

TEMPORALITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:
A POLITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF
ACTIVISM IN CONTEMPORARY TURKEY
(2016-2018)

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Abstract

While social movement studies have developed extensive frameworks for studying the emergence, maintenance, and decline of social movements, temporal orientations and futurity have not been systematically mobilized as necessary explanatory dimensions of activism. This dissertation argues that activists' temporal orientations and future imaginings are crucial to understanding action, including organizational form, movement trajectories, and long-term projects. Futurity is particularly relevant and amenable to theorization in uncertain, politically volatile, and urgent times, when activist debates revolve around predictions, expectations, possibilities, and scenarios. I take grassroots activism in Istanbul, Turkey between 2016 and 2018 as a case in point to examine the changing dynamics of activism during regime change. Based on participant-observation at a local assembly that was established to campaign for the “no” vote in the constitutional referendum of 2017 supported by semi-structured, in-depth interviews with activists, this study follows the changes in activists' temporal orientations and their relationship to different aspects of activism.

The dissertation begins with an examination of the organizational structure of the local “no” assembly as a product of activists' critical engagement with the past and the future, by looking at their re-reading of the Gezi protests of 2013. The analysis then moves on to the period around the 2017 referendum, when future imaginings, in the form of anticipatory scenarios about the near future, played a constitutive role in the decision-making processes of the assembly, and contending futures resulted in its disintegration. Lastly, as the referendum was left behind and as activists were faced with defeat at the 2018 presidential and general elections, their engagement with the distant future came to the fore, in the form of hope, which enabled and was enabled by a future-oriented narrative of historical embeddedness. To conclude, I argue that scholars of social movements should pay more attention to the role of possibilities and future imaginings in political action, as well as the open-endedness inherent in activism, especially at times marked by uncertainty and urgency.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

There is a picture by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before *us*, *he* sees one single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. What we call progress is *this* storm. (Benjamin, 1940)

In the passage above, Walter Benjamin, in his theses “On the Concept of History” (1940), writes about the “angel of history”, inspired by the Swiss-born German painter Paul Klee’s famous painting *Angelus Novus*. This beautifully written passage is an inspiring starting point to think about our times, and about history in general. In the rest of his theses, Benjamin writes about the state of emergency as the normal condition; about history as accumulation of ruins; about the messianic moment and transformation. He looks back at the past and the defeated, dreaming of the future and of rupture. The angel, with its face turned toward the past and its back toward the future, tells us about the arrow of time. For Benjamin, history is anchored in the past while time pushes us forward. He sensitizes us to the workings of time and of history with his specific temporal orientation to them.

My dissertation follows a group of activists in Istanbul as they try to reverse the process of the consolidation of authoritarianism in Turkey. Contrary to Benjamin’s

angel of history, we witness the angel turning around its own axis throughout my dissertation. With each fluctuation in the political situation, and a regime that gets more and more repressive and overtly authoritarian at every turn, activists turn their glance from history-as-the-past toward history-as-the-future.

This study examines contemporary grassroots activism in Turkey based on political ethnographic research conducted from July 2016, right after the military coup attempt, to September 2018, a little after the presidential and general elections took place. At the broadest, it looks at how Turkey's authoritarian turn affects grassroots activism on the ground. More specifically, the dissertation seeks to investigate the role that activists' temporal orientations play at different stages of the organization and mobilization process, as they orient themselves with regards to a volatile political schedule and increasing repression by the state. This question entails addressing a range of issues from the adaptation of organizational structures and the changes in ways of doing politics to activists' response to defeat and abeyance. By examining these issues and processes, I hope to critically engage with social movement theory and expand it to cover temporality and temporal approaches to the study of political contention.

At this stage, it is necessary to clarify what I mean by temporality by distinguishing it from time. On the one hand, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, time is "the indefinite continued progress of existence and events in the past, present, and future regarded as a whole", as in "living through space and time". Temporality, on the other hand, is defined as "the state of existing within or having some relationship with time". So, what sets temporality apart from time is that it is defined by a *relationship* to the latter. Whereas time is uncontrollable and unmanipulable by humans as "the continued progress of existence", temporality as a

concept leaves more room for human agency. I take temporality to be more prone to an agentic approach to how temporal processes work because humans constantly play with their *relationship with* time: we make time, we work against time, we can be ahead of time, and so on. Surely, our experience of time is not always under our control: we might run out of time, there might be no time, time might feel like it has slowed down or sped up. Even then, the way we experience time itself can be intersubjectively constructed. Moreover, we often put work into commanding how we use our time (“time management” springs to mind), as well as adjust our perception of it (e.g. the difference between a deadline approaching and looking forward to the end of a period of time). Hence, my focus here is on temporality rather than time – a point to which I will come back in more detail in the section where I review how temporality and time are used in social movement studies – although I sometimes use them interchangeably when the word “time” makes more grammatical sense.

Phrased in temporal terms, then, my dissertation is an account of how, with changing political circumstances and their position within it, activists’ temporal orientations changed, which in turn shaped their actions. Temporality, in other words, is not only the connecting thread that ties together the arguments and structure of the thesis, but also the main element through which changes and continuities are explained. Each empirical chapter depicts a different phase of temporal orientation: in the first chapter, activists are re-reading the Gezi protests of 2013, looking back from 2017; in the second chapter, they are facing the near future, while having a solid glimpse of the distant future, with the sense of a storm building up; in the third chapter, the rotation is complete, and they are face to face with what used to be the distant future. Activists feel the debris of the past on their back, even when they are facing the future, and vice versa. As such, the past and the future are intertwined in action.

Each temporal orientation influences how people act in the present. The ways in which action is affected by different temporal orientations map onto the different themes that each empirical chapter addresses. In the first chapter, it is the changing reading of the past – which is itself informed by the present and the future – that informs grassroots organizational structures and the emergence of the local assemblies. In the second chapter, it is the relationship between expectations about the near future and movement trajectory or sustainment. In the last empirical chapter, it is the narrative of emplacement within an ongoing historical struggle that facilitates hope as a political resource, as a response to defeat.

