart, the very fact of exchange indicating that the counterpart has, in the immediate context, and equivalent value" (68). He also notes that anything that can be exchanged for and therefore bought for money is a commodity (69). According to Kopytoff's definition, bottled water is definitely a commodity since it can be bought for money. Bottled water is one of those things available in our society that some believe appropriate for marking as a commodity. However, because of the fact that a ban was voted into place, it becomes evident that some residents of Concord do not agree that it should keep its status as a commodity, and therefore problematizing bottled water as an object. I apply this understanding of bottled water as a commodity to understand what is going on in the discussions emerging around the ban. This approach allows me to see how it becomes a subject of discussion, rather than a taken for granted object and commodity.

Kopytoff then moves from this understanding of a commodity to bring forth what he calls a cultural biography of a thing. "Where does the thing come from and who made it? [...] How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?" (66-67). My approach somewhat follows the story of bottled water as it becomes an environmental, political and legal

issue and thus somewhat a mediator or actor in making the social through questioning its very existence. My approach differs from Kopytoff's in that I focus on what occurs as a result of a gathering around the issue of bottle water; my approach does not look specifically at where the bottles and the water came from before they arrived in and were eventually banned. I instead look at how people gather around this instance of bottled water, in particular through a ban on the sale of them. In some ways I am focusing on a particular period in bottled water's lifecycle; yet instead of tracing a complete biography of this thing, I arrive at the apparent end of its existence in Concord, and I piece together stories from the actors that are connected through the ban.

In his book *Consumer Boycotts: Effecting Change through the Marketplace and the Media* (1999), Monroe Friedman uses his working definition of a consumer boycott as "an attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace" (4). It is important to note three key characteristics of this definition: the focus on individual consumers instead of organizational entities, the lack of limitations in boycott ends or goals to those of the marketplace, and its emphasis on urging consumers to withdraw selectively from participation in the marketplace (5).

Friedman explains that "Since the Revolutionary War, it can be argued that the boycott has been used more than any other organizational technique to promote and protect the rights of the powerless and disenfranchised segments of society" (3). Although members of the campaign Concord on Tap in fact went further than simply urging consumers to stop buying bottled water and actually urged consumers to vote a ban into place that would make it illegal for retailers to sell bottled water in

Concord, I find much of Friedman's discussion on consumer boycotts relevant to the case in Concord. In a sense, Concord on Tap asked citizens to impose a local boycott by voting for the removal of bottled water from the shelves of stores in Concord. Citizens went beyond what Friedman calls a commodity boycott; asking consumers to refrain from buying all brands and models in a product or service category (9) (for example, asking consumers to choose not to buy bottled water), and instead made it illegal for retailers to sell a product and therefore took away the choice of the consumer to purchase or boycott.

Friedman includes a chapter specifically devoted to exploring ecological boycotts. He suggests that because ecological boycotts are a relatively new phenomenon, there is a gap in scholarly literature on these initiatives (181). His team decided to conduct their own survey study of recently initiated ecological boycotts –that is environmental protection groups and animal rights groups – and he shared their results in his book. A key concern of his interview study was to “determine what lessons could be learned from the boycott experiences to help activists work more effectively to secure the goal of a sustainable future” (197). I believe that Concord on Tap falls under the broad category of an environmental protection group. What I find of relevance for informing my own research is Friedman's discussion linking ecological boycotts with the goal of a sustainable future. He suggests that a case could be made for organized consumer action in the form of boycotts as one of the more striking tactics available to regular people seeking to secure a sustainable future (198).

[...] in theory, the boycott permits such individuals to exercise “economic democracy” every day with their purchases in the marketplace by rewarding companies whose actions are ecologically sound and by punishing companies whose actions are not. By

joining a boycott campaign, consumers are able, in theory, to exert economic pressure on corporations to influence their actions in ecologically desirable directions (198).

Although Concord's ban on the sale of plastic bottles of water cannot technically be labelled an ecological boycott since the town instead collectively voted the ban into law, it is relevant to note the importance of consumer choice in rewarding and penalizing ecologically sound practices by companies, such as Nestlé, PepsiCo, and Coca-Cola.

Next, I situate myself within current anthropological literature on bottled water, namely Martha Kaplan's article "Lonely Drinking Fountains and Comforting Coolers: Paradoxes of Water Value and Ironies of Water Use" (2011). Although a ban on bottled water has never, as far as I know, been undertaken as a research project by an anthropologist, Kaplan has already studied the fascinating stories that emerge through her work on bottled water from vending machines, privately owned coolers, and public fountains on a campus in upstate New York. Her work directly helps me to piece together the multiple roles and meanings that bottled water holds in Concord.

What I find most useful from Kaplan's considerations to apply in my own research is the way she allows us to ask questions about changing use values of bottled water, and how we must consider the ways in which these rise and fall in popularity are social. She states that "for most current water scholars, activists, and journalists, a social understanding of this [bottled] water story lies within our society's transformation to modernity and alienation: a trajectory of increasing commoditization, individualization, and privatization" (516). There has been a shift in the way that people treat and relate to water, demonstrated through the rise in

popularity of bottled water and the increasing concern over health issues directly related to public water sources. When a public good – water, in this case – is privatized, it is thereby threatened by corporate predation (516).

Kaplan and her research team went to a university campus in upstate New York to explore how people were getting their water. Her approach is useful for my own assessment of the social appearing around ways of managing water. Kaplan's approach helps me join what links surrounding a water source, as well as explore the personal meanings people associate with this source. She became interested in discussing water coolers in two sections: how people claim and use the coolers, and how they fetishize them. She found that throughout the course of her research, her team never found an 'unclaimed' water cooler on campus; each unit was maintained by a specific group, such as an administrative team, and each group was proud to have such a unit in their care. Communities had even formed around a cooler, assembling only after it had been put in place and uniting users through it. However, many participants that Kaplan interviewed did not know where the closest water fountain was, nor who, if anyone, maintained its upkeep.

Kaplan's findings illuminate the ways that people claim a cooler as their own and fetishize it through decorations and personal signs. This allows me to be aware of the ways groups can assemble around a thing, which leads me to wonder if individuals can also assemble around a personal bottle of water. From Kaplan, I am very mindful of the personal connections people make between coolers, (and therefore perhaps bottles of water) health, family, and positive community efforts. I consider how these links would be challenged through a ban, and therefore a severe threat, on bottled water. People on the campus that Kaplan visited were not

merely associating coolers with the location that he or she filled up a cup of water, but were also creating links otherwise unheard of when speaking of a public fountain. I directly apply Kaplan's findings to my theoretical approach by paying attention to the ways the social is being made. Essentially, this theoretical approach which follows Latour (2005), does not assume that the 'social' is something already there, but is something that is always being done in practices as people and things assemble. I could not assume that a ban on bottled water merely challenged some people's source of water, but rather that it also challenged associations that people create with this thing that I had yet to uncover, such as health and safety for their families. Perhaps the meanings that people associated with bottled water were on a more personal level than the meanings created through a shared water cooler, but I had to become aware of the links I had not previously imagined that were indirectly being brought to the surface and challenged by this ban.

Kaplan states that "linking water, water sources, and health, people often contrasted drinking fountain water and cooler water" (529). People did not see the drinking fountain or public water as the source of any type of social and sanitation progress, but rather boasted about their shared cooler's life-enhancing properties such as increased hydration. Some people even moved on their own initiative from speaking about water coolers and health to other non-health related service or volunteer organizations, or other groups that they belonged to, for example a volunteer fire company or a battered women's shelter (530).

Kaplan sets off in a similar fashion that I do: she recognizes that there has been a shift in the public's use of drinking water, and found a site where she could further explore how water uses are realized in the social. The social is being made

around relations to water and plastic through the unconventional communities that form. However, our studies differ because Kaplan is more interested in the paradox of how water can gain or lose value, for example how does a drinking fountain lose its purpose and position of trust, while plastic bottles of water and coolers draw comfort from students and faculty alike. I am more interested in how a particular instance of bottled water shifts from being an apolitical object to a politicized thing, and what actors and stories arise in the midst of this transition.

Kaplan and I both draw upon Bruno Latour to show how our focus of research, either a water cooler or a ban on bottled water, is a thing. We investigate the sociality that gives these things life, and the plural social groups that water technologies or a ban on bottled water assemble (Kaplan, 534). I use in his article “Why has critique run out of steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern” (2004), as well as his book *Reassembling the social; an introduction to actor-network theory* (2005). I believe that remaining mindful of Latour’s theoretical argument towards a renewal of empiricism through dealing with matters of concern, not matters of fact, sheds light on how to approach a ban that allows for the transition of water from a object to a thing. Latour helps me to design a plan that investigates what is going on in Concord by following how things and people assemble when they are ‘doing’ the ban.

I was drawn to Latour’s method of approaching gatherings not because he has done research specifically on the topic of water or bottled water, but because I believe his approach is particularly enlightening for any social scientist. Latour helps understand how to follow the ways people and things assemble, namely around the many parts that make up this ban, and also how to approach this assemblage.

In *Reassembling the social* (2005), Latour writes, Actor Network Theory (ANT):

Is not the empty claim that objects do things 'instead' of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call non-humans. [...] The project of ANT is simply to extend the list and modify the shapes and figures of those assembled as participants and to design a way to make them act as a durable whole (72).

Using Latour's definition, ANT is understood as a relationship between entities which are in no way recognizable as being social in the conventional manner, *except* during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together. Social, for ANT, is the name of a type of fleeting association which is considered by the way it gathers together into new shapes (64). Latour's ANT allows me to recognize the multiple non-human actors that shape this gathering, including the bottle itself and the ban. In my Results Chapter, I visit each actor and explicitly detail why each one played a vital role in the transition of the plastic bottle of water from an apolitical commodity to a political one. I also outline why I see the bottle as an actor and as having agency.

Latour explains that social action is passed or delegated to different types of actors which are able to transport the action further through other manners of action, which are other types of forces altogether (70). He says that "bringing objects back into the normal course of action should appear innocuous enough" (70) because, for example, the kettle boils the water, knives cut the meat, and so on. If action is determined to be only what 'intentional', 'meaningful' humans do, then it is extremely difficult to understand how the kettle or the knife, or the hydrating bottles transporting water, or a ban on bottled water, could act (70). Latour adds that they

may “exist in the domain of ‘material’ ‘causal’ relations, but not in the ‘reflexive’ ‘symbolic’ domain of social relations” (71). However, Latour calls for social scientists to move towards the controversies about actors and agencies, as I did by moving towards the ban in Concord.

ANT is not the empty claim that objects do things ‘instead’ of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call *non-humans*. (71)

In Concord, does bottled water make a difference in the course of some other agent’s action or not? I argue that the answer is yes, and therefore bottled water can be recognized as an actor. Latour continues by adding, “In addition to ‘determining’ and serving as a ‘backdrop for human action’, things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on” (72). By this understanding, a ban which forbids humans to sell plastic bottles of water can be considered a thing and an actor.

In his article “Why has critique run out of steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern” (2004), Latour argues that an object, previously seen as a simple matter of fact, transitions to become a thing, now a matter of concern, through the associations and meanings given to it by the people who use it and, as Heidegger (1967) would say, gather around it. He gives the example of a handmade jug that is the result of many hours of labour and thought, and can be given as a gift with personal associations. This jug can be called a thing, while the industrially-made can of Coke (or, in this case, a bottle of water) remains a mere object (Latour, 233). In Concord, a bottle of water was at one point simply an object sitting on a store shelf among many other identical bottles of water. However, when the idea of

a ban on this object was introduced in town, these readily available bottles were now a topic of great interest and debate, thus becoming a thing. The entire town gathered through petitions, campaigns, public arenas of debate, and various methods of protest around this bottle and helped bring it from an accepted fact to a matter of concern. The ban and the resulting discussion of meanings associated with it made bottles of water in Concord things and not simply objects on a shelf. We are reminded of Kopytoff's discussion earlier of what can be labelled a commodity. Once water became recognized as a commodity because of the way it is presented to consumers, available for purchase, residents were given something to gather towards. Although I am drawn to this particular instance of bottled water, it is important to note that Kopytoff's recognition of the importance of a thing's biography (where it came from, what it meant at different stages of its life, and where it can go from here) shapes the transition of an object to a thing. Humans have pulled water's status from object to thing by putting it in a bottle and selling it. The commodification of water is an important stage in bottled water's cultural biography, as is the creation of a ban.

People, the human actors, mediate social assemblages, but non-human actors are equally significant players in this whole. What I find particularly interesting to note in this case is that water seems to overlap between both categories of human and non-human actor; water is not a person, but it comprises a vast part of what humans are made of, as noted above in discussion of Wilk's work. Water is non-human, but without it, humans would not exist, and can therefore be thought of as a quasi-human actor with agency. Water is a universally-known and needed

substance, and is shaped into commodity, thing, object, and subject depending on the biography it follows and how it is problematized. Water plays a different role as an actor when linked with environmental issues, politics, and source of all life. In the case of Concord, by recognizing water as a key non-human actor, we see the vital role that it plays in this assemblage.

Here I wish to expand further on what I mean by actors mediating social assemblages. Latour (2005) explains that it is vital to note whether the means to produce the social are taken as *intermediaries* or as *mediators*. An intermediary is “what transports meaning or force without transformation”, while mediators “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (39). I believe that bottled water is an actor as well as a mediator and that the ban assisted in transporting and shaping meanings. A mediator may appear simple, but can become complex; “it may lead in multiple directions which will modify all the contradictory accounts attributed to its role” (39). The ban allows bottled water to be pulled in different directions by the human and non-human actors in Concord, and I am interested in visiting the possibly contradictory accounts that people attribute to its role. Instead of being an intermediary that simply transports but does not transform meaning, I instead think of bottled water as a mediator which alters how we view water, plastic, and its role in society, the environment, among others.