Taken together, these findings constitute the primary theoretical contribution of this dissertation: Temporal orientations of movement actors influence movement organization, trajectories, and strategies. Social movement theory, as I will discuss shortly, has not paid enough attention to the temporal dimension in these processes. Rather, I will claim that it has taken into consideration time as an overarching, analytic framework or simply as the standardised measurement of the passage of existence. What is missing from the analysis is an active notion of temporality, where the scholar recognizes that people (and research) do not only exist *in* time but have a relationship *with* time that operates on a collective level and shapes action. Movements do not only exist in their temporal context, but the different temporalities within and outside a single movement clash, align, contradict, expand, contract, and the list goes on. Time is not just an externality that happens to us. Activists co-construct the different temporalities with which they work, embedding themselves in different ways in different temporalities; looking backwards at times, forwards at others, or sometimes focusing on the present; they compete over how to use time, or the temporality on which to act. Temporalities, at least in some cases, lie at the heart of contention itself.

The secondary theoretical contribution is to studies of activism in transitional political contexts. The role of activism in western democracies and in authoritarian states has been well documented, as I will discuss in the second part of the literature review below. Activism during de-democratization phases, or during transitions to non-democracy, on the other hand, has been understudied even though de-democratization is an increasingly frequent phenomenon. Ethnographic studies of such transitions in general, and activism under such conditions in particular, are even rarer. This research is well situated to help fill in this lacuna within the social movements and transitions literatures. This study will provide a tentative overview of the effects of an authoritarianism that is under construction in Turkey and the ways in which activism adapts itself politically, socially, and organizationally, in a bid to reverse the anticipated course of events.

This study seeks to make an empirical contribution as well. It will serve future studies as an ethnographic account of grassroots organizing within a specific time frame, between 2016 and 2018, in Istanbul. This dissertation is not a full account of the period in question: My aim is not to provide a complete description of the social or cultural worlds of activists, the chronology of all the events that took place, or an exhaustive and all-inclusive view of existing activism.¹ What I do in this work is to give a situated account of grassroots activism as it seeks to orient itself with regards to lived and anticipated changes in macrolevel political structures (i.e. regime change). I focus particularly on a specific type of activism, namely, the local assemblies; and on certain themes that emerged out of my observations and interviews, and that I find theoretically more interesting. As such, my research does not document the whole

¹ See the next Chapter on methodology for the methodological approaches that constitute this study.

scene of political activism of the period in Turkey and instead provides a focused snapshot of a local “no” assembly.

Beyond these limitations, the empirical account is still important if we consider the fact that styles of contention and state intervention help explain later moves on both sides. As Boudreau (2004, p. 1) puts it, “democracy movements arise against established patterns of contention: Their timing, base, and outcome reflect state-movement interactions begun at the dictatorship's outset and reproduces (with adjustments) thereafter, in interactions between repression and contention. Institutions and repertoires of contention that survive, or are ignored by, state repression inform important aspects of anti-dictatorship movements, and influence the role that protest plays in transitions to democracy”. We can view this study as an account of early attempts at building a democracy movement from below. Whether the period with which this study deals comes to be categorized as such depends on how history plays out in the future, but the process through which activism is shaped will be important, nevertheless.

It is important also because the volatility, darkness, and uncertainty that mark the period under study are not peculiar to Turkey. Activists' ways of responding to these changes, and the forms of politics, spaces of contention, temporal and emotional orientations that they devise or adopt can be informative insights into how activism perseveres in other, similar contexts.

In the rest of this chapter, I will proceed by introducing the political context in which this study took place. This section will include a brief outline of politics in Turkey as well as an account of the political events that occurred during my field work between 2016 and 2018. Then, I will review the literature on social movements with a specific focus on how temporality has been used. The next section will review the

literature on (de-)democratic transitions and social movements' role in them. Lastly, I will present the outline of the dissertation.

Political Context

Founded in 1923 as a republic, Turkey has a troubled history of democratization, with multiple transitions to democracy and as many relapses into authoritarianism. Sunar and Sayari (1986) attributed Turkey's centralist state and its bureaucratic elites to this convoluted history. After the transition to a multi-party system in 1950, the military assumed the role of a guardian (Heper, 2005) – the protector of secularism and of the state – and intervened in politics roughly every 10 years.² Even though electoral democracy was re-installed shortly after each military intervention, the guardian status of the military remained institutionally entrenched until the 2010 constitutional referendum. The role of the military, a strong executive, and the 10 per cent electoral threshold (introduced after the 1980 military coup) were the distinguishing features of Turkish democracy (Kalaycioglu, 2011) until recently. The Republican People's Party (Turkish acronym, CHP) is the first political party of the Turkish Republic and the ruling party during the one-party period until 1950. The party represents the Kemalist, secular, liberal strata of Turkish society, as well as social democrats. This position, however, has been questioned by libertarian socialists and leftists since it became the main opposition party throughout AKP rule.

The left in Turkey was successful at mobilization in the 1970s, during which a proliferation of social movements was combined with polarization and violent clashes,

² Most notably in 1960 (military coup), 1971 (military memorandum), 1980 (military coup d'état), 1997 (military memorandum), 2007 (e-memorandum), and in 2016 (military coup attempt).

which resulted in the 1980 military coup. However, the Turkish left has been traditionally weak, while the Kurdish liberation movement proved itself to be a stronger challenge to the Turkish establishment (Gunes, 2017). Although Kurdish political parties were established and closed down throughout much of the multi-party period (White, 2000), the most electorally successful party that comes from that lineage is the left-wing, pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (Turkish acronym, HDP) that was founded in 2012.

Following a series of military coups, memorandums, and party closures, the Justice and Development Party (Turkish acronym, AKP) came to power in 2002 as an economically liberal, socially conservative political party. Ozbudun (2006) describes the process by which the AKP came to power as a transition from political Islam to conservative democracy. The party came to be supported by a broad popular stratum, including the business community and some liberal intellectuals. In the first decade of AKP rule, Turkey saw rapid economic development and an expansion of democratic freedoms, and with the 2010 constitutional referendum, the AKP put an end to military tutelage (Kuru & Stepan, 2012). During the first half of its rule, the party seemed to be adhering to the core secular reforms of the Republic, was successful in local government, and was doing well economically. The Turkish trajectory of Islamic liberalism was offered as a model to other Middle Eastern countries in the first decade of the 2000s (Tugal, 2016a).

The Gezi protests that took place in 2013 in Turkey was the largest mass protest in living memory in western Turkey. The global wave of uprisings at the time – from Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen to the United States, Spain, and Brazil – assigned the Gezi protests a global significance. Gezi was interpreted as a movement for “reclaiming the right to the city” (Kuymulu, 2013), a politics of the body

(Gambetti, 2014), an urban utopia (Harmansah, 2014), a counter-hegemonic moment (Gencoglu Onbasi, 2016), an exercise in radical democracy (Inceoglu, 2015), among others. Prefigurative politics was brought to the forefront in terms of dominant styles of contention. Consensus, persuasion, non-institutionalism, and non-partisanship were valued organizing principles. The belief that “another world is possible” was boosted, and the focus on solidarity, listening to the “other”, doing things together, being local were popularized. Gezi and its immediate aftermath were a hopeful time for the opposition in Turkey.

In the general elections of 7 June 2015, the HDP won 13% of the votes in Turkey and became the third largest political party in the parliament. The HDP’s election success put an end to the Justice and Development Party’s (AKP) 13 years of rule, making it not only a victory for leftist politics but for all democrats who were against the increasingly repressive politics of the ruling party. However, the hopeful atmosphere created by the elections did not last long. Following the end of the Peace Process between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Kurdish acronym, PKK) in July 2015, there were 111 illegal curfews in nine Kurdish-majority cities (HDP Report, 2016); 2,360 people, including 380 unarmed civilians, died in armed conflicts in these cities (Amnesty International, December 2016); and 24,000 people living in Sur in the city of Amed (Diyarbakir) were forced to emigrate (ibid.). A series of bombings ensued. The first bombing in 5 June 2015 at the HDP rally in Amed (Diyarbakir) were followed by the bombings in Suruc on 20 July 2015, in Ankara on 10 October 2015, in Istanbul’s Sultanahmet district on 12 January 2016, in Istanbul’s Istiklal Avenue on 19 March 2016, in Istanbul Ataturk Airport on 28 June 2016, and in Antep on 20 August 2016 (HDP Report, 2016, p. 1).

The terrorization of social and political life culminated in the AKP's return to power as the ruling party. The 2015 elections were followed by other major political events; namely, the 2016 military coup attempt, the declaration of a state of emergency, and the constitutional referendum of April 2017. These events had horrific results for democratic rights and civil liberties in Turkey; thousands of government employees were dismissed by emergency rule decrees, politicians were arrested, including the co-leaders and thousands of members of the HDP, elected officials were replaced by government employees in tens of cities, and thousands of activists, lawyers, journalists, academics were arrested and indicted with membership of or aiding terrorist organizations.

During the two years that this study covers,³ I witnessed a military coup attempt in July 2016, a two-year-long state of emergency that ended in June 2018, a referendum to reform the Turkish constitution in April 2017, and presidential and general elections in June 2018. These historic events are important milestones that provide the political context that is needed to understand the unstable social and political environment in Turkey which has affected this study.

The meaning of the 15 July 2016 military coup attempt for politics in Turkey can be summarized under three interrelated headings: Debates about the weakening of the reshuffling Turkish State, legitimization of the state of emergency, and the establishment and institutionalization of a new regime through emergency rule. The dynamics and actors behind the attempted coup were a popular topic of discussion for both the ruling party AKP and the opposition alike. Even though this debate shed some light on the AKP-Gülen relationship, it was constituted mostly by accusations and speculations, and the details of the coup attempt will probably remain unknown for a

³ Please see the next Chapter on methodology for a breakdown of my time in the field.

long time.⁴ What the attempted (or staged) coup d'état meant for the participants of this study was an excuse for Erdogan to further strengthen his authoritarian rule and increase the repression on the political opposition. It paved the way for the legitimization of the emergency rule and the decision to hold a referendum to change the constitution in favour of a specific type of presidential political system which concentrates powers in the hands of the President, with no checks and balances.

Following the coup attempt, on 20 July 2016, President Erdogan declared a three-month long state of emergency that was extended for seven times until it was lifted almost two years later, after the presidential and general elections in June 2018. This means that the research for this study was conducted under emergency rule, which affected the actors of this study and the research itself. According to the European Commission's Report in May 2019, "during the state of emergency, 36 decrees were issued constraining certain civil and political rights, as well as defence rights, expanding police powers and those of prosecutors for investigations and prosecutions as well as foreseeing the dismissal of more than 152 000 civil servants, including academics, teachers and public officials" (European Commission Countries Report, 2019). Amnesty International's report further confirms the previous report: "As many as 123 journalists and other media workers remain in prison while many university students are on trial facing terrorism related charges for merely expressing dissenting views or participating in peaceful protests" (Amnesty International, 2019, p. 1). Furthermore, "as of December 2018, the total number of detainees in prison without an indictment or pending trial is 57,000; over 20% of the total prison population. 44,690 people are in prison for "terrorism" related charges. These include journalists, political activists, lawyers, human rights defenders and others caught up in a crackdown that has

⁴ See Çiçekoğlu and Turan (2018) for a collection on the "dubious" nature of the failed coup.

vastly exceeded the legitimate purpose of investigating and bringing to justice those responsible for the 2016 coup attempt” (ibid., p. 2).

Tens of activists I had been acquainted with – including the district heads of political parties – were taken into custody, arrested, or were issued a warrant during the year when I was in the field. Aside from the heavy presence of riot police and the harassments of plainclothes police officers during protests, random criminal record checks, and countless unlawful practices, the danger of “fascist attacks” surfaced especially after the “yes” vote won the referendum, however fraudulently. On 5 July 2017, 10 human rights activists were taken into custody during a meeting held in the Prince Islands in Istanbul. Six of these activists were then indicted with association to terrorist organizations and were arrested. After this incident activists in the field started voicing the approaching danger more frequently, thinking “if they arrest human rights defenders, they’ll definitely get to us soon”. A local “no” assembly “report” (called “notes” in the assemblies) took its place in the indictment as evidence, which made the situation even more perilous; criminalization of the assemblies had officially begun. This was what the state of emergency meant for the activists at my field site. It entailed the extension of the detention period under custody, the increase in political arrests, and the proximity of the danger. Hence, although emergency rule served to debilitate political action to a certain extent via the means I just mentioned, it did not eliminate it altogether. To the contrary, during my first 14 months in the field, political activism was vibrant and approachable, especially after the referendum decision was announced, which had an invigorating effect on political activity.

The referendum campaign started an intense mobilization period, which is the subject of Chapter 3, creating a prosperous setting for this study. This period sped up political discussions, decisions, gatherings, and interactions. It provided me with the

added benefit of observing a diversity of people and organizations, a plurality I would not come across so easily otherwise. This period paved the way for protests and events that were unthinkable before, everyone started talking about politics, and there was a significant increase in political activity in general. When the “no” assemblies decided to continue in assembly form after the 16th of April, they became the grassroots nucleus of a possible “anti-fascist front” or “democracy block” in the eyes of the opposition; the left-wing opposition in particular.