Latour (2004) further explains that we see through a unique window into the number of *things* that have to participate in the gathering of an *object* (235). This demonstrates the metamorphism between object and thing, and in my case it is how a bottle of water (object) becomes a matter of concern (thing). This becomes a

“multifarious inquiry launched with the tools of anthropology [and other sectors of the social sciences] to detect *how many participants* are gathered in a *thing* to make it exist and to maintain its existence” (246). Here I note that I am precisely interested in this; following the actors who gather around the ban, and allowing them to guide me through their stories. By connecting those that gathered around this ban and were connected because of it, we can see how the ban enabled the issue of bottled water to exist while it was not a matter of concern beforehand. This offers a way to explain both the interest of the ban as well as the approach I follow; specifically finding out who assembles around this issue and how. This particular understanding of the social invites me to follow the actors; namely, it does not assume the social as pre-existing and an explanatory force, rather it supposes the social is continuously being done through gatherings.

If there is a gathering, there is a matter of concern beyond myself, and I consider myself as one of the actors participating in the gathering. I see this as taking a step further from what Latour explains, as he simply claims to listen to the actors while never discussing his own role in the picture. I did not piece together the important actors, the gathering had begun much before I arrived, and my role was to find out who and what joined, not join them together myself. My role as an anthropologist is to describe how the social is being made around the ban in Concord by using the knowledge I obtain by partaking in the matter of concern through the way I enter the field. This brings me to my next chapter where I discuss my methodological approach to this study.

Latour concludes with a clear direction for the next phase of critique. He advises us to not turn away but rather towards the gathering around the things. And

that is precisely what I have done through this project. I sought out a real-life example of bottled water's role being challenged in the everyday. Many anthropologists are fascinated by not simply the fact that people believe a thing to be of value, but also how it came to hold value and if and how it shifts over time (briefly visited previously with Kopytoff's social biography of a thing). If something is constructed, such as this ban on bottled water, the critic should offer the participants areas in which to gather and not simply proclaim the believers to be naïve and gullible. "The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles" (Latour, 246) and the one who adds reality. I attempt to gather the various connected human and nonhuman actors who have positioned themselves around the ban and allow this thesis to be an area of discussion, recognition, and assembling. By listening to what made these actors join such an assemblage, I can ask how people in Concord think of bottled water, how they are connected through this thing, why some wish to remove its status as thing rather than mere object (or remove its entire place in their town), and in turn what we can take away from this particular case. A way in which I add to Latour's approach is by placing myself as one of the actors partaking in the gathering. Latour listens to the actors but somehow avoids addressing his own role within the gathering. I recognize my own position in the field and my position on this issue throughout my discussion, and I acknowledge that I too have gathered and am a part of this shared social experience.

In this theoretical chapter I begin with an exploration into bottled water's emergence and popularity today by drawing upon various figures and statistics, and then I transition into a discussion of the cultural impacts bottled water has brought

forward. By exploring what various scholars have found bottled water has come to represent in a broad sense, for example unsustainability, or a pristine source of hydration, or social status, I am more equipped with possible associations that residents of Concord will draw upon in my fieldwork interviews. Latour helps me recognize the gathering that has occurred, notes the importance of moving towards the gathering, and reminds me to be aware of my own personal stance as a critic and personal opinion of this thing. Kaplan brings this knowledge into her own fieldwork on water use and unconventional groups which form because of water use, and she leaves the field open for further investigation into the communities which are drawn together through access to or lack of access to a particular water source. In my next chapter, I share the methodological approach that I undertook as a result of the theoretical approach that the above authors helped inform and shape.

Chapter 3: Methods

My methodological approach is to employ an open fieldwork plan. I let the actors speak to me. In order to answer my main question ‘how does bottled water move from being an apolitical commodity to become a highly political one?’ , I did not want to enter the field with a narrow approach, and instead wished to seek out various actors who I knew were connected to the ban, and let them guide me to others. I designed an approach that would allow the actors to show me what was significant.

Before entering the field, I needed to learn a bit about Concord, since I had never ventured outside of Boston’s city limits on previous trips to Massachusetts. The town is in the heart of New England and resides within the boundaries of Middlesex County. Concord borders the towns of Carlisle, Bedford, Lincoln, Sudbury, Maynard and Acton. The town centre is located near the confluence of the Sudbury and Assabet rivers, forming the Concord River, which flows north to the Merrimack River in Lowell. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2010 the town’s population was 17,668.

I explored various online news sources for any information I could gather concerning the bottled water ban. I was particularly interested in learning what people perceived as the pros and the cons of this ban, understanding a timeline of the events that had occurred in Concord so far (which can be found in my introductory chapter), attempting to wrap my head around the structure of Town Meeting that allowed for this ban to develop, and becoming familiar with the websites that Concord on Tap and Free the Water had set up. I planned to later

clarify what I had learned with the people I was able to interview. By watching recordings of Town Meetings, available through Concord's town website, I was able to become familiar with how the presentations from both campaigns had played out, as well as the pros and cons to the ban that residents brought up.

I followed the online news provider Wicked Local's section on local Concord news for background information and for reasons why some residents opposed the ban and others supported it. Cheryl Lecesse's article "Concord Town Meeting passes bylaw banning bottled water sales" (2012) states that proponents of the ban believe the ban will help reduce the amount of plastic waste generated by residents and it would also send a message that public water sources need to be supported. Those who opposed the bylaw said it denies residents their freedom of choice and also could negatively affect Concord's retail stores.

I determined that opponents to the ban raised issues such as the ban would be a direct infringement upon personal liberties, that it will force residents to spend money on water elsewhere, the people will become more unhealthy when they are forced to buy sugary drinks instead of water, and that this ban will not have an impact on overall plastic use. Those for the ban suggested that Concord will act as a model for other municipalities across the nation by taking a stand against corporate-owned water and returning ownership to local sources, Concord residents will reduce the amount of plastic bottles that end up in landfills, and that the ban will encourage the local government to build and maintain more public fountains (Lecesse 2012). These are some of the issues that guided my fieldwork and served as discussion points for my interviews.

Entering the Field

In May 2013, I moved to Brookline, Massachusetts. Although Brookline is officially a city in its own right, it is often referred to as a streetcar suburb of Boston because of its close proximity to the city limits and because of its short commute to Boston via public transportation. The drive to Concord from Brookline was typically around 45 minutes, depending on traffic. I rented a room in a shared apartment with two law students.

Before beginning interviews, I travelled to Concord and conducted a self-guided tour around the town. I went into specialty shops, the visitor centre, the library, and walked around the magnificent local landmarks such as Sleepy Hollow Cemetery. Even before speaking to town residents, I felt that I was gaining an appreciation and an understanding of Concord's history and natural beauty. I made a point of visiting the site of Henry David Thoreau's cabin in the deep woods by Walden Pond. After the irritating increased parking fees for visitors from out of state and the many screaming children splashing in the pond's shallow water, I was able to completely relax and breathe in the fresh pine scents, listen to the soft crunching as my feet pressed into leaves and twigs, and feel the warm summer breeze guide me along the path. Only the rocky foundation of Thoreau's cabin remains at the site, but I quickly understood why he had deliberately secluded himself for two years, two months, and two days to this spot in the woods. Thoreau has often been deemed as one of the founders of the American Environmental Movement. Therefore, I find it worth noting that he was born and raised in Concord, and wrote his most revered book, *Walden* (first published as *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* in 1854) just outside

the city limits of where the bottled water ban now reaches. The core of Thoreau's argument was to warn his fellow Americans that their reckless and selfish destruction and harnessing of the environment in the name of progress prized only the material possibilities of the environment. He believed that protection and conservation of natural resources was more important than material gain (Kline 2011, 39).

When I first began contacting businesses in town and explained my project, I received a lot of puzzled looks. People would often comment that this topic seemed strange for a Master's thesis, and that if interviewed he or she probably would not have a lot to say about it. This led to a few initial personal doubts about whether or not, after all my preparatory work and relocation to Brookline for the summer, this was a legitimate topic that anthropologists and people from other disciplines would find useful, especially if those involved in it did not find it an interesting topic. Yet after my very first interview with Maude, I knew my doubts were unfounded. She talked straight, without any interruption, for over an hour after I asked an open question about what her story was. And the theme continued with every interview; whether they supported it, opposed it, or were caught somewhere in between, it turned out that people in town really did have a lot to say about the ban. After Susan's daughter complained that she and her mom had been sitting in Fiona's restaurant for too long, talking yet again about the ban, Fiona exclaimed, "come on, I'm on my soap box!", before continuing her story.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

Name ⁸	Position	Concord Resident?
Concord on Tap Campaign		
Maude*	Campaign Manager	Yes
Jean Hill	Originally submitted article	Yes
Natalie*	Earned a high school credit working with Concord on Tap Works at ice cream store	Yes
Free the Water Campaign		
Susan*	Leader of opposition movement	Yes
Fiona*	Member of opposition movement Owner of a café and a convenience store	Yes
Local Businesses		
Walter*	Store Manager Appleby's Market Place*	No
Nancy*	Owner and Founder of a health food store and café	Yes
Brian*	Owner and Founder of an ice cream shop	Yes
Russell*	Store Manager of a convenience store	No
Graham*	Owner of a café	No
Amelia*	Server at a restaurant	Yes
George*	General Manager at an inn	No
Karen*	Shift Manager at a women's clothing and accessories boutique	No
Concord-Carlisle High School		
Terry*	Environmental Sciences Teacher	Yes

In order to address my research question, I set out with an open mind and was willing to meet with anyone from Concord on Tap who wished to talk with me. It was important for me to speak with Jean Hill and Maude, but I was open to listening to the stories of anyone else who was involved. I first attempted to contact them through Concord on Tap's Facebook group since their official website led me there. Maude later told me that no one checked those messages often anymore, and I was initially unsuccessful. My next idea was to contact the Town Clerk for advice on how to reach people. The Town Clerk was very helpful and she passed along email addresses and phone numbers for Jean and Maude. All it took was an email to

⁸ Names marked with an asterisk (*) are pseudonyms in order to protect identity of the informant or location. Actual names of participants who do not wish his or her name to be changed are not marked.

Maude and a phone call to Jean and I was scheduled for interviews with each on separate occasions. Maude and I communicated a lot through email in attempts to set me up with more people who had been members of their campaign, but summer proved to be a difficult time to track people down.

The Town Clerk also passed along a telephone number for Susan who led the Free the Water Movement, which was a campaign associated with its parent organization Concord Residents for Consumer Choice but geared specifically towards repealing the ban. I judged it important to maintain attempts at gathering a holistic viewpoint and therefore wished to balance the interviews with both residents who fought for the ban and residents who fought against it. Unfortunately, since by the time I had arrived in Concord the ban had been in place 6 months, there were no opportunities for me to be an observing participant in any meetings, informational sessions, or other campaign events from either side. Susan explained that even though she was not specifically involved in any bottled water campaigns anymore, she would be happy to meet with me and discuss the ban and her campaign. She suggested we meet at a local café owned by Fiona, a woman who had assisted on the Free the Water campaign and also owned a business directly affected by the ban.

In my original thesis proposal, I thought it would be beneficial for me to set up a booth in a local supermarket or other public place where residents previously had the opportunity to purchase bottled water and I would conduct quick, 5 minute surveys with shoppers. I planned to ask approximately 100 people whether or not they used to buy bottled water, if yes do they go somewhere else now, if no why, and how they voted at Town Meeting. I instead came to the conclusion that rather

than gathering a large amount of part quantitative, part qualitative data that did not directly answer my question about how bottled water became a political thing, and I should instead focus my energy on conducting longer, more open ended and exploratory interviews. These would allow me to focus on a more narrative-style approach.

I asked myself, prior to the ban, how were residents of Concord accessing bottled water? This brought me to contact owners or representatives of local businesses affected by the ban. I felt that the story must include actors associated with those sites that used to be an important step in the biography of bottled water in Concord. From Concord's town website, I found a listing of all local businesses in town and decided to contact as many as I could. I also picked up a local Tap Map from the tourism office (created by Concord on Tap) that listed businesses that had agreed to hand out free glasses of water or refill a bottle if someone walked into the store and asked for one. The stores were marked to potential customers by displaying a special sticker in their window⁹. I made sure to include a mix of businesses who were on this map, as well as those I noticed were registered Concord businesses but had, I assumed, opted to not be included on this list. My main strategy was to either call the store or visit it in person, always asking first to speak with the manager, and then asking if either the manager or someone who worked at the store had time to sit down with me for a few minutes to speak about the ban in town and the effects, if any, that happened in their store. Although sometimes I left voicemail messages or messages with a worker in a store and never received a phone call back, no store simply said 'no' to meeting with me. Of

⁹ See Appendix 2 for example of these signs.

the approximately 40 registered businesses in Concord, I ended up with 10 interviews with people who worked in town and were no longer allowed to sell bottled water at his or her site of employment.

During one visit to a local ice cream shop I by chance found a student, Nathalie, who had earned a high school credit by working alongside Maude and Jean at Concord on Tap for one semester, and then she returned as a volunteer as the campaign continued. She was working at the ice cream shop for the summer and agreed to sit down with me during her break to talk.

As discussed earlier, through the snowball effect I came into contact with and subsequently interviewed the local high school Environmental Science teacher who set up the credit for Nathalie and had invited both Concord on Tap and Free the Water leaders to speak to his class. Terry is a friend of Maude and she passed along his email address to me. This interview was conducted by phone call in September 2013 after I had returned to Ottawa.

Structure of the Interviews

All my interviews were designed to be semi-structured and open ended. For the interviews with key informants from both campaigns (Jean, Maude, Susan, and Fiona), I thought it best to organize the interview somewhat chronologically at first in order for the story of the ban to come through each informant's personal affiliation with each campaign as the ban's story progressed. Each woman had become involved with a campaign at a different time, and I wanted to be able to piece together a timeline using the various stories. This also allowed for useful

commentary concerning the different stages. I always began with asking motives behind involvement, as well as any personal history of fighting for justice.

Some of the interviews, for example Nathalie's and Terry's, were even less structured because I had, in a sense, stumbled upon these informants and were less prepared with any set questions. I had not been expecting to find a student who had supported the ban at her high school working in an ice cream shop, but could not turn down the opportunity to speak with her. I found being familiar with actors that other informants had mentioned (in this case, Maude had mentioned Nathalie's name and a bit about her role) helped me to be more prepared for these surprise interviews. After Maude put Terry in carbon copy of one of the emails she sent me, Terry immediately came outright and said he would be more than happy to speak with me. He wished to help me with the project and speak of his experiences, and although I knew little about his involvement before our telephone call, it was one of the most valuable interviews I conducted. Therefore, I must note the importance of being flexible with interview subjects and, as time allows, always accept the opportunity to speak with someone an informant recommends you will find useful. In Terry's case, I had already moved back to Ottawa and had begun data analysis when we set up the phone call, but his comments certainly helped me think about the ban and subsequent events in a new light and definitely impacted my overall report.

Conducting Interviews: Gathering Qualitative Data

I received clearance from the University of Ottawa's Ethics Board to record all my interviews, and I allowed participants to read this on the ethics release form and I would also inform them of this verbally. I was prepared to continue with an interview and take more rigorous notes if an informant refused to be recorded, but this situation did not arise. Because of this, I did not take very detailed notes during any of the interviews. I would jot down names of people or the name of an article someone recommended reading – all pieces of information I thought would be valuable to look into immediately. If I knew I could wait to note something until the transcription stage, I would rely on the recorder to capture that information. I found that there are both positive aspects and negative aspects to this style of interviewing. I do believe that I absorb more of what someone is explaining if I maintain eye contact and am not distracted by note-taking. If I am writing something down I am no longer paying attention to what the speaker has moved on to. I also gave a lot of verbal recognitions of acknowledgements during the interview, such as saying 'ok' and 'oh really?' which I felt showed the informant I was interested in learning more. However, because I relied so heavily on the audio recordings I would have been quite lost if anything had happened to them. It also took me months more than I had planned to complete my transcriptions.

At the beginning of every interview, I would explain my research project and that I was not interested in determining which campaign was right and which was wrong, but instead I wished to include stories from Concord and those affected by the ban and piece them together. I felt that this method seemed to relax some informants, especially those who agreed to sit down with me but immediately warned me that he or she may not have very much to say. It was quite satisfying for

me to watch as an informant would begin apprehensively and slowly become more confident in his or her personal story, perhaps not even realizing there was so much to say about it. I had a set of questions that I would ask each informant, and then always finish with asking if he or she had anything else to add. However, I would often not stick to the particular order of my questions that I arrived with, especially when a participant covered a question through his or her own initiative. I often found that some of the most valuable comments came at the very end of the interview. A few times I reached to turn off my audio recorder right as an informant began talking again, and I was very glad I had left the recorder on. Perhaps the reason for this is that over the course of the interview the informant had become more comfortable with me and was pleased with him or herself for knowing all 'formal' topics had been covered. Also, I think that talking about the ban for a while may have got the informants thinking about different things that may not have been immediate thoughts, but had developed over the course of the interview.

Transcription and Citation

Because my main method of data collection was through recorded interviews, I left Concord with many hours of participants speaking about the ban and focused on transcribing these as quickly as possible. Although it was extremely tedious, the method that worked best for me was not to listen to the interviews while writing jot notes, but rather to type out exactly what had been said. Of course, I skipped sections here and there, for example when one participant spoke about an upcoming surgery unrelated to my topic, but I managed to eventually type basically

word for word what had been said in my interviews. At first I thought it would be useful to include some of the American 'slang' used, such as 'um' and 'ah', but often the participants would use these words multiple times in one sentence and I decided the placement of 'um's did not seem to be necessarily important.

I ended up with transcriptions totalling 33,000 words, and approximately a dozen pages of notes from a journal I kept during my time in Concord with anything from humorous or ironic thoughts to a schedule of interviews I set up in Concord. For example, I thought it to be both irritating and somewhat ironic that Maude suggested we meet at a café because the owner, Graham, had agreed to put his business on the Tap Map. However, when I returned a month later to the café to this time interview Graham, he explained to me why he thought the ban was "ridiculous", all while sipping a bottle of Poland Springs water he had purchased out of town. What made the situation even more ironic was that I had forgotten my reusable water bottle at home, and although I drank from one of the town fountains before beginning my commute from Concord back to Brookline, I had to stop at a grocery store and buy a bottle of water because I was so thirsty. Outside of Concord there are no window signs welcoming customers to a free glass of tap water, and instead of trying to find a shop on my way that would be willing to do this I instead bought a large plastic bottle of water. I felt extremely guilty as I guzzled it down in the parking lot, and vowed to never forget my bottle again on a scorching day such as this one.

Data Analysis

I developed my own system of coding by themes in order to analyse the data collected through interviews. I did not have a predetermined set of themes that I used to categorize, but rather I let the themes develop naturally. I was particularly interested in exploring what Latour mentions as the transition of an object to a thing, and what meanings people associate with bottled water than allowed this ban to become a matter of concern. I believe that this system did not allow me to predict or manipulate my data by making it conform to my own predisposed notions of what was important, but rather I let the data and therefore the participants dictate what important parts of this study were. Because I used semi structured interview guides with plenty of allowance for the participants to show me what was significant, I wished to maintain this theme of openness into the data analysis. Next, I subdivided each of these themes into more specific categories. In the next chapter, I will analyse the results of my data collection in order to answer my main and specific questions and will elaborate on the subjects of analysis I determined to be significant.

Chapter 4: Results

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explain that my aim is to how an apolitical commodity becomes a political one. I decided to focus on how various actors allowed this transformation to occur, actors such as the creators of the ban, the opponents to the ban, and the store owners affected by the ban. From my research, I find that the main sites where the ban was being lived participants were in local businesses, in open and public spaces in Concord, in the high school, in Town Meetings, and in his or her own home. These are the locations that participants volunteered as sites where the ban was having a direct impact, either physically through inability to buy the product, or verbally through open discussions and voting on the matter. I predicted that discussions of how the ban was experienced and debated at Town Meeting would surface, but I am surprised by the influence that the high school's staff and students had on this gathering. This chapter will draw upon various actors' thoughts and memories where they experienced the ban, and still are today, at these different sites.

I struggled with a logical method of organizing my results into meaningful groups. There is so much overlap among people, thoughts, and places that it is difficult to classify some stories into only one section, while knowing that many of the stories draw upon various common themes. In the end I decided that in order to assemble everyone that joined together because of this ban, it was important that I first make clear which actors, both human and non-human, I found to be joined. Some had interesting personal histories, knowledge, and beliefs that culminated in a

certain reaction when faced with the ban. The actors can be divided into three sections, as listed below:

1. Actors connected through Concord on Tap

- Jean Hill
- Maude
- Terry
- The Concord on Tap campaign

2. Actors connected through Free the Water

- Susan
- Fiona
- The Free the Water campaign

3. Other Actors¹⁰

- The ban
- The plastic bottle
- Concord tap water and the fountains

By letting the voice of each actor come through, I create a forum to show my results concerning various interesting topics that arose:

4. Points of Interest

- Unhealthy consequences of the ban
- “It’s my choice!”
- Why water? Why *this* issue?
- Impact on local economy
- The Younger Generation
- Outside influences vs. internal backing

And finally, I have a section for what I found businesses in Concord to be doing in order to adjust to the ban, as well as how they would recommend someone make similar changes.

5. Actions Undertaken

¹⁰ I do not have a specific category for local businesses in Concord that were affected by the ban. I do recognize the businesses and the people who work in town as actors that play into the ban, but I find it too difficult to show what I learned from them in only one category. I have instead included their voices throughout this chapter, particularly in the sections called Points of Interest and Actions Undertaken.

- Businesses make adjustments
- Advice on transition from businesses

Through these categories, I am able to analyze the thoughts and memories that surfaced, which allows me to unravel what is linked through the ban. What all these thoughts and memories have in common, whether the informant agreed with or opposed the ban, is it makes him or her feel something. Either the person agrees with Jean's message and wished to help push it forward, or the person disagrees with her methods for a number of reasons, for instance his or her personal beliefs are challenged, the ban seems "un-American" (as Susan claimed), or he or she agrees with the message of the ban but opposes the method Jean used. The idea of the bylaw being put in place ignites something within many residents of Concord, a trigger, a call to action. I uncover what factors had to fall into place for this ban to mean something personal for my informants and what this ban means now that it has been put in place.

Actors connected through Concord on Tap

Jean Hill

Since without Jean there would be no ban, I will begin by speaking to my visit with Jean in her home. She and I sat down for tea in her beautiful home where she lives by herself, but maintains close contact with her four children. I asked her to explain to me, in her own words, why she thinks the idea for the ban came to her. It turned out to be much more than simply learning about the Pacific Garbage Patch; instead that information that she gathered from her grandson showing her pictures

online was merely what triggered the idea. Jean had in fact two passions that I believe had been lying dormant for some time: a strong sense of justice, and, more recently, a concern for the environment. She explained to me,

When I was a kid during WWII, I got a summer job in a factory that had been converted to making parachutes. I was only 16. I worked at this factory and I realized that there were women, mostly women employees, who had worked before it was converted to making parachutes, and you know I got to know some of these women and they were poor, and some of them had never had a paid vacation. So there was a union, it was located in Union Square in New York City, and so I went to the union office and I said you know you really should try to organize and form a union in that factory, and because I was so young they didn't take me seriously so they essentially said 'get lost', you know. And so that was my first experience in fighting for justice.

When I asked Jean if she had a history of environmental activism, she explained:

Well not really, but I've always had a strong sense of justice. I believe that if something is just and honest, and you believe in it, you should fight for it. I have two beliefs. One is that every person has an obligation to do something good for the planet. Second, you should do a good deed every day.

It seems as though Jean has had a strong sense of justice within her, and only recently has become more aware of the environmental destruction that had begun to build up around her. She said that once she became more comfortable on the internet and with researching various sites, she was able to learn a lot more about humans' impact. "We can't mess around. We must reduce our carbon footprint, it's essential. And it's my belief that any person who has any intelligence and is able to be effective should devote some time to help slow down global warming. Because it's happening!"

So with a sense of justice and a growing awareness of the environmental destruction that was occurring because of human interference, discovering that there was an unimaginably large swirly vortex of trash, mainly plastic trash, shifting around in the Pacific Ocean triggered Jean into action. It is thus by problematizing

bottled water that she found a way to act upon this issue. Jean was drawn towards what she believed was a matter of concern, and transformed it in a way that connected Concord with the greater issue. She asked herself: what can I do, and what can I help my neighbours do, that I am not already doing to ease this problem? In her own words, “I’m 85 years old and I don’t want to go until I’m all used up”. These two existing feelings were put to the test, and bottled water formed the basis for her personal call to action. Jean did a lot of research on her own by watching movies which focus on the destruction caused by bottled water such as *Tapped* (2009), she read books such as *Bottled and Sold: The Story Behind Our Obsession with Bottled Water* (Gleick 2010), as well as calling the Federal Department of Agriculture to ask questions about the number of staff they had to supervise the bottled water production. Jean told me that her next step, find a partner to help her with the campaign, is something she would recommend to anyone wishing to undertake a similar project.

Maude

I joined Maude, an energetic, outspoken, and vibrant woman for breakfast one morning at a restaurant in Concord. I asked her to simply tell me her story. One hour later, I felt as though I had intimately gotten to know Maude, and could see her passion for activism shine through the entire time. I barely got a word in edgewise but could not have been happier that this woman had so much to say about her involvement. Finally she laughed and said, “Ok! Did I cover everything?”

Although Jean was not short in passion for this cause, she lacked practice in presenting at Town Meeting, understanding how to draft a formal bylaw, and

experience in garnering support of her neighbours on an issue. When Jean asked Maude for help, Maude jumped on the opportunity. Maude had been instrumental in helping the town with previous environmental projects; in 2008, Maude and her friend brought an article to Town Meeting asking to pave the sections of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail that runs through Concord in order to make the path accessible to all. Subsequent to that win, she became a member of the town's Finance Committee (2008 to 2010), Concord's Municipal Light Board (2010 to 2012), and is the current the chair of Concord's Comprehensive Sustainable Energy Committee. After the success of these various projects, she decided she could be of use to Jean and together they formed the group Concord on Tap with Maude as the campaign manager. The formation of this group is a piece of what makes the social for this topic; the two women formed an organization which rose against a commodity by bringing forth its environmental concern to the citizens of Concord. Both women had trepidations about the environment, but bottled water is the specific concern that brought them together.

Terry

Terry is a high school teacher at the only public high school in Concord. At the high school Terry runs an environmental film series and he decided to show the movies *Flow* (2008) and *Tapped* (2009). This happened to be around the time that Maude and Jean were garnering attention surrounding the vote to ban bottled water in town. During the second year of the Concord on Tap campaign together he and Maude came up with the idea of having two of his students participate in an internship with them for the semester. Terry said,

I think we both concurred that involving kids in the issue would carry a little more weight. And I had Nathalie and [her friend] approach me about doing an independent study because they were both interested in the environment. So the thought arose to maybe have them work with Maude. I think it's a great opportunity that presented itself; for them to actually work on a live issue.