In the field, the mood was neither of defeat nor victory. In the words of the activists in the local assembly I attended, “neither yes nor no came out of the ballot box”. The general opinion was that the results were fraudulent, and the no vote won, but anxiety about the future became palpable. The expectation that oppression would increase incrementally, that Turkey had entered a period of what some called “the institutionalization of fascism”, others “regime change”, “dictatorship”, or “Bonapartism” was dominant. Anxiety, verbally and behaviourally expressed in the field, proved to be a double-edged sword: It generated the need to train new activists but also to be cautious of newcomers, and it created a feeling of urgency to do something but slowed down the process because the stakes were too high.

The debates following the referendum were centred on the question of how to preserve and expand the 50 per cent “no” block. In August 2017, the opposition was debating the possibility of a “democracy front”, driven by the HDP’s repeated statements on the subject. At around the same time, local assemblies were discussing what their goal and program should be to spread and make the assembly form permanent. In December 2017 and January 2018, when I was in Istanbul for a month, the assembly, now called the local Democracy Assembly, was still discussing ways to move on, this time through discussing the general elections that were scheduled for

2019, and there were new attempts at “assemblyfication”, or spreading the assemblies to other districts and cities. The anxiety and the urgency were still a big part of their politics, especially with the law by decree number 696, which gave legal immunity to everyone who “took part in suppressing the attempted coup d’état on July 15, 2016, terror acts, and other acts which are considered to be a continuation of these”⁸, which was interpreted by activists at the times as a licence to kill for the paramilitary forces of the AKP, or a call for civil war.

The local “no” assembly that I studied split up during my visit to Istanbul in January 2018, which is the subject of Chapter 4, and soon after, a new period of election campaigns began, this time for the early presidential and general elections that were held jointly in 24 June 2018. My field site now dissolved into new assemblies and disjointed election campaigns, and the campaign being dominated by political parties (as an election is more ostentatiously the subject of party politics, while a referendum can be extra-party-politics and hence more amenable to grassroots campaigns), I had to rely on the network of activists rather than the assembly as an organization to gather data for this period. My findings from this period are discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation.

The time frame covered by my research ends here, with the immediate aftermath of the 2018 elections.⁵ What I would like to turn to now, based on this brief overview of the political context, is a) how to characterize the regime in question and b) how to characterize this particular period in question.

⁵ To give the reader an idea of what happened soon after this research is cut off: In 31 March 2019, local elections took place. The CHP candidate, Ekrem Imamoglu, won the mayoral office in Istanbul. However, the government renewed the elections in Istanbul in 23 June 2019, to lose again to Ekrem Imamoglu. In 19 August 2019, elected mayors (of the HDP) in three Kurdish cities – Amed, Van, and Mardin – were removed from office and replaced by AKP officials.

The transformation of the political system under AKP rule is reflected in academic studies. It has been compared with the “delegative democracies” (O’Donnell, 1994) of Latin America (Ozbudun, 2000), it was conceptualized as having changed from a semi-parliamentary to a semi-presidential democracy (Kalaycioglu, 2011), and more recently, it has been characterized as sliding into neo-fascism (Tugal, 2016b), competitive authoritarian (Baykan, 2018), and authoritarian neoliberal (Bozkurt-Gungen, 2018; Tansel, 2019), to name a few conceptual approaches. Throughout my dissertation, I use the word authoritarianism to define the regime in question. However, it is not an established, or consolidated, authoritarianism. Rather, I define the period under scrutiny as an *authoritarian transition*, where regime change in Turkey took its constitutionalized form, from a de facto authoritarianism to a de jure one. I will not go into a discussion here about the starting point of the authoritarian turn; I believe that is a question for historians of the period. My focus instead will be on the period under study in my dissertation, from the coup attempt in July 2016 to the elections in June 2018, as the developments that were underway during this time has been immensely consequential for activism in Turkey and for my study.

Authoritarian tendencies have been present throughout the history of modern Turkey (remember the coups), and some scholars trace the changes under AKP rule to the military coup of 1980 (Ozyurek, Ozpinar & Altindis, 2018). When we concentrate on the period between 2016 and 2018, we first see a rehearsal of constitutionalized authoritarianism through two years of emergency rule that overruled the constitution and ruled by laws by decree; we then see it constitutionalized through the referendum; and lastly, we see its legitimization with the elections in 2018 when Erdogan was elected as the president.

Juan Linz (1964, 2000) distinguishes authoritarian regimes from democratic governments and totalitarian regimes by looking at two dimensions: “The degree or type of limited political pluralism under such regimes and the degree to which such regimes are based on political apathy and demobilization of the population or limited or controlled mobilizations” (2000, p. 54). Regarding these two dimensions, Turkey is still a multiparty system that holds elections, with episodes of mobilizations against the government and the regime. However, as Linz also acknowledges, these are a matter of degree, and not just of type.⁶

There is a wealth of literature that seeks to classify the range of regime types between the two end points of full democracies and fully authoritarian regimes. Some of these categorizations are hybrid regimes (Karl, 1995), illiberal democracy (Zakaria, 1997), delegative democracy (O’Donnell, 1994), soft authoritarianism (Means, 1996), semi-authoritarian regimes (Ottoway, 2003), electoral-autocratic regimes (Wigell, 2008), competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky & Way, 2002), hegemonic-electoral authoritarianism (Diamond, 2002), and politically closed authoritarianism (Diamond, 2002). The distinguishing commonality among contemporary authoritarian regimes is the existence of multiparty elections in nondemocratic settings (Bogaards, 2009, p. 406).

Levitsky and Way (2002) distinguish competitive authoritarian regimes from democracies by first laying out the criteria for democratic regimes. Their criteria are open, free, and fair elections; universal suffrage; protected political rights and civil liberties; and elected authorities possessing the authority govern without the tutelary control of the military or cleric leaders (p. 53). They state that fully democratic regimes

⁶ Linz (2000, p. 54) offers five subtypes: Bureaucratic-military authoritarian regimes; organic statism; mobilizational authoritarian regimes; post independence mobilizational authoritarian regimes; and post-totalitarian authoritarian regimes.

may at times violate these criteria, but not to the extent that these violations become systematic threats that impede democratic challenges. They continue by contrasting democracies with the operation of authoritarian regimes (p. 53):

In competitive authoritarian regimes, by contrast, violations of these criteria are both frequent enough and serious enough to create an uneven playing field between government and opposition. Although elections are regularly held and are generally free of massive fraud, incumbents routinely abuse state resources, deny the opposition adequate media coverage, harass opposition candidates and their supporters, and in some cases manipulate electoral results. Journalists, opposition politicians, and other government critics may be spied on, threatened, harassed, or arrested. Members of the opposition may be jailed, exiled, or—less frequently—even assaulted or murdered. Regimes characterized by such abuses cannot be called democratic.