Water issues was a topic that Terry had covered as part of the curriculum at school, and although he hypothesized that the students already knew his stance on bottled water, before discussions of a ban took place he did not come outright and give his opinion but rather presented students with the facts so that they could come to their own conclusions. During our phone interview, Terry told me that he strongly believes that in order for adults to become more aware of possible methods of change, their own children are extremely effective vehicles for encouraging the adoption of lifestyle shifts. He explained,

A way to get into the household is through the kids. It's a way to change the awareness of adults who are set in their ways and are often not interested. Kid comes home, opens fridge, and says it's crazy how much energy we are using! They're pushing back at the status quo that their parents have established. When you let the kids take the lead, it brings the discussion into the household. I had my students do an energy analysis. This has always been my hope, for kids to be more sustainable in their homes, and to calculate their carbon footprint. The parents have to provide utilities bill such as gas and electricity, and the kids can now calculate their footprint. Some have very big ones. The students are always surprised. This allows them to have a discussion as a family. The kids ask, this energy that we consume, is there a better way to do it?

Terry has always been environmentally conscious and recognizes the importance of empowering his students to make positive changes at school and in their homes, so it was a natural transition for him to be supportive of his two students participating in this campaign, as well as encouraging the high school population to accept the ban on campus. Terry's story shows how more actors became involved around a matter of concern with bottled water. This topic may be a specific instance of the environmental concerns which Terry presents in his class,

but it put into context the awareness for the environment and, more specifically, water, which were already points of discussion in class.

Concord on Tap: the campaign

Although the campaign had a lot of people help out, the only two regular members that I was able to interview were Jean and Maude. The strategies that the campaign used in 2011 (when they narrowly lost) and 2012 (when they won in a 403-364 vote) were different than the strategies they used in 2013 (when the repeal efforts brought the town to another vote, and the Save the Bottle campaign lost). Before the ban was voted into a bylaw, the team did as much research as they could for themselves on the issue of bottled water and learned about how recycling plastic and the resultant waste were only a small part of the bigger picture. They found research on the National Institute of Health's website that, in Maude's opinion, uncovered some of the lesser known facts about the industry, such as the fact that there are endocrine disrupters that leach from plastic into the water. They learned about the energy it takes to extract the water from somewhere else and then transport it into their town, and they did not like the fact that it appeared to be a low or virtually unregulated product. The Concord on Tap team became informed on this topic, as I did through my own research, and they were then ready to act on this knowledge and bring forth bottled water as a matter of concern through the ban. Their research uncovered various actors that were problematic, such as the plastic bottled, the extracted and transported water, and the consumers who purchase the end product.

Maude likes to call the strategy that resulted from the team's personal research a 'community education program'. She believes that once people were more knowledgeable and informed on this issue that they have perhaps never given much thought, they will be more aware and open to the proposed ban. The program was two-fold; partly centred on awareness of the issue, and partly centred on sustainability and what practices they could adopt. Maude explained, "A couple of year ago we got together at Town Meeting and we adopted sustainability principles. So my goal in my presentation last year was to say we made this commitment to sustainability, and this bottled water is only one piece of our commitment, but it's important." To me, this adoption of sustainability principles by the town was significant because it meant that many residents were already committed to doing his or her part in becoming more environmentally-friendly in town, and perhaps felt an obligation to follow through.

The team invited representatives from the NGOs Food and Water Watch and Corporate Accountability International to conduct a session in town where they talked about water issues and the broader context in which the community should examine bottled water. They also had the opportunity to have a representative from Bundanoon, Australia come to Town Meeting and present on the successes and challenges his town faced, and why they had been able to maintain the ban for a number of years. Maude believes that the way the campaigners really began to connect with people was through the Concord Journal – the town's local weekly newspaper. The team would submit guest commentaries which would cover different aspects of bottled water, and others would write letters to the editor that

would be published. Town residents would then be able to respond to these commentaries and letters and a different style of discussion was opened.

Maude explained that a community education program does require a lot of hand-holding and showing people how to make the transition. The group helped install a number of new water fountains. By creating a Tap Map and a Tap App, people are able to see on a map of Concord where the water fountains are, as well as which local businesses have free tap water available to anyone who asks.

After the ban became law and repeal efforts began, they had a team that varied between 6 and 8 people, and this time the strategy was all about gathering votes. This was a comment that Susan made that she found out as well: it boils down to how many people show up at Town Meeting and actually vote, not just how many people agree or disagree with the ban. Maude explained that this time they ran a more quiet campaign and gathered votes through lists of people who had committed to showing up. They did this because they did not want the opposition to know what was going on; how concerned they should be, or how much effort was being put in. They also contacted environmental organizations that existed in Concord and asked for their support through votes. They also continued to update their existing webpage and created a Facebook page in attempts to reach a different audience in a picture-oriented way.

Because of the literature review I conducted concerning the history of bottled water's rise, particularly in North America, and the current implications of this popularity, I felt confident in my support of Concord on Tap's campaign and the ban. It was a difficult transition for me to sit down with members of Free the Water, as I describe in the next section, but I do not feel that my own personal education

hindered my ability to gather and analyze my data. I felt knowledgeable and prepared to listen to representatives from both campaigns, and was more aware of some of the pros and cons that both sides presented.

Actors connected through Free the Bottle

Susan

From sitting down at Fiona's café and speaking with Susan for a few hours, I gathered that before this ban to come into discussion she was not particularly pro bottled water or anti bottled water. She admits to not have bought the product very often and even brings around a reusable bottle occasionally, but she enjoys exercising her right to purchase a bottle if she wishes to, when she wished to, and where she wished to. She explains further,

I do buy it occasionally and I just didn't want my right or anybody else's right to buy something taken away. My argument is we're all educated adults, we can make the decision if we want to buy it, or conserve, or not. So please don't take away our right. That's my whole argument. So that was my belief the entire time.

I believe that for Susan, being politically active in her hometown went hand in hand with her speaking out publicly against this ban. I asked her to tell a bit about her history, and she explained:

My family and my parents have always been politically active. Before the kids, when I lived in Boston, I was always a community activist. I was on the Board of Directors for a park that was across the street from us and we built a new playground for the kids. I sort of grew up with it, my mother and father always backed political candidates. My father was always on the finance committee, so it's sort of always been around me, so that's why I said when there's something I don't like, I try to get involved to change it. My belief is "don't sit there and complain about it, do something about it". That's why we live in the United States of America, because we have a say! Every person has a say.

Susan became involved in the effort to repeal the bylaw immediately after the deciding vote in 2012 took place. She could not believe that this was happening, and she asked one of her friends who had been outspoken against the ban what she could do to help. Susan's friend told her that people were tired of hearing her talk about the issue, and asked if Susan would take her place as spokesperson. Susan agreed, and she submitted the warrant. This means Susan collected 10 signatures of residents who opposed the ban, she filled out the appropriate paper work, and she was then put on the agenda at Town Meeting.

I was very nervous leading up to my meeting with Fiona and Susan. Looking back, it seems silly to have fretted so much over it, but I was scared to come face to face with two obviously very strong-willed and outspoken women who I knew I disagreed with on many aspects of this issue. I felt almost as though I was being lured into a cave where they would throw a lot of facts into my face and ask me questions to which I did not have answers. I had been excited to meet Jean and Maude because I held them in some ways as role models and what I strive to be more like, but I could not say the same for Susan and Fiona. I had to remember that anthropology is not the study of what you know, what you feel comfortable with, what you agree with, or what you deem a worthy cause. I had to put my passion for the environment aside and try as hard as I could to listen to their side of the story, their reasoning, why they could not let this ban sit without a fight. I am so glad I did, because the interviews were truly invaluable experiences. The ladies could not have been more welcoming, they never asked me to defend myself, and they seemed thrilled to share their side of the story from someone who had come specifically to piece together the various actors that made up this whole. Listening without

judgement is certainly one of the more difficult tasks I was faced with during this process, but I could feel myself growing as an ethnographer with every uncomfortable situation I was faced with. Surprisingly, I can understand a lot of what Susan and Fiona spoke of, including utmost care for their children's health and the right to choose what their children consume. I feel that neither woman had rushed to any conclusions and had truly spent the time working out the logistics of this situation before acting.

Fiona

Fiona was raised in Concord and had been practicing law in Boston before returning to her hometown to run the café we met at in a building complex owned by her father. Her thoughtful insights come through in this chapter. I find that although I do not agree with some of her logic, she presented many alternative ways of facing the ban, and I am appreciative of what she shared. Fiona is mother to two young twins. She held a unique position as she was one of the few business owners in town who publicly backed repeal efforts while the campaign was in full swing.

Free the Water: the campaign

The campaign formed and grew through word of mouth. Susan explained that there were about 15 core people who were very active in the campaign, but others would volunteer services as they could, such as Fiona's dad who donated unused office space in his building for their headquarters. Their first preliminary meeting was on December 1, 2012 to discuss the submission of the warrant and different strategies they could use to begin repeal efforts. As the April 2013 Town

Meeting approached, the group met increasingly, sometimes every week to divide up tasks and keep organizing tactics. It was sometimes a group effort to write Susan's speeches or to help her practice before a speaking event.

After a brainstorming session, the team came up with the name 'Free the Water' since it was important to have the word 'freedom' included in the message. One of the people on their committee was a graphic designer, and so she designed their logo. The goal was to spread the word to as many residents as they could that a group had formed to attempt a repeal, so they had flyers printed out, they created lawn signs, and handed out bumper stickers. For funding, the group fundraised, asked for donations from various organizations, and each member donated money of their own to the campaign. They hired an outside company to record Susan's voice and call homes in Concord with a message about the importance of this issue. The group also held out signs in common areas, and stood outside the only major grocery store in Concord with an informational booth set up. Susan explained that every year in Concord on Patriot's Day (which the third Monday in April and was therefore very close to the vote night at Town Meeting) there is a large parade. The group set up a booth in the centre of town where the parade would pass by and had a jar for donations.

Other Actors

The Ban

At both Town Meetings in 2011 and 2012, there were two sides that presented the pros and cons of adopting the ban. One side contained members of

Concord on Tap, and one side had a group that opposed the ban. This group had not formally adopted the name Free the Water since repeal efforts had not yet begun, but many of the people who opposed the ban before it became a bylaw went on to join the Free the Bottle campaign. At Town Meeting, the moderator has a number of items to discuss, and one of them was the bottled water ban. When the ban's allotted time came, both sides made presentations using PowerPoint to elaborate their views. Next, there were two microphones set up at the front, one 'for' ban microphone and one 'against' ban microphone. Any town resident was able to come forward, state his or her name and where he or she lived in town and either make a statement or ask a question to the presenters. A time limit was placed on the length of the comment or question. At the end of the question period, attendees used a slip of paper to vote for or against the ban. The ballots were counted immediately and the results were announced. At Town Meeting in 2013, when Free the Water was attempting to repeal the bylaw, the set up was the same but this time Free the Water decided when to stop the questions and call a vote.

This research project is filled with examples of how the ban is a major, non-human actor. Throughout this thesis I recognize the vital role of non-human actors in shaping the gathering that occurred and the transformation of bottled water to becoming a politicized commodity. While I believe that many actors gathered around the ban, it too is an actor. The ban evokes meanings, emotions, and associations towards a thing, and the people of Concord assemble around it. Previously I have demonstrated how Latour sets the theoretical foundation for the ban to be considered a non-human actor with agency. The ban became an actor when it became a legally binding document. Once Jean's idea was reduced to a

legal document, it became political consumer propaganda. It gives strength to certain residents, for example the environmentally conscious who voted for its success, while it also gives weakness to some, for example those who associate bottled water with health, security, and cleanliness. Failed repeal efforts demonstrate how the ban resisted and fought back; it takes on power through controversy and has a role of its own.

The Plastic Bottle

In similar fashion, bottled water becomes a thing and an actor, no longer an object, because of the associations and meanings that people give it. It is a material entity; it is a commodity while at the same time it holds a commodity (water) within it. As demonstrated by Latour, the plastic bottle is an actor because of its usefulness. It is an actor because of what it does, such as creating piles of garbage (in the way, the plastic speaks through the mountains of waste because it does not go away), transporting water, or being a part of an artist's sculpture. Linked to the ban, plastic bottles resist being ok for some residents in Concord.

There appears to be a direct correlation between store owners or managers who lived outside of Concord and did not attend Town Meeting, and had misconceptions about recycling plastic bottles of water and the resultant environmental impact of recycling. For example, café owner Graham, who does not live in Concord, explained to me "I think the whole thing is that if they recycle they won't have any issues", and further:

The whole idea that you can't sell water, it's stupid. I mean put a deposit on the bottle. That's all they have to do. They do it in other states. I mean the whole thing is the issue with the plastic bottle. It's ridiculous. If they're conscious they should push for a

deposit on the bottle. Not ban water! I mean it makes more sense. The whole thing was about the ocean in Mexico where they're miles and miles of plastic bottles. Charge a deposit on them, so they recycle them, like they do the other bottles. You walk around town and you don't see cans or bottles on the ground. There's no trash on the ground in this town. It's not an issue. Find a way to recycle it. Put a deposit on it. Let them melt it and reuse it. There's gotta be other ways than banning water.

As I listened to many store owners and workers bring up the recycling alternative, I thought back to what Maude emphasized about the ban and holding Concord accountable for its sustainability pledge. Putting a deposit on plastic bottled would incentivize people to recycle the bottled, but it would not reduce the amount of plastic consumed. The ban turned the focus from recycling and being effective with dealing with waste to reducing the overall waste amount of waste from the beginning. Maude pointed out that recycling cannot be seen as a way out of the ban because it does not hold people accountable.