Turkey fulfils all the criteria above to be classified as a non-democracy; and can be classified as a competitive authoritarian regime according to these criteria, with an adjective in front of authoritarianism instead of democracy (as in illiberal democracy). Levitsky and Way then distinguish competitive authoritarian regimes from fully authoritarian ones (2002, p. 53-54):

Although incumbents in competitive authoritarian regimes may routinely manipulate formal democratic rules, they are unable to eliminate them or reduce them to a mere façade. Rather than openly violating democratic rules (for example, by banning or repressing the opposition and the media), incumbents are more likely to use bribery, co-optation, and more subtle forms of persecution, such as the use of tax authorities, compliant judiciaries, and other state agencies to “legally” harass, persecute, or extort cooperative behaviour from critics. Yet even if the cards are stacked in favour of autocratic incumbents, the persistence of meaningful democratic institutions creates arenas through which opposition forces may—and frequently do—pose significant challenges. As a result, even

though democratic institutions may be badly flawed, both authoritarian incumbents and their opponents must take them seriously.

To the extent that the banning and repression of the opposition and the media are concerned, the regime in Turkey can be placed closer to full authoritarianism. However, elections – although their openness, freeness, and fairness are highly dubious – still provide a means by which the opposition can gain meaningful (albeit limited and threatened) governing positions.⁷ As such, Turkey’s political regime can be characterized as a competitive authoritarian regime that has fully authoritarian leanings.

In their 2018 book entitled “How Democracies Die”, Levitsky and Ziblatt identify four indicators of authoritarian behaviour (p. 64-65): The rejection of, or weak commitment to, democratic rules of the game; denial of the legitimacy of political opponents; toleration or encouragement of violence; and readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media. Following these criteria, I call the current regime in Turkey authoritarian because it shows a weak commitment to the rules of the democratic game. Elections that are somewhat competitive are held, which is why it might be called a competitive authoritarian regime in which there are multiple political parties that compete in elections. However, there have been constant (mostly successful) attempts at undermining the legitimacy of elections, and refusal to accept electoral defeat. Examples include the general elections in 2015; the removal of elected mayors in Kurdish cities throughout the two-year period and again in August 2019; and the repeated municipal elections in Istanbul in 2019. Cancelling elections are backed up by the unwillingness to abide by the constitution, as evidenced by an

⁷ For example, the “no” vote against regime change in the constitutional referendum in 2017 won in two of the biggest cities in Turkey; Istanbul and Ankara. Similarly, opposition candidates won the municipalities of Istanbul and Ankara in the local election in 2019.

unusually long period of emergency rule. These were means used to restrict basic and political rights, as evidenced, for example, by the charges against Academics for Peace.⁸

Another symptom of authoritarianism in Turkey is the AKP government's denial of political opponents. The imprisonment of thousands of HDP members including its former co-leaders is an example. The unending accusations on the HDP of being secretly allied with the Kurdistan Workers' Party PKK (categorized as a terrorist organization in Turkey), pitching the HDP as a threat to national security, and describing the HDP as a criminal organization all point to the AKP's denial of the opposition as legitimate political actors. The government's refusal to condemn and/or to engage in precautionary measures against violent attacks on the opposition reinforces the label of authoritarianism. Furthermore, criticism of the government or the president has become punishable by an arbitrary interpretation and implementation of the law. Banning the right for assembly (i.e., protests and demonstrations) and the media, and jailing journalists and academics critical of the government have become common practice, couched in legal terms.

In sum, the curtailing of political rights and civil liberties; criminalization of the opposition; sidestepping the constitution (through emergency rule); reforming the constitution following what has been documented as a rigged referendum (e.g., Oy ve Otesi, 2017); the condoning of violence against the regime's critics; and the refusal to accept election results when no fraud can be documented are the reasons behind my choice of the term authoritarianism. Throughout the dissertation, I will use the term

⁸ For more information on Academics for Peace, see: <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/1>. Accessed 24 August 2019.
For the 2017 and 2018 Amnesty International Report on Turkey, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkey/report-turkey/>. Accessed 24 August 2019.

authoritarianism bearing in mind the degree and the specific nature of authoritarianism in Turkey, as I have discussed in this section.

For the purposes of this dissertation, defining the period in terms of the stage of authoritarianism is as important as defining its nature or degree. Therefore, moving on from characterizing the regime to characterizing the period, I contend that what we are looking at is an eventful time, in which major political events are condensed within a very short time frame. I take the events that organize this dissertation – the Gezi protests in 2013, the military coup attempt in 2016, the constitutional referendum in 2017, and the general and presidential elections in 2018 – as a “relatively rare subclass of happenings that significantly transforms structure” (Sewell, 1996, p. 100). These are “transformative events” that “become turning points in structural change, concentrated moments of political and cultural creativity when the logic of historical development is reconfigured by human action but by no means abolished” (McAdam & Sewell, 2001, p. 102).

Events taken as turning points that define the period I am looking at in the dissertation include not only those imposed by external forces like the coup attempt and a variety of elections, but also acts of resistance whether they be (collective or individual) hunger strikes, protests, independent election campaigns, new grassroots formations like the one I study, and so on. It is also a period of rapid institutional change: From the constitution to the parliament, from the political system to the armed forces of the state, the whole political structure is undergoing immense changes. The authoritarian turn in Turkey started long before I started conducting field work, but the events and changes that took place within the time frame of my field work do correspond to an acceleration of the process of constitutionalizing what was a de facto authoritarian regime. In this sense, it is a period defined by authoritarian *transition*.

The speed and magnitude of the said changes make this interval a good example of “intense times” (della Porta, 2016), times of crises or great transformations. We can also think of these times as “restless”, insofar as we view this period as a series of events seen as “a function of the ongoing interpretive and interactional competitions and contestations among principal actors and witnesses” (Wagner-Pacifici, 2010, p. 1374).

If the political context in which my field site is embedded sets the scene for this study, then the transition to authoritarianism – and the process of making it constitutional – is crucial for its effects on activism. Temporally, rapid and massive changes are underway, making these times “intense times”. With this political context and its temporal implications in place, my research questions, hopefully, take on a clearer significance. To reiterate them in light of the discussion above: How has the intensification of authoritarianism in Turkey affected grassroots activism during intense times? And how has temporality factored into the different stages of political action? I will now turn to social movement theory to see how the existing literature has dealt with questions of temporality.

Temporality in Social Movement Theory

In this section, I seek to find the temporal logics deployed in social movement theory. I will start with the political process model and the concept of cycles of protest; then move on to frames and narratives; and lastly turn to more recent works on temporality in social movements. I survey major works that have come to be associated with a certain theory and their revisions where applicable, and prominent scholars in their respective areas of research. My intention here is not to provide a

review of social movement theory in general, but to have an overview of the theories and literature that I selected for their implicit or explicit considerations of elements regarding time and temporality. More specific discussions can be found in each empirical chapter.

The political process model

The political process model emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a corrective to two prominent bodies of literature: The social-psychological explanations of what was then referred to as the “classical” theories of collective behaviour and mass society, and the resource mobilization model’s over-reliance on the willingness of the elite to sponsor minority groups as well as the direct relationship it drew between grievances or discontent and insurgency⁹. The political process model, as developed by Doug McAdam in his 1982 book, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930-1970*¹⁰, defines social movements as “rational attempts by excluded groups to mobilize sufficient political leverage to advance collective interests through noninstitutionalized means” (p. 37). The model rests on the assumption that social movements are the ongoing product of interactions between internal and external factors, and of the interplay of both institutional and noninstitutional politics. It is a processual model, as the name suggests, in the sense that it seeks to provide a framework for studying the emergence, development, and decline of movements; not only their emergence.

⁹ For a detailed critique of the classical model of social movements, see McAdam 1982, Chapter 1. For an evaluation of the resource mobilization model’s advancements and deficiencies, see McAdam 1982, Chapter 2.

¹⁰ McAdam became the most well-known theorist of the political process model, but he was working with the ideas already put forth by Gamson (1975); Jenkins and Perrow (1977); Eisinger (1973); Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly (1975); and Oberschall (1973), among others.

The “process” in the political process model makes an explicit temporal argument to distinguish itself from the classical theories that view macro processes like industrialization or urbanization as directly increasing grievances and as a consequence, leading to protest. Rather than seeing protest as “the end product of a specified causal sequence” (p. 53) (and hence focus on explanations of the emergence of protest only), McAdam states that a key difference between the two models is “the *time span* during which insurgency is held to develop. The classical *sequence* of disruption/strain depicts insurgency as a function of dramatic changes in the *period immediately preceding* movement emergence. By contrast, the perspective advanced here is based on the notion that social insurgency is shaped by broad social processes that usually operate over *a longer period of time*” (p. 41, italics mine). The emphasis on a broader time span not only revises the definition of social movements to include their development and decline (therefore moving away from an understanding of protest as a moment of social “outburst”), but also continues the line of historical studies of social movements.

McAdam suggests that there are three sets of factors that are crucial in the generation of insurgency. In his words (1982, p. 40):

The first is the level of organization within the aggrieved population; the second, the collective assessment of the prospects for successful insurgency within that same population; and third, the political alignment of groups within the larger political environment. The first can be conceived of as the degree of organizational “readiness” within the minority community; the second, as the level of “insurgent consciousness” within the movement’s mass base; and the third, following Eisinger, as the “structure of political opportunities” available to insurgent groups (Eisinger, 1973, p. 11).

Each of these three interrelated factors – the readiness of the aggrieved group, the collective assessment of the prospects of insurgency (or “cognitive liberation” as McAdam terms it), and the structure of political opportunities – reflects a consideration of temporality. McAdam views existing organizations prior to mobilization as “the primary source of resources facilitating movement emergence” (p. 48), as a capacity that is necessary to make use of political opportunities conducive to the emergence of movements. Agreeing with and referring to Oberschall, he states, “[i]f no networks exist, he contends, the aggrieved population is capable of little more than ‘*short-term, localized, ephemeral outbursts* and movements of protest such as riots,’ (Oberschall, 1973, p. 119)” (p. 44, italics mine). The thrust of the argument is that inter-organizational and inter-personal connections provide the aggrieved population with the facilities to initiate a movement, as these are the spaces in which cognitive liberation is most likely to occur. Cognitive liberation happens when “oppression is collectively defined as both unjust and *subject to change*” (p. 34, italics in the original). Recognition of the possibility of change has roots both in the structure of opportunities and the level of organization.

The factors that facilitate movement emergence also affect the ongoing development of the movement, with the additional factor of the shifting social control response of other groups. McAdam draws attention to time here as well: “What is absent in the above discussion is the element of time. The point to be made is that the level of threat or opportunity embodied in a movement is not constant over time. Not only are the interests of elite groups likely to change, but so are important characteristics of the insurgent challenge itself” (p. 57).

Time here is the frame of analysis: Longer term social dynamics, short term ephemeral protest, sequencing of events, the alignment and realignment of groups,

continuities between the emergence of movements and their trajectories and outcomes all happen *over time*, or in a certain *time frame*. The model's arguments on a specific time span (i.e. long-term, historical analysis) and the changing dynamics of social forces over time are the key temporal elements in the political process model, even though it is not unaware of or insensible to the workings of time.

Still within the political process logic but with a much narrower focus this time, in a 1986 article entitled "Recruitment to high-risk activism: The case of freedom summer", McAdam weaves in considerations of time into his analysis of activist recruitment. He introduces the term "biographical availability" and argues that "those with less time to engage in activism or more personal responsibilities constraining involvement will be less likely to participate even if they are predisposed (and their structural location enables them) to do so" (1986, p. 83). He also makes an analytic distinction between "cost" and "risk". Whereas cost refers to "the expenditures of time, money, and energy that are required of a person engaged in any particular form of activism" (p. 67), risk refers to "the anticipated dangers – whether legal, social, physical, financial, and so forth – of engaging in a particular type of activity" (p. 67). So, for instance, the act of joining a protest percussion group may be low-risk, but it may be high-cost in terms of the time needed to rehearse, the money needed to buy the instrument, and the energy needed to participate in the group's activities. It is also a question of biographical availability: A worker with a dependent at home will be less available to afford the time and energy that participation would require.