In Maude's opinion,

The state of Massachusetts' legislators are in the pockets of the beverage industry because they cannot pass an expanded Bottle Bill¹¹. I mean it blows my mind that they are so incompetent and so corrupt in our political system that they can't put a nickel deposit on ice tea and lemonade. But in a way that worked to our [campaign's] favour. Because people used to say "well I recycle". And we'd say "no it's a bigger issue than that!" So in some ways the ineptness of our state legislators helped us pass the bylaw. And there are people who say "well what if it does pass? Will you repeal your bylaw?" And I said, "No!"

Nancy, the founder and owner of a health food store in Concord, held a different view than many others I spoke with:

[In my store,] we're not moving away from plastic just because we can't. When you look at the containers that our deli meat is in it appals me that there's no alternative in a commercial setting. And so many things come in plastic. The last thing we need is water in plastic bottles.

For Nancy, there is currently no viable alternative to the plastic containers she must use on a daily basis. However, there is another option for plastic bottles of

¹¹ A Bottle Bill would charge consumers a deposit on plastic bottles and then refund that deposit amount upon return of the bottles.

water, so why not move towards a more sustainable option when you are presented with a choice.

Fiona sees plastic bottles as a useful product that did not appear suddenly, but rather filled a void and evolved into something extremely useful. This is proved in its current growing popularity. There is logic behind why this product took off and is depended upon worldwide.

Every disaster plan everywhere in the world has bottled water as a thing. The reason we got rid of glass in the intercity is because it was breaking and cutting peoples' feet, and so on. It's not just like all of a sudden Nestlé came in and was like "everyone has to drink bottled water, no one's allowed to do anything different". These things evolved into a product that was really useful.

Concord Tap Water and the fountains

"You know the way the world is now. Nobody trusts water coming out of a tap." This quote from Russell, a convenience store manager, who had been surprised about the number of people who "didn't care" about the dangers of tap water, and those were the ones who supported this ban. I knew before beginning fieldwork that there exists a lot of conflicting information about whether or not to trust tap water. Through the research I mentioned in my introductory chapter, I learned that the media plays a vital role in shaping the public's opinion. My informants had various reasons to be weary of Concord's tap water, and these reasons certainly cause doubts on the ban's practicality. Fiona had premature twins and her doctor recommended she make their infant formula using a mixture that required bottled water. It is understandably difficult to decide whether to believe what your physician's opinion on the safety of bottled water, or if you choose to follow other health experts who have spoken out in documentaries such as *Tapped*

(2009). While I was interviewing Fiona in her café, a new Concord resident came up to us to tell Fiona how much she had enjoyed her lunch that day. When Fiona explained about my project and why she was being interviewed, the woman nodded approvingly and told me that she had just moved into a very old house and she was worried about how clean the pipes were. Concord water is tested at the site of the filtration plant but had not been tested at her house, and she could not yet afford to change the pipes, so she had been driving to a neighbouring town to purchase bottled water.

Wilk notes that the mistrust of public water supplies is in part what drives the sale of bottled water, and that many people are hesitant to trust what they believe is a neglected and dangerous system. “If governments were more transparent and open in their regulation and testing of public water, more willing to demonstrate their concern for the public welfare by dramatic action, they might regain some of that trust” (319). I certainly agree with Wilk, however it is worth linking here what Maude said concerning the possibility of a refund-program for plastic bottles: “The state of Massachusetts’ legislators are in the pockets of the beverage industry because they cannot pass an expanded Bottle Bill”. I wonder, is it currently a practical expectation that the government will become more transparent and open on this topic? They certainly opted for dramatic action, but did not wait for the government to impose any bans or become more open on their own terms.

Points of Interest

Unhealthy Consequences of the Ban

The idea that banning bottled water in town would force people to reach for unhealthy alternatives such as soda and other sugar-laden drinks came up numerous times in my interviews. One woman who I interviewed at the women's clothing store where she worked told me that on her lunch breaks she would visit local sandwich and coffee shops and find people buying different beverages in plastic bottles instead bringing a reusable bottle. Fiona added:

I'm pretty liberal. The arguments about government interference weren't my first concern because I like regulation to a certain extent. I think it's good that we have laws. But this seemed like such an overreach in the sense that it is a safe product that people want and to take that off the market was just crazy to me because you're letting people drink Diet Coke. And the argument that "water comes out of the fountain or the tap, so it's a good thing to ban" also doesn't fly with me because then I'm like well then why can't you just say "you can't drink Diet Coke but you can still drink water, that comes out of the tap, just drink water". So now in the name of "we're being so good for the environment" you've actually incentivized people to drink things that are not as healthy.

Part of Concord on Tap's message was that this is a small sacrifice; giving up bottled water is not a big deal and will not have a major impact on your life. Fiona told me that a lot of people got up at Town Meeting and said the same. But she thought to herself,

This is zero sacrifice for you because you don't drink this product! But you're making the sacrifice on my behalf and that's really kind of obnoxious! I do the best I can in my life, and am I a criminal because I'm out and I'm driving and it is 90 degrees out and I forgot water I want to give my two year olds water instead of, Coke? Apparently I am! And [the other side] has said this. They say, "Well that's your bad parenting".

In this hypothetical situation, Fiona explains that one of her issues with the ban is it makes you a 'criminal' for wanting to give your child something other than a soft drink if you happen to forget to bring water along for a car ride. I find her thinking to showcase what some might see as an extreme leap but others, such as herself, are very concerned about what will happen when they do not have access to tap water. Although I do believe that this is a worthwhile concern, I also believe

that once people are inconvenienced and recognize the annoyance of not being able to purchase water, it becomes a conscious choice whether or not to begin a new habit. If you refuse to bring a reusable bottle around town or do not wish to take advantage of any of the fountains in town or stores willing to give out free glasses of tap water, you will certainly be inconvenienced by this ban.

Fiona's thoughts transition well into my next topic, where I explore residents' and workers from out of town's thoughts on whether or not anyone should be putting energy banning bottled water and not focusing on another pressing issue.

Why water? Why this issue?

A central matter that I find coincided with Kaplan's findings regarding health is that people who do not support the ban also cannot separate water from bottled water. The issue often arose that water is healthy, and why should we ban water? There is not a clear divide between the water and the fact that the water arrives to consumers in a plastic bottle. We are reminded of Graham's words earlier when he exclaimed, "Find a way to recycle it. Put a deposit on it. Let them melt it and reuse it. There's gotta be other ways than banning water". Russell, a convenience store manager who lives outside of Concord, said "I think there are different ways to do what they wanted to accomplish. First thing people say when they come in [to my store] is you have a bunch of soda bottles in there, how come they're not banned? And then you ban water". I often heard people wonder "why water? Why not soda? Of all the things to ban, why ban water?" Latour advises us to tread carefully when accusing people of fetishizing things which people hold in high account, and Kaplan looks at the associations and meanings people give to these objects they turn into

things. I think a reason many people may have felt this ban hit very close to home is that they see bottled water as a principle of essential, safe, and clean drinking water, or at least a safety net in case they ever find themselves without other access. If people cannot separate water from the water in the bottle, they will certainly find the ban to be a ridiculous proposition since water is needed for survival.

Many people deem this an unworthy cause of any effort. Nathalie admitted to me that she received a lot of backlash from other students and parents at the high school when she and Maggie began their own education and awareness program for their peers. “I would get hate emails. Just people being like ‘why don’t you solve other problems like gun control or something?’”. Before I began interviews I visited Concord’s visitor centre to pick up a map and see if there would be any flyers or information regarding the ban. The man who worked there commented that he had been to Town Meeting to vote against it because he also thought there were more pressing issues that could be receiving attention, such as waste produced by diapers.

It is difficult for me to remain neutral on this discussion because I do believe that bottled water is a worthy cause of our attention since it not only asks people to think about our hydration sources and what goes into drinking out water, but it opens up a forum to discuss other unsustainable practices that could be matters of concern. As seen in my Theory chapter, Wilk notes that a billion people are spending huge amounts of money on water when they already have access to a clean supply, which in most cases is delivered straight into their homes through their taps, and the purchased water only has a marginal benefit to their lives (if any). He

also comments that the same logic can be applied to a great number of luxuries consumed by the rich every year, but “water provides a particularly clear example of the logic of modern capitalism, which makes sense at one level of analysis, and absolute nonsense at another” (319).

I do agree that diapers create a lot of waste, but so does bottled water. Why is one worthy and not the other? Wilk wonders: if we cannot find a solution to the puzzle of bottled water, how can we hope to tackle other unsustainable practices, such as sports utility vehicles (319) or, as Fiona offered, a commercial compost system? It seems that some people are quick to tell others what they should be putting their time and effort into, and are quick to criticize some peoples’ way of thinking and acting. Do not tell me how to live my life... but you should reevaluate how you are living yours. However, these same criticizers feel that this ban is telling them what to do and where to get their water from. It is almost as if a cycle, reminding us of Latour, goes around when one group accuses another of not using their time wisely, and one group accuses another of fetishizing the bottle and elevating it to the status of a worshiped thing.

“It’s my choice!”

Continuing the topic of choice, a recurring theme for the anti-ban movement that surfaced most prominently during my talk with Susan and Fiona was individual liberty and the right to choose. The notion of whether or not citizens of Concord should be given the choice to buy what the FDA has labelled a safe and legal product seemed extreme valid for most retailers and Susan and Fiona, who belonged to a group aptly called *Concord Citizens for Consumer Choice*. Fiona in

particular was very adamant that this ban takes away the power of people to choose what is right for him or herself and your family. She believes that by telling others that you cannot buy bottled water is an act of elitism:

So I just started being like oh my god we [in Concord] are so elitist. And so narrow minded. But there's this idea that we know better than everyone else so let's spread this. So I started thinking well, what's the end goal of this. So the end goal is to wipe out bottled water in the world. [With sarcasm] "I think it's great a crusade and I'm so glad that we're the ones who started it!" It was this conceited, paternalistic idea that I couldn't believe we were putting energy into it. In the name of "it's a revolution". It's a stupid revolution.

Fiona's thoughts link with the discussion of consumer boycott featuring Friedman (1999); while a boycott by definition is a *personal* choice to not purchase a product, for example bottled water, Fiona found that Concord citizens who wished to put a ban into place were taking the power of decision to purchase away and were instead insisting that the decision needed to be made for the people. This particularly infuriated members of Free the Water.

Susan added,

When this whole thing started was three or four years ago, when they raised it at Town Meeting, I was upset that somebody could dictate what I could buy. I just thought it was unconstitutional. It just goes against everything that I believe as an American, that somebody could tell me that I couldn't buy a legal, safe product. And so I didn't think it would ever pass! I thought how absurd. Concord would never go for this, that's crazy.

When the topic of individual liberty and the freedom to choose came up, Maude explained to me that culturally the United States is different from Canada because it is filled with a bunch of what she calls 'all about me' people. Although there are pockets of people who do not think like there, they still do not have the kind of cooperative culture that exists in Canada. She suggested that the members of Free the Bottle were thinking, "I don't like that decision you made for me, and it's my right to choose, you better put it on the shelf, and if I want it, I want it!" Maude

stated this this mentality was a real cultural indication of what was happening in her town and elsewhere in the United States, and that it may be getting worse. Maude finally shook her head and said, “There are some people you’ll never bring on board. Some people who just wanna make a buck. And it’s their right to sell a legal product”.

Brian, owner of the local ice cream shop, shared his mixed feelings with me that he holds that seem to combine both sides:

[Before the ban went into effect] we didn’t have bottled water here in the shop. It wasn’t something I wanted to do. We filter the water, it is town water. As a retailer and a capitalist, on one hand I say well I think people should be allowed to sell what they want to sell, and water is as benign as they come. But at the same time I’ve never been a fan of bottled water because I’ve always perceived water to be a utility. It’s something that the municipality provides. So I don’t really drink bottled water myself, and it’s never been a part of what we do here. So I kind of had mixed feelings about it.

The discussion about the right to choose seemed to be twofold: the right of the customer to choose what he or she purchases, as well as the right of a retailer to choose what he or she makes available for sale. To me, it seems that because there is much conflicting information on the safety of both tap water and bottled water (as discussed in the actors section), many residents felt the ban to be paternalistic in nature, and that complying with the ban would be allowing its creators to micromanage your life. Even health concerns aside, there are valid arguments that show bottled water is not good for the environment. However, some, such as Fiona, felt that humans in general are not good for the environment, so eliminating the plastic produced for bottled water is only one stressor in the entire system. The important aspect was not ‘this is a small change that will make an impact’, but rather ‘this is an insignificant change that will not make a larger impact’.

Impact on local economy

Out of all the businesses I visited, the only one that seemed noticeably affected by the ban was the only grocery store in town, Appleby's Market Place. Other stores either said they were as of yet unsure because they had not taken a look at the numbers, or if they had lost revenue it was not a significant amount. I sat outside on a hot July afternoon with the manager at Appleby's, Walter, looking out over the parking lot. I was very surprised by how much I was moved by Walter's stories. Even though he was not entirely supportive of the ban, was not particularly environmentally friendly, he seemed like such a kind man who cared deeply about his employees and recognized that by working at his grocery store a lot of them were putting themselves through college, or were the only source of income to their households. Hearing Walter's thoughts was the only time of all my weeks spent conducting interviews in Concord that I actually had doubts that I was 100% pro-ban. I think what Walter was able to do that no other business was able to do was he spoke for those workers at the other end of the spectrum. Those who perhaps could not afford the luxuries that I enjoyed such as buying organic produce where possible, or attending a Master's program. Some of the workers Walter spoke for relied solely on their weekly pay cheque, and because of the ban and its impact on sales Walter had to reevaluate how his store would function.

Walter said that from the beginning, he thought it was important to remain neutral towards the ban, and he let representatives from both sides come on different days and set up informational booths. He explained that although he did not want the ban to pass, he knows the importance of keeping the highest customer satisfaction rate possible and he needed to let both sides have their space.