In this article we see a treatment of time that is very different than in the book.¹¹

Time is considered not only as an analytic framework, as changes in x,y, and z *over*

¹¹ In a 1983 article entitled "Tactical innovation and the pace of insurgency", McAdam makes another temporal argument which is that tactical creativity speeds up the mobilization process. I am not including this article in the main text since his analysis of the pace of insurgency is very much like the cycles logic that I discuss next.

time; but as an explanatory element in itself that affects recruitment that crystalizes as *having time* and *anticipation*. Even though the importance of having time and anticipation of possible risks in movement participation are common knowledge by now, as I will show in the rest of this section, time or temporality as an analytic explanatory category has not been taken up by researchers until recently.

Cycles of contention and waves of contention

Incorporating Zolberg's "moments of madness" (1972) into his longer-term analysis, Sidney Tarrow (1993) offers the concept of systemic cycles of protest to understand how forms of contention created during a period of upsurge in protest activity become part of the long and slow development (e.g., Tilly, 1978; 1986) of repertoires of contention. Tarrow argues that "[c]ycles of protest are the crucibles in which moments of madness are tempered into the permanent tools of a society's repertoire of contention" (1993, p. 283). Cycles are how new forms of collective action become permanent, and thus a part of the evolution of the repertoire of contention, that is, the culturally and empirically limited set of means that contenders possess to make claims on particular groups and institutions (Tilly, 1978). Here is a passage that demonstrates Tarrow's core argument and the temporal elements in it (p. 302-303):

Moments of madness – seldom widely shared, usually rapidly suppressed, and soon condemned even by their participants – appear as sharp peaks on the long curve of history. New forms of contention flare up briefly within them and disappear, and their rate of absorption into the ongoing repertoire is slow and partial. But the cycles they trigger last much longer and have broader influence than the moments of madness themselves.

Tarrow relates the short-term temporality of the protest event to its long-term effects. Here again, as in the political process model, time is the frame of analysis that comes into view in terms of speed, duration, and time span. The “cycles” perspective is intended to speak to the effects of different timescales. However, the cycles logic entails a view of contention that is, as the name suggests, circular, repetitive, and recurring in a cyclical manner. This is a pessimistic and conservative view of movements with a beginning and an end that then starts all over again.

Ruud Koopmans (2004) attempts to remedy the closed-circuit implications of the cycles language by replacing the word “cycles” with “waves”. The concept of “waves of contention”, in his elaboration, refers to the expansion, transformation, and contraction of the level of contention. Although he claims that “[t]he wave metaphor does not imply such assumptions of regularity [as implied by cycles], and simply refers to the strong increase and subsequent decrease in the level of contention” (p. 21), the metaphor does not escape the circularity of the cycles logic. Waves are more or less regular and orderly, and they come and go. If we start with the assumption that movements emerge, bloom, and subside, in that order, then we deterministically assign all movements their doom from the very beginning. In this sense, both concepts treat time in the same way, and their understanding of social movements is theoretically very similar.¹²

The cycles framework does not take into account the open-endedness of political struggles. Plus, I highly doubt that movement participants see themselves as

¹² McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) have a different, but to a certain extent similar, critique of the concept of cycles of contention: “The theory’s weakness was that it remained largely a stage theory based on a deductively posited phase of mobilization followed by a distinct phase of demobilization, failing to account for mobilizations that emerge at various stages of the cycle and leaving untheorized the relations between actors, their actions, and their identities. By positing a recurring parabolic shape to episodes of contention, cyclical theory begged the question of the internal composition of the cycle and whether there are episodes that take different forms altogether” (p. 66).

in a cycle, doomed to fail and start again; they would not be activists if they thought they were in a pre-determined loop. Openness to possibilities and futurity is incompatible with the cycles or waves framework, even though they are obvious and essential to any activist or movement participant on the ground. Moreover, as others have argued (e.g., Gillan, 2018), this framework tends to favour analyses of the “peaks”, rather than the valleys, of contention, confining the analysis to the moment of protest only, narrowing down the time frame to a fraction of what comes before and after the spectacular instant of social protest, or what happens alongside it, less visible to the public.¹³

Frames and narratives

Frames are “interpretive schemata that enable individuals to locate, perceive, identify, and label occurrences within their life space and the world at large” (Snow & Benford, 1992, p. 137). Frames identify what is wrong with the current social condition, how it can be fixed, and a roadmap to fix it. For frames to be successful, “people need to feel both aggrieved about some aspect of their lives and optimistic that, acting collectively, they can redress the problem” (McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996, p. 5). Efficiency, or agency, is related to the conviction that collective action can bring about change, that there exist “agents that impress people as politically efficacious, by virtue of either their success in the past or their potential efficacy” (Klandermans, 1997, p. 18). Much like the political process model’s emphasis on

¹³ Protest event research works with the same logic, taking into account the timing and sequencing of events, using time as an overarching analytic framework. However, exceptions that analyse broader movement dynamics and not just the protest wave exist (e.g., Hutter 2014; Almeida 2008).

cognitive liberation, the framing literature stresses the importance of convincing existing and potential participants that collective action will lead to its intended effects.

Francesca Polletta (1998) sets narratives apart from frames using a more explicitly temporal language: “Narratives not only make sense of the past and present but, since the story’s chronological end is also its end in the sense of moral, purpose or telos, they project a future. This is the basis of self-identity and action” (p. 140). Building on White’s (1980) definition of narratives as “chronicles invested with moral meaning through emplotment”, she highlights the temporal dimension in identity construction through narratives as “the structuring of events into evolving wholes” (p. 140). “Emplotment” in this context refers to the configuration of past events within an unfolding larger story, connecting them to subsequent events over time. In this sense, narratives not only give meaning to past events, but also allude to what will or should be in the future. As Davis (2002) puts it: “Narrative explanation operates retrospectively, since the events earlier in time take their meaning and act as causes only because of how things turned out later or are anticipated to turn out in the future” (p. 12). Activists thus narrate stories of defeat to set out the longer-term prospects for struggle and success (Voss, 1998; Beckwith, 2015), stories of “immaculate conception” (Taylor, 1989) that construct origin myths or movement histories based on which to build a collective identity (Blee, 2002; Armstrong & Cragg, 2006; Meyer, 2006), and stories of heroic individuals that spurred movement mobilization or successful outcomes and legacies (Polletta, 1998).

Studies of framing and narrative are much more attentive to the temporal complexities of action, collective identity, and aspirations. They are sensitive to the plasticity and openness of activists’ own accounts. Still, when we look at the clusters of research that these studies have produced – such as origin myths, movement

histories, symbolic events and heroic leaders (or commemorations, for example) – we see that the explanatory focus revolves around the past, even when the analysis acknowledges the multiplicity of temporalities at work (e.g., how past events configure the present and the future, how expectations shape action in the present, etc.). Building on this and the previous bodies of work on social movements, this dissertation accentuates the role of anticipation and the future at different stages of the trajectory of the group that I study.

Recent work on temporality in social movements

As reviewed above, major branches of social movement theory have put forward concepts, theories, and arguments that deployed various temporal logics, but they have not taken temporality itself as an object of study or as an explanatory factor, like narratives or political opportunities for example. Recently, there has been an increasing interest in a more explicit engagement with temporality in the study of social movements. Scholars have written about “eventful protest” (Della Porta, 2004; 2008) and “eventful democratization” (Della Porta, 2014), “time intensification” (Della Porta, 2017; see also Summers-Effler, 2010), “rhythms of social movement memories” (Merrill & Lindgren, 2018), “eventful events” (Wood, Staggenborg, Stalker & Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2017), “eventful subjectivity” (Meyer & Kimeldorf, 2015), “temporal blindspots” (Wagner-Pacifici & Ruggero, 2018), “historical narratives, mundane political time, and revolutionary moments” (Lazar, 2014), to name a few. The burgeoning interest in temporality among social movement scholars has been remarkable, but the output of this emerging topic remains fragmentary. Here, I identify two strands that have clustered around a) the temporal dynamics of

prefiguration and prefigurative politics, and b) broader calls for a temporal approach to the study of social movements. After briefly introducing two scholars whose works have been influential for both of these strands, this section will review each of the two clusters in turn.

William H. Sewell's call for an "eventful sociology" (2005) and Robin Wagner-Pacifici's account of the restlessness of events (2010, 2017) have influenced the development of social movements studies that are sensitive to the workings of temporality. Sewell discusses temporality in historical thinking, bringing to the fore a "lumpy, uneven, unpredictable, and discontinuous" (2005, p. 9) historical temporality instead of a linear one. He calls attention to an "eventful temporality" that recognizes the power of events: "An eventful concept of temporality assumes that contingency is global, that it characterizes not only the surface but the core or the depths of social relations. Contingent, unexpected, and inherently unpredictable events, this view assumes, can undo or alter the most apparently durable trends of history [...] An assumption of global contingency means not that everything is constantly changing but that nothing in social life is ultimately immune to change" (1996, p. 102). As such, Sewell's approach takes events as moments of structural transformation, moments that are open to human agency as well as structural continuity. Contingency is a crucial element in this approach.

Wagner-Pacifici (2017) has devised an "analytical apparatus, termed political semiosis, for tracking the contingent ruptures, shapes, and flows of events" (p. 3), in order to get events out of their boundedness in space and time. She theorizes the "restlessness" of events (2010; 2017) in an attempt to grasp the "ongoingness" of events, "the ways they are restless and the ways they are subject to continuing oscillations between bounding and unbounding as they extend in time and space"

(2017, p. 5). For Wagner-Pacifci, restlessness is an essential characteristic that defines events (ibid., p. 88). Similarly, in her 2010 article on the 9/11 attacks in the United States, she examines how different actors were involved in an unfolding semiotic interpretive process to control the meaning of the events. Interpretation and re-interpretation of events by multiple actors, and the spread, reproduction, and representation of events are at the core of Wagner-Pacifci's inquiry.

The works of Sewell and Wagner-Pacifci have opened up a more temporal conversation in social movement studies by way of theorizing the contingency and "restlessness" of events. The scholarship to which I will now turn have been influenced by Sewell's call for an eventful sociology and his analysis of transformative events, as well as Wagner-Pacifci's theory of the event. Below, I will first review the cluster of scholarship that discusses prefiguration and its relation to temporality, then turn to a more detailed discussion of calls for more temporally sensitive studies of social movements.

The last decade has seen a resurgence in scholarly attention to prefigurative politics, defined as enacting in the present the changes one wants to bring about in the future, due to the practices of large-scale movements like the Alter-Globalization movement or the Occupy movements.¹⁴ Recent works on prefiguration and prefigurative politics focus on prefiguration's relationship with strategy. While some contrast prefiguration with long-term strategy (e.g., Smucker, 2014), others claim that it is a strategic choice that links means and ends (e.g., Maeckerbergh, 2011). Petrick (2017) suggests that prefigurative protest sites, such as camps, uphold a counter-temporality against capitalism by elongating the moment of protest, even though the means might not always fit the "strategic or organizing priorities" of the movement

¹⁴ The concept of prefiguration has a long history. See: Boggs (1977); Breines (1982); Epstein (1991); Polletta (2002).

(p. 498). These sites and ways of protest have been analysed as experimentations with the desired future society (Yates, 2015), or as concrete utopias (Gordon, 2017). Wagner-Pacifici and Ruggero (2018) go into a detailed ethnographic analysis of Occupy Philadelphia and find that there is a multiplicity of prefigurative approaches to temporality that lead to disjunctures in coordination. The recent interest in prefigurative politics is important since it demonstrates the adoption of temporal approaches to the study of social movements.

Turning to scholars that call for more attention to temporality in social movement studies, I will begin with Donatella della Porta, who is a prolific scholar who has published an abundance of work on the topic of time in contentious politics, among others. She subscribes to the eventful approach, built mainly on the theory of the event and the notion of eventful temporality that William H. Sewell (1996) has put forward, that takes protest as event and as a rupture of routine (e.g., 2008; 2011; 2014; 2017; 2018). In her 2008 article titled “Eventful Protest, Global Conflicts”, she develops the concept of “eventful protest”, focusing on its emergent and contingent character, its potential to be a turning point for structural change, and its transformative capacity. Della Porta takes the protest itself as an independent variable in this article, looking not at what produces protest but what protest produces; not only its effects on public opinion and the authorities but its impact on the participants and the internal dynamics of movements as well. She identifies some protests as “eventful”, “that is they have a highly relevant cognitive, relational and emotional impact on participants and beyond participants” (p. 48).

In her 2016 book, “Where did the Revolution Go?”, della Porta deepens her investigation of eventful protest and looks at how “eventful democratization”¹⁵ (i.e.

¹⁵ Della Porta’s 2014 book that focuses on different kinds of democratization, of which eventful democratization is one, will be reviewed in the next section.

waves of protest for democratization) has relational effects on its participants through intensified interactions (2016, Chapter 1). More relevant to my purposes in this review because it explicitly tackles with the issue of time, I will focus on another chapter of the same book, entitled “‘Like a house of cards’: Time intensity and mobilization