However, he does wish that the ban had been enacted state-wide and not only within Concord because of the close proximity Concord holds with neighbouring towns. For some customers, it is even closer to drive to another town's supermarket, but they had been supporting the local one before the ban by driving a few extra minutes. Walter was disappointed find out how many customers had opted to take their business elsewhere when they could no longer purchase cases of water at Appleby's. The ban does not prevent consumers from purchasing cases of bottles from online retailers and having them shipped into town. Walter expands by saying,

We're definitely losing sales on a weekly basis. It wasn't so much of that loss of the bottled water that made me nervous; it was the loss of that customer who wanted to buy bottled water. You know that mother of a family of four comes in and that case of bottled water was a staple in their shopping. Now quite frankly they have to go less than 500 yards over the Concord border to buy it. People are absolutely doing that. I've had several of my good customers who've come to me and said 'Walter, to be honest with you I do go over there, just to let you know, I go over there and I do pickup other things'. So yes I do think very much that people go over there. It would be similar to say for some reason we were no longer allowed to sell cereal, you know people would go somewhere else to buy their cereal.

Walter said the transition has been difficult, and at the time of research his store was continuing to deal with lost customers. He also commented on the fact that although many organizations had backed the ban in town, no one had reached out to his store to discuss how it would impact him and his employees. I understand that it would not have been within Concord's power to enact a ban on neighbouring towns and that Concord on Tap hopes others will follow, but at the time of research they remained the only one in the area. Walter continues,

And that's one of the things I wished people had approached us with before the ban, "how do you think it's going to affect you?", and listened to that. No one called the store to see how it was affecting things. Life is continuing to go on in Concord, everybody is still getting along, and so in [some people's] mind it's not affecting anything. But the reality is it has affected our ability to hire people, our ability to fill hours. One of the people I remember coming up to me said you know Walter you should be proud of being the first [grocery store to have a ban on bottled water]. In all

honesty I'm not proud when I have to tell one of my employees I have to cut your hours. I've been working with these people who are counting on these hours for a certain amount of time. I'm not proud of that.

The younger generation and the high school

Concern for the younger generation came up often during my interviews, both during pro-ban discussions and anti-ban discussions. It is important to note that people on both sides of the argument insisted that fighting for their chosen side was the right thing to do for their children. If participants brought their kids into the discussion by their own account, I would ask if having children and wanting to set an example for them ever impacted his or her decision to speak out on this issue. The answer was always yes, and although most participants explained that although it was difficult to imagine not having children, he or she would have likely still participated in the chosen cause regardless. When I asked Susan if having children impacted her decision to become involved in Free the Water, she explained:

Oh absolutely. Well I don't know if that was my primary motivation, but it was certainly a motivation. I want to set a good example. I want to teach my children to not just sit back and complain about it but to take an active stance. And also, I want to make this world a better place for my children, so if I want to make it a better place I have to do something. If I didn't have children I think I'd be doing that same thing though because it's something I strongly believe in. It's hard to say that because it's hard to imagine and I'd be a different person if I didn't have children.

It is interesting to note that part of Jean's primary motivation to attempt a ban on the sale of bottled water in Concord echo a lot of the reasoning Susan suggests above; we cannot simply watch as things we disagree with occur, we need to, as Susan says, take an active stance and do something about it. It was Jean's grandson who told her about the horrors of the Pacific Garbage Patch and, coming from a child who inherits the world as Jean's generation has left it, this piece of

information obviously had great impact on her. However, while Jean feels responsible toward the environment and doing her part in making it a better place for the future generation, Susan puts other concerns at the forefront, such as the right as an American to make an informed decision by him or herself.

Despite the fact that most of the students who attended the local high school were not yet eighteen years old and could therefore not vote on the bottled water issue, a lot of controversy occurred at the high school. As mentioned previously, I was able to interview by chance one of the students at the local high school who Terry helped set up with Jean and Maude to partake in a credit program where they assisted with the campaign. Nathalie said in addition to helping with projects outside of the high school, such as visiting some businesses to see if they would be willing to undertake the ban and gathering data on how many plastic bottles they sold a week, helping write letters to the editor of the newspaper, and even presenting alongside Jean and Maude at Town Meeting, Nathalie said there were a number of activities she and her classmate set up at the high school. They created flyers and bulletin boards with facts about bottled water, and conducted taste tests during lunch blocks to see if anyone could tell the difference between bottled water and their high school tap water (Nathalie said most tasted no difference). Terry also noted that Nathalie and her classmate supported the application and acceptance of their high school for a Concord Education grant that allowed them to install brand new hydration stations. Reminiscent of what Kaplan noted at the upstate New York university campus, Terry said:

There's a real disconnect. In the eyes of the student there really is a big difference between what comes out of an old school faucet at the water fountain down the hall, but then to have a hydration station, all flashy, your bottle gets filled up using a light

sensor, and it's chilled and filtered and you don't notice the chlorine taste. That was very instrumental in getting a lot of people on board, and if we hadn't had those in place, it may not have been so successful. Once the ban came into effect I think it then became apparent that – well where are people going to get their water?

It is interesting to see that for the high school students in Concord, like those that Kaplan studied, many were not particularly interested in drinking from old, unmaintained, and dingy-looking fountains. The staff in Kaplan's study took a different route than in Concord by paying out of their own pocket, or out of their team's budget, to have water delivered in coolers instead of using the fountains. In Concord, the installation of the hydration stations allow for an interactive bottle fill-up (the stations count the number of bottles refilled here, and therefore the number of plastic bottles diverted from a landfill) and still complies with the ban. Old and unmaintained fountains acted as a barrier for some people at the high school; without the option to buy bottled water from vending machines or at cafeteria, and without the option of refilling their bottles from what they believed to be a clean source, the ban would have been difficult for some to accept. This example demonstrates a way in which the ban directly shaped a public space; students' and staff' perceptions of their communal space were made visible and were altered with the addition of the newer and cleaner hydration stations. The ban led the way for the recasting of existing infrastructure and brought questions about water management and water access to the surface.

As with any other site of discussion in town, not all feedback was either positive or negative – it was certainly mixed at the high school. Maude said for her one of the lowest lows out of all the negative feedback her team received as a result of her campaign was when a parent of a student at the high school declared to the

principle that Terry had been indoctrinating ideas into the students' minds about the horrors of bottled water. A student from the high school wrote a letter to the town's newspaper and told of his personal transition to carrying a reusable water bottle around with him. The student explained that he used to go through many plastic bottles of water; he would keep them in his car and reach for one whenever he became thirsty. When the ban came into place, he wrote that he switched to ice tea for a while, but got tired of that, so he tried bringing around a bottle. He discovered that it was not that hard at all, and was especially proud of this decision because of what he had been learning about bottled water in class from his teacher, Terry. A parent then complained to the school that Terry had been wrongfully filling the students' minds with incorrect facts and had been biased about the issue.

In response to the mixed feedback he had received from high school staff, students, and parents, Terry decided that the most diplomatic thing to do was to invite both Maude and Susan into his class to give her side of the story, rather than the students hearing about it from Terry. He explains:

I had to be a bit diplomatic. As a town employee I technically can't tell people how to vote. And that became much more of an issue with the appeal. Because the first time around we were looking at it strictly as an environmental issue and then the second time around that changed. One of the students had written an editorial in the paper and had mentioned my name. That was seen in the paper by the opposition, and so immediately a letter goes out to the superintendent saying [Terry] is politically indoctrinating students. I think they knew certainly where my position was, but we did not formally address the topic in class yet. I was intending to. And so we were able to actually invite Susan to come into the class to show her side, and also then we also had Maude come in and present the other side. So from an academic standpoint, I think it worked out better.

Terry told me an interesting story about a friend of his and fellow Concord resident. Over the course of one year, Bob collected 1,500 empty bottles of Poland Springs water. On garbage night on his street, Bob would take his dog for a walk

and pick up any empty bottles that his one neighbour had thrown out into the recycling box. Bob knew this neighbour and knew that she lived alone, so the 1,500 bottles he collected were waste from one person over the course of a year. Terry asked out loud, what does this say about our community as a whole? If one person consumed 1,500 bottles in a single year, how many bottles could be diverted from a recycling plant or a landfill if all of Concord decided to drink tap water instead?

After gathering these bottles into huge bags in his living room, Bob invited Terry and about 8 students over to his home to help him create a structure¹². Ironically, the bottles are strung together to create the shape of a massive tap. Bob asked Terry if he could showcase their creation at the front of the high school. This was at the height of discussions in town, close to the final vote night during repeal efforts. Terry said he would need to receive the go ahead from the school's superintendent before Bob could put the structure on display. But Terry explained that Bob just became too impatient; the sculpture appeared on the front lawn one day with a sign stating "You are looking at 1,500 Water Bottles, the number consumed in the U.S. EVERY SECOND!" Terry said he had a hard time assuring the principal that he had explained to Bob that they had to wait for permission. I find it interesting to note that only a matter of months ago, plenty of bottles of water were sold on campus, ended up in recycling bins and the trash: they were visible on campus and had been for a long time. What changed to make the principal so concerned about this sculpture? What does it mean when you gather a bunch of objects and form a thing, a message? Why did the high school not want to be associated with the sculpture? Was it because of the tone of the sign? The

¹²A photo of the end result can be seen in Appendix 3.

sculpture became a powerful symbol of the ongoing debate in town. It was made up of thousands of discarded objects that, through the way people gathered around them, become things. It was overwhelming to see that many bottles strung together, especially because they were consumed by one person in such a short period of time. The sculpture relates to Kopytoff's discussion concerning the cultural biography of things. I have previously mentioned that I recognize this ban as putting an end to the biography of bottled water in Concord, but this sculpture shed new light on this conclusion. The ban is not putting an end to its cultural biography, nor even its physical biography in town, because the bottles were transformed into a creation which held new and powerful meaning. The bottles still exist in town despite the ban, but they have taken on a new cultural identity, which is extending the cultural biography in unpredictable ways.

Outside influences vs internal backing

Susan admitted to me that Free the Water did contact the International Bottled Water Association (IBWA) and Nestlé for help; they accepted funding and advice on how to approach repeal efforts. The IBWA called homes in Concord with information about the benefits of bottled water, they helped Free the Water send out mailings, and they hired people to hand out pamphlets. Susan explains,

We sort of were bouncing ideas off them but we did all the legwork, the ground work, they were more of a moral support. They were helping us, giving us some ideas, what they thought. We dealt with a government relations department so they had experience with campaigns, although this has never come up. They had a financial stake in not having it come up ever again. We were very adamant that they shouldn't really do anything more than in the background and helping us because we really believe that this was a grassroots issue and this was something that the residents should fight and the corporate level should not get involved in this.

However, even though Susan says they insisted the IBWA remain in the background, Maude believes that this outside influence worked negatively for Free the Water.

Part of [Concord on Tap's] strategy was to widely publicize the fact that the people proposing the article were working closely with the bottled water industry. Because people in Concord don't like that. Or, at least a lot of people don't like that. And the sad thing is, the industry was really just using them. They just don't care. They just want to keep making money. The woman who put forth the article actually admitted to the press that the bottled water industry attended her strategy meetings. So we got that out there right away. And we would write letters to the editor saying 'The industry paid people at the poles, we know they're attending these meetings, etc.' This is no longer about bottled water. This is about: is the town of Concord going to let the bottled water industry push us around?

When I asked Maude about the businesses that had not supported the ban after the bylaw went into effect and repeal efforts were in place, Maude also believed that this did not sit well with many residents. She said it was offensive to those who had voted this ban into place that some stores still refused to support it. They did not see the deeper meaning of the ban and that, as she says, it was no longer only about the bottle and the plastic, but now it was about showing the IBWA, Nestlé, PepsiCo, Coca-Cola, and other big industries that they do not hold a monopoly over Concord's access to clean drinking water. And to Maude, the businesses that hung 'Free the Water' posters in their windows were siding with the industry.

It became very clear that some businesses cared more about Nestlé or Pepsi than they care about the citizens. But from my standpoint it's just another strategy of the industry. And it backfired. Because people in town don't like that. If we have a law that we voted on, whether you like it or not, you need to obey the law. And so I don't think it was a very popular thing for people in town, I think that actually backfired.

I also learned from Maude that the Concord Republican party called all of its registered voters and made sure they came out to Town Meeting on the night of the vote to repeal the ban. The ban did not sit with some residents, even after the town

had voted the ban into place. If it was not political at the very beginning, and it was simply about reducing the amount of plastic consumed in town, it had certainly become politicized now.

Terry explained to me that as the informational sessions and debates leading up to the repeal occurred, the discussion evolved to be less about the plastic and more about the water and, more specifically, where you get your water. Town residents began to realize that Nestlé should not be selling Maine's water via Poland Springs because Concord already has access to clean water at a reasonable price, and residents have a right to that water. Maude adds,

I think the people who voted to keep the bylaw in place realized that water is a broader symbol of what our society has become in terms of unsustainability. Why are we taking water from Maine and putting it in plastic and shipping it to Concord when we have great water?

Terry believes that this mental shift allowed the educational piece to come out. Instead of wondering what they would do without their bottles of water, people began thinking about how water should be protected and how they could improve the municipal water supply. The community gathered around the need to have their water protected and supported. This allowed Concord to rally behind their water in a way they had not thought about before. This is reminiscent of Latour's (2005) discussion about mediators. The ban allows bottled water to be pulled in different directions by the human and non-human actors in Concord, and here we see a shift in meanings that people attribute to its role. Instead of being an intermediary that simply transports but does not transform meaning, bottled water alters how residents of Concord think of their local water and the level of influence they desire from outsiders.

Concord's Board of Selectmen¹³ spoke at every vote night and told the public where their opinion stood. On the night for the vote to repeal, the selectmen voted no action on the repeal because the ban had not been in effect long enough for people to let it sink in. They recommended the town wait it out and give it more time. Susan had tried to speak at their meeting to get them to back Free the Water with no success. She believes that their decision was the nail in her campaign's coffin; residents and businesses do not like to go against what the Board of Selectmen recommend.

Actions Undertaken

Businesses make adjustments

One of the very first observations I made during the course of my interviews is that in Concord, the town was divided by the ban on bottled water. This point surfaced numerous times in interviews, and none of my participants were on the fence; it seemed that everyone who was actively involved in or directly affected by the ban was either for or against it. I interviewed members of both campaigns either for or against the ban, store owners, managers, and workers from local businesses that supported or opposed it, and interviewed a high school teacher who explained to me the deep divisions that occurred at the local high school. Of those whose livelihood was affected by the ban, 2 business owners supported the ban, 1 server

¹³ According to Concord's official website, "the Concord Board of Selectmen has five members who are elected to serve three year terms, as defined by the Town Charter and the Term of Office Bylaw. The Town Charter, Bylaws, and the General Laws of Massachusetts grant the Selectmen broad powers to govern the Town. The Selectmen appoint more than 20 boards and committees (permanent and ad hoc). The Selectmen act as the primary policy-making body for a wide variety of issues, which affect the Town's development and provision of services."

at a local restaurant supported it, and 4 business owners or managers opposed it. The businesses that used to sell bottled water, many of which are owned or staffed by people who do not live in Concord and were reached to a lesser extent by Concord on Tap's community education program, are directly affected by the elimination of bottled water in town. Informants told me that until the repeal efforts were voted on at Town Meetings and were unsuccessful, many residents boycotted stores that outwardly supported the ban, and also those who did not support the ban, depending on the customer. Fiona said that she was very confused by this; selling bottled water was a means to make her income, and many of the retailers in town were too afraid of being caught up in town politics to be vocal about their opinion, so she felt she was the voice of many.

Maude said,

It's been difficult for [the businesses]. What they want to do is replace [the lost bottled water sales] with an acceptable legal product that can make the same money – you know they're not thinking transformatively about it. They're thinking, I've got too much to do, how can I just get a corn-based bottle, so I can use it to sell?

She said she did not want to enter the stores which did not support the ban in the lead up to the Town Meetings where a vote was taking place. One convenience store in particular, with which I unsuccessfully attempted to arrange an interview, had been refusing to stop selling bottled water from the time bylaw went into effect up until the repeal efforts failed. The store had simply been accepting fines¹⁴ from inspection officers every time one came in. As Russell, a fellow convenience store

¹⁴ The Health Division of the Town Manager's Office is tasked with enforcing the bylaw. When it went into effect in January 2013, they began inspections of retail stores, restaurants, and other venues that sell bottled beverages. Vendors must comply with the bylaw by not selling bottled water under 1 litre (34 ounces). If bottled water less than 1 litre is being sold, a written warning is issued. Within one week a re-inspection will occur, and if this is failed a \$25 fine is issued as a non-criminal citation. On the third and subsequent inspections, a non-criminal citation with a fine of \$50 is issued if bottled water continues to be sold in violation of the bylaw.

owner, commented it is unclear whether or not that store is losing money because of the continual fines or if the amount of money they still make by selling bottled water is greater than the amount they are being fined.

The tourism industry is significant in Concord. At the visitor centre I learned that about one million people visit Concord every year, especially because it is a short drive from Boston and an easy trip by train. The man working at the visitor center explained to me that it has been difficult for them to help tourists understand the ban, especially on hot summer days, and he admitted that they keep a few cases at the desk for emergencies and hand would hand them out for free if someone were to be in need. I thought to myself, as I looked down at the Concord Tap Map I had just picked up from a stack on the wall, that people would indeed have to be quite desperate to not be able to make it to the closest water fountain which appeared to be about ten steps away from where I stood.

Maude explained that having a Tap Map was one of the promises Concord on Tap had made during their campaign, and in 2013 they followed through with it. It is modelled off a similar map from Vancouver that Maude was sent by an enthusiast. They reached out to businesses in town and asked who would like to be included on a map that would show where tourists or residents could ask for a glass of free tap water. The stores would receive a sticker to display in their store window. Maude thought it was even a marketing opportunity; if someone was thirsty, this would draw people into the store. I found that often the businesses listed on the Tap Map were not places that you would conventionally find bottled water being sold, for example the women's clothing and jewellery store, an antique shop, and a hardware store were all listed. Both Maude and Jean commented that it was vital for people to

see that the town was doing its part in ensuring that there were alternatives in place if you were on the run and did not happen to have remembered to bring a water bottle with you.

In an attempt to further bridge the gap, Concord on Tap partnered with the company Camelbak to offer reusable bottles for purchase in many stores across town. Maude explained that their intentions were never to hurt local businesses, but rather to show alternative ways of getting to the same goal of quenching thirst. The Camelback program allowed businesses in town to purchase shipments of the bottles for a significant discount. Maude suspects that Camelbak made barely any money off those bottles, but while the company got their product out, businesses were able to offer an alternative to customers. Camelbak also gave funding to Concord on Tap for their website and Tap Map, and are listed online as one of the campaign supporters.

I was curious to learn about the adjustments that businesses were making, particularly the ones that used to sell a lot of bottled water. For some the transition was not difficult at all because they had not previously relied heavily on that sale. At the ice cream shop, Brian explained that bottled water was not something he had sold before the ban, and he had always had a jug of free, filtered water available to customers who came in off the street, so for him business went on as usual. Terry, the high school environmental science teacher, commented that at one of the Town Meetings where people were allowed to come up to the microphone and discuss the pros and cons of this ban, one retailer said that his store had made the transition to boxed water, and it had been seamless. Terry noticed that this really “took the wind out of the opposition arguments” because this seemed to be somewhat of a

compromise. At the health food store, Nancy said she had sold the occasional bottle before the ban, and had always sold reusable bottles. She said that even when there was simply talk about the ban in town but it had not yet come into effect they eliminated plastic bottles of water from her store. They instead had switched to glass bottles of water, which she felt more comfortable supporting. At one of the town's historic inns, the manager reminded me that although businesses were not allowed to sell PET plastic bottles of water, they can give them away. He said that sometimes they still do that, and for bottles sold at the front desk to tourists passing by on a historical tour, they have a plant-based bottle available for purchase.

Graham, owner of a café close to the train station and the first stop for a lot of tourists, had a different approach.

I don't agree with the ban. I think it's bad. My way around it is with the bombing of the marathon, I have a container on the counter. I buy the water personally and I make people give a donation, and I'm gonna send a big cheque to the One Fund when the time comes, when the fund is gonna end. So that's my way around the water bottle ban, by doing a good thing and keeping it in the store. It's going to a good cause and I still have water if my customers want it. Is it killing me that I'm giving bottled water away? No! It's \$7 for a case of water, it's 35 to a case, and it's not a lot of money. So in the end I'm going to make a donation and it's probably going to be \$500-\$1000.

Although I highly commend Graham for supporting a cause that he believes in, I could not help but be reminded of Kaplan's comments, and how when discussing their coolers informants often, on their own accord, brought up other 'good' organizations that they belonged to. Graham could have written a cheque to the One Fund¹⁵, but instead he found a way to reinforce customers' behaviour when they bought a bottle of water by putting that donated money towards a good cause. Graham felt proud of the donation he would be sending, customers were pleased

¹⁵ The One Fund raises money to help victims and victims' families affected by the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings.

that their money was being donated *and* they got a beverage, and the bottled water industry was still making money.

Advice on transition from businesses

Every business that had been selling bottled water before the ban went into place had found a way to keep distributing a similar product, either by offering glass bottles, different plant-based bottles, or by giving away a bottle in exchange for a donation. None of the businesses had completely made the switch from selling or distributing bottles of water to offering only free tap water, but there are certainly no more PET single-serving sized plastic bottles of water being sold in Concord.

I asked my informants what advice they would give to a store going through a similar transition. No one suggested continuing to sell the banned product; the one convenience store that did so seems to be an isolated case. Nancy's suggestion to be proactive about it seems to follow Maude's advice on educating people before presenting them with an alternative.

I would say be proactive, explain to people why you're doing it, and give away for a month stainless steel bottles, or one free with a \$150 purchase, which is what we did. You have to be proactive, you have to put a positive spin on it, and explain to people why it's good for everybody.

It is also useful to note that Nancy began following the ban between September 2012 when the Attorney General's office approved the bylaw and January 2013 when it officially became enforced. Walter at Appleby's Market Place said there is not a lot you can do to make the move away from bottled water easier.

In all honesty I don't have much advice, I wish I did! Because if it does happen, there's not really a whole lot you can do. It's either you have the product or you don't

have the product. You have to do the best you can to make everybody happy, to try and work within the law of the community. I certainly wouldn't do anything that would cause the community to get upset. You need to work with the community.

The analysis in this chapter allows a glimpse into this instance of bottled water, specifically a ban, in Concord, and the actors who help shape this matter of concern. By linking stories from those who are in some way affected by and connected through the ban, I am able to draw conclusions and I am able to elaborate on what my study contributes to the growing literature on this topic.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

Although my project has been a mere glimpse into one moment, one stage in a town's evolving and ever adapting life, I do believe that we can learn from what I found. The individual stories of actors who are connected by this ban may not amount to much on their own, but as I discovered how the actors are joined by this instance of bottled water, and why they gathered around it, I can piece together this matter of concern and make conclusions about my case. My interviews allow me to understand how an apolitical commodity became a political one. I learned that the ban encouraged Concord residents to problematize water and plastic by creating an open forum of discussion to bring forward the various meanings associated with bottled water and a restriction to it. In recognizing the historical and current implications of bottled water's popularity worldwide, I am confident in my suggestions concerning where Concord fits, what my research can contribute to the existing debates in the literature, and why this ban was a worthwhile site of study for my Master's thesis research.

Through my fieldwork and the subsequent analysis of my interviews, I uncovered two main results that I will further explore in this chapter. First, through the guidance of Kaplan and Latour, I found that there are an innumerable amount of meanings people can associate with a thing. In Concord, bottled water means different things to different residents. It also brings other actors into being, such as the plastic bottle, the ban, and Concord public tap water. The ban brought these to the surface, and challenged them or supported them in various ways.

Second, originally the ban signified taking a stand against environmental destruction, as Jean intended. After repeal efforts surfaced, a shift in discussion occurred towards small town autonomy and the meaning of political efforts to take a stand against or accept outside help. The discussion evolved from 'what can this ban do for Concord, and therefore the greater environment' (environmental discussion), to 'what does supporting or not supporting this ban mean for my town' (political discussion). Because of the political route in Town Meeting that Jean was forced to take in order to turn this ban into a practiced and enforceable bylaw, residents were able to recognize and share their personal meanings towards bottled water, and therefore gather around this thing. However, when efforts to repeal the ban became apparent and corporations outside of Concord became involved, the discussion turned from solely the impact of bottled water on our environment to the impact of bottled water companies and large corporations on local Concord issues. It is here that we see a shift; the bottle went from being an apolitical commodity to being seen as a political commodity in town. It seems that this result was impossible to avoid because of the political route that Jean had to follow, and also because of the vested financial interest that various industries have in maintaining their product on shelves and available for purchase in Concord.

I believe in the end these two main results go hand in hand. Depending on the meanings that a person associates with bottle water, a person will react differently towards a ban. However, these meanings may evolve when impacted by major events that arise during the course of a gathering, such as the prospect of a repeal of the ban and subsequent outside interference.

The campaign to ban the sale of bottled water in town and the repeal efforts that followed can be seen to have both united and divided the town. There was constant talk during my interviews of a divide in town; people outwardly showed their support through lawn signs similar to putting up signs to support an election candidate. There were small battles on-going depending on the chosen side: one convenience store boycotted the ban, while customers boycotted other stores depending on whether or not the store supported the ban. I listened to stories from Jean, Maude, Terry, and Susan about how pleasantly surprised they were that a community of enthusiasts had banded together to support a side of the cause, and lasting relationships formed because of this.

For the local businesses, in the end it does not matter what their workers' personal opinions are on the ban, they have to comply with the ban. Many are caught in a difficult position between wanting to continue the sale of a product they had success with, or comply with what the town had voted for. The businesses had to become resourceful, but fortunately Concord on Tap ensured that there are opportunities for them to comply with the ban and still make a sale. I did notice that the workers who lived in Concord and who would have been more likely to have attended Town Meetings and informational sessions (and more reached by the community education program) had more informed thoughts and positions than those who lived out of town. It may have been beneficial for the town to hold meetings specific to businesses and to have relied less on word of mouth. This would have created another forum for them to discuss their concerns, and may shed light on certain confusing topics such as recycling.

Reflections on successes and failures: Concord on Tap

Both Maude and Jean expressed gratitude for all the people that gave bits of their time throughout the campaign. Even though it took years of effort for them to convince the town this was a project worth backing, it is extremely rewarding to see it all come together. At the time of my interviews, both women were taking a bit of a breather from the campaign and had plans to begin new projects. Jean is so pleased to have received support from fellow residents that she has decided to tackle a new item: plastic bags. She plans on returning to Town Meeting in April 2014 with a presentation outlining the negative environmental impacts of plastic bags and will encourage the town to have a ban on these as well.

Maude feels differently on this subject. She is of the opinion that the community needs time to heal instead of being “ban-happy”. She would like to see the town continuously learning about sustainability practices and perhaps try a few changes on a voluntary basis before adopting a new ban. However, she believes it is still vital that the town continues to see positive outcomes of the bottled water ban. There is a new water station in a local park, and there were plans to install at least one more in the near future.

Maude explains,

I find that the most rewarding thing has just been the relationships I’ve built with the people I’ve worked with. I’ve met so many new people and we’re working together on other things. So I feel like even though it was divisive for different parts of the community, I think it built community within the group that I was with. So I met a lot of great people. I know a lot of people now! Some people don’t like me but it’s ok. It’s not about popularity; it’s about doing the right thing.

Maude remains the chair of Concord’s Comprehensive Sustainable Energy Committee which recently ran the most successful Solar Challenge in the state of

Massachusetts by adding 166 solar installations in Concord for an additional 1.3 megawatts in clean, local solar power.

Terry was happy to share with me that there have been teachers working within subjects that relate to the environment who have heard about Concord's new bylaw and have reached out to Terry to seek advice. One suggestion he has is to start at a high school, or even an elementary school, and educate students about more sustainable ways to stay hydrated. This would include installing hydration stations. He would encourage the school's superintendent to stop the sale of bottled water in vending machines and at the cafeteria on school grounds, although Terry admits that can be difficult since the school does make a profit from these sales. He says that it boils down to changing the public's perception about something they may never have given a second thought to and have taken for granted.

Reflections on successes and failures: Free the Bottle

Neither Susan nor Fiona believe that their efforts were futile; even though they lost at Town Meeting, there were still benefits that came out of this experience and all their time spent devoted to this campaign. Susan does not think she has changed, but she has found inner confidence from all the public appearances she participated in.

The funny thing is I've become sort of more notorious, I've become like a local celebrity, which is hilarious. But I don't think I've changed as a person. If anything it makes me proud to know that I can do it. I used to be extremely afraid of public speaking, and so this really helped me get over my fear. It's kind of like being thrown in the deep end and told just swim! And that's what happened. It's given me more confidence, just to be able to speak up and say what I believe in, knowing that nothing bad is gonna happen, my house isn't gonna get bombed, my life isn't gonna get threatened, nothing.

In addition to the Board of Selectmen not backing them, Susan also believes something that did not help their campaign was that there was not enough time for the residents of Concord to be inconvenienced by this ban. Even though there were over 4 months between the time that the ban went into place and the vote to repeal took place, she does not think people realized just how irritating this ban was. I cannot help but wonder if it in fact was quite the opposite; perhaps people had time to realize that it was *not* quite as big of a deal as they originally feared, and that life was carrying on even though they could not buy bottled water in town. I suppose only time will tell if Susan's hypothesis is correct.

On what she would change about her campaign's strategy, Susan explained:

I would not do the lawn signs. Because I think what happened was people thought because there were so many lawn signs around town residents thought that we were going to win it and that they didn't need to go to Town Meeting. So maybe I wouldn't be so public. I would do more of a stealth campaign. Like do more phone calls and personally making sure that people showed up to Town Meeting. I would do publicity but in a different way. I think the other problem with our campaign was we brought out the other side by doing such a highly public campaign. We had absolutely no idea what the opposition was doing, because they were not visible. All of our publicity just enraged the opposition.

Fiona does not see that the ban has made any reduction on plastic consumption, even though Maude begs to differ. Fiona instead proclaims, "The ban has inconvenienced people, but it has not stopped people from drinking bottled water". It is more of an annoyance than an effort towards more sustainable practices in town. Fiona does agree that the debate got people thinking and talking about water in ways they had not previously done.

Fiona and Susan are both adamant that the structure of Town Meeting did not work in their favour and that it is outdated and needs a complete overhaul. They are on a committee that is addressing this issue. One of the main concerns they

raise is that it simply not accessible to all residents of Concord. Some people work evenings or cannot devote an entire evening, or multiple evenings, to attending meetings. People who are out of town or who are sick do not have an opportunity to vote; there is no absentee ballot or online option. If you are not physically at Town Meeting, you cannot vote. There is also no way of knowing exactly when your item of interest will come up over the course of a long evening.

Life in Concord

It is difficult to predict what this ban means for Concord in the long term. Walter suggested that one alternative to the ban could have been to charge more for bottles, and that in the end they would gradually phase out on their own in the same way that cigarettes were phased out at Appleby's Market Place. He said the store owners decided on their own initiative to stop selling cigarettes since it was no longer profitable. However, this took many generations to evolve; if cigarettes have been sold in stores for over a century and have only recently been phased out, how long would it have taken for bottled water to become gradually unheard of at the local supermarkets?

For most of Concord's residents, life appears to be continuing as normal, from what I could observe. Fiona and Susan both agreed that they would support a second effort to repeal the bylaw if someone else was willing to take the lead, but it is not easy to predict just how inconvenienced and upset Concord residents remain after the first effort to repeal failed. It appears as though many residents are simply moving on with their lives; either continuing to buy bottled water but online or in a

different town, continuing to drink water from sources other than individually-sized plastic bottles, or accepting the ban, adapting according, and making lifestyle changes. We are reminded again of the high school student, friends with Maude's son, who was at first inconvenienced by the ban because he thought his only alternative was to purchase sugary beverages, such as ice tea. Once he realized how easy and more affordable it was to carry around his reusable bottled, he made the complete switch. Only time will tell if others follow his suit and, as Maude suggests, "move on with their lives", or if enough residents are still agitated enough to attempt a repeal.

Personal Thoughts

I found it difficult to connect with those who opposed the ban for reasons that I immediately identified as being solvable by making a transition back to the tap. People who opposed the ban were not able to see beyond the restriction on plastic bottles carrying water; they instead ended at banning water. They were either doubtful or unwilling take the step further and change their own behaviour. They assume that people bringing around bottles is not going to happen, so if people do not make a shift in behaviour then they will be inconvenienced, they will end up on the run and thirsty, or they will be faced with only unhealthy choices at the convenience stores, they will in the end go to neighbouring towns to get their bottles.

Although I disagree with Susan and Fiona's stances on the ban, I did find it useful to sit down with them and listening to their reasoning for why a person would

see that way. So even though I do not agree with the points they believed to be valid reasons why the ban should be repealed, I could understand how *if* someone were to think the way that they did, that he or she would take issue and even personal offense to the ban.

Limitations of my work

My work is limited in that it is merely a glimpse into one moment in a town's long history. I arrived on site and interviewed people who spoke a lot about the lead up to an event that I had not personally been witness to. We talked a lot about opinions of various events, but I did not conduct any participant observation. I did literary analysis of news reports, watched taped recordings of the Town Meetings, and read pertinent legal documents, but I did not witness any of these events in person. However, I was able to walk around town, armed with my Tap Map, and observe which stores had opted to put a Concord on Tap sticker in their windows, and which had not. If I had more time for fieldwork, it would have been beneficial for me to live in Concord for a longer period of time and attend more of the public education program meetings led by Maude, or sat in on a meeting at Fiona's father's space which had become Free the Water headquarters.

Possible area of future research

It would be fascinating to conduct a comparison study between Concord and Bundanoon, Australia. The bylaw has successfully been in place for 4 years at the time of this research in Bundanoon, and it would be interesting to learn what

meanings that surfaced in Concord were isolated to this town and what is common among the two towns. It may even be beneficial for residents of Concord to participate in this research and learn from Bundanoon concerning their mistakes, what they would have done differently, any issues they are now faced with, and why they believe the ban has lasted for so long.

Future for bottled water bans

Is there a place where having bottled water is appropriate? Maude suggested that would be in places where drinking tap water is not safe. Free the Water members would have certainly suggested that its appropriate place is here in Concord. However, other towns are beginning to follow Concord's lead. At the time of my research, Maude had plans to speak at a nearby town's meeting about the successfully-passed bylaw. She said a few towns in the region and neighbouring states had contacted her about the bylaw in hopes of starting a similar one in their own town or city. It is my belief that these bottled water bans will slowly gain in popularity, but it is important to note that I can share thoughts regarding the future of bottled water bans, not bottled water, including its popularity in the United States. As statistics in Chapter 1: Introduction show, consumption of bottled water remains on the rise and as of yet there have been no studies conducted to prove or disprove that the ban in Concord or bans on campuses have had an influence on the amount of bottles of water consumed and the amount of waste that ensues.

Despite his obvious discontent with bottled water, Wilk notes, "In another era, perhaps, we could ask governments to simply pass laws that forbid or tax bottled

water for the common good; to do so today is impractical, and in choosing this course we implicitly endorse authoritarian and anti-democratic government” (319). I see residents in Concord as taking what Wilk predicts would cause unrest for various reasons one step further: instead of waiting for the government to outlaw bottled water, they brought the deciding vote to the people who would be affected by the ban and allowed them to decide their own fate. I believe that when it comes down to it, the ultimate form of democracy prevailed: the majority of voters in Concord who attended Town Meeting vote nights decided to allow this ban to take place. The residents took the place of the ‘anti-democratic government’ and instead gave equal say on the matter to every eligible voter.

What I learned and what I would change

The most rewarding experience for me throughout this whole adventure is that I met so many dedicated and passionate individuals who surprised themselves in many ways. They challenged themselves to be personally responsible for what they believed to be right and just for the town, and then carried out a long and trying journey that everyone learned from. Although I may not hold the same viewpoint on this issue that many of the informants I interviewed hold, I hold them in the highest respect for speaking out and fighting for what they believe to be right. That being said, I also learned that some people are extremely resistant to change, even change that I find (as Maude would say) a small sacrifice that will help the community in the long run. But I also learned that there are many reasons why a person holds on and is resistant.

It seems as though no matter how you look at the situation, Concord's efforts and the ban that is now in place most certainly bring up the discussion about bottle water's role in our lives. It challenges people to talk about water, and where people get their water from, in ways that would not have otherwise come to the surface. Terry commented that it was not until many residents were presented with the idea that there may be something wrong with bottled water do they start connecting the dots outwards. The media attention, both positive and negative, allows for an open forum to debate and discuss a ban that had never been previously seen for a small town in the United States. Jean, Maude, Terry, and the rest of their team hopes that this ban will be an example for others and show them that they researched, they planned intensively, and they carried out a successful environmental movement that surprised many town members but stood the test of much negative feedback and repeal efforts.

End Note

During the time of writing, on Wednesday, December 4, 2013, a special Town Meeting occurred in Concord. A second effort to repeal the ban on the sale of plastic water bottles was resoundingly defeated. Reporter Calvin Hennick wrote “town Moderator Eric Van Loon didn't even bother taking an official tally because the opposition to the ban was so overwhelming. It appeared that upwards of 80 to 90 percent of the 1,127 voters at town meeting raised their ballots against the repeal measure” (2013). It is difficult to predict whether or not efforts to repeal the ban will arise again in the future, but I believe that the ban is set to remain in Concord for at least the time being.

It is also interesting to note that San Francisco is the latest city in the United States to enter this discussion. According to an article by Joshua Sabatini in the *San Francisco Examiner*, a proposal by the Board of Supervisors President David Chiu plans to ban the sale of bottled water on public property such as in parks, concerts, large events and mobile food trucks. Sabatini notes,

For events on public property with 100 or more attendees, the legislation would prohibit the sales of plastic water bottles if there is an alternative city potable supply. City agencies would have to study how to better supply water to events, and it would be city policy to install drinking fountains, bottle filling stations and potable water hook-ups whenever there are capital improvements. By October 2016, no person would be able to sell or distribute bottled water at outdoor events on public property. Beginning October 2014, new leases, including renewals, and permits, such as those for mobile food vendors and vendors in public parks, would prohibit the sale of plastic water bottles.

The article also notes that Concord's ban was “emblematic of a rising tide” which brings attention to the plastic water bottle industry that is continuously

criticized by environmentalists for their fossil fuel consumption and mass amounts of waste (2013).

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Appendix 1

TOWN OF CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS

SALE OF DRINKING WATER IN SINGLE-SERVE PET BOTTLES BYLAW

Section 1. Sale of Drinking Water in Single-Serving PET Bottles

It shall be unlawful to sell non-sparkling, unflavored drinking water in single-serving polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles of 1 liter (34 ounces) or less in the Town of Concord on or after January 1, 2013.

Section 2. Exemption for Emergencies

Sales occurring subsequent to a declaration of an emergency adversely affecting the availability and/or quality of drinking water to Concord residents by the Emergency Management Director or other duly-authorized Town, Commonwealth or United States official shall be exempt from this Bylaw until seven days after such declaration has ended.

Section 3. Enforcement Process

Enforcement of this Bylaw shall be the responsibility of the Town Manager or his/her designee. The Town Manager shall determine the inspection process to be followed, incorporating the process into other town duties as appropriate. Any establishment conducting sales in violation of this Bylaw shall be subject to a non-criminal disposition fine as specified in Appendix A of the Regulations for the Enforcement of Town Bylaws under M.G.L. Chapter 40, §21D and the Bylaw for Non-Criminal Disposition of Violations adopted under Article 47 of the 1984 Town Meeting, as amended. Any such fines shall be paid to the Town of Concord.

Section 4. Suspension of the Bylaw

If the Town Manager determines that the cost of implementing and enforcing this Bylaw has become unreasonable, then the Town Manager shall so advise the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Selectmen shall conduct a Public Hearing to inform the citizens of such costs. Subsequent to the Public Hearing, the Board of Selectmen may continue this Bylaw in force or may suspend it permanently or for such length of time as they may determine.

And to amend Appendix A of the Non-Criminal Disposition Bylaw by adding the following:

Bylaw	Fine Schedule	Fine Allowed	Enforcement Agency
Drinking Water in Single-Serving PET Bottles Bylaw	1 st offense 2 nd offense 3 rd & each subsequent offense	Warning \$25.00 \$50.00	Town Manager's Designee

Passed by Counted Majority Vote
(403 voting in favor; 364 opposed)
Annual Town Meeting, April 25, 2012
Approved by Attorney General –September 5, 2012

Appendix 2



All photos in this appendix were taken by the author at the time of fieldwork.

Appendix 3



Lawson (2013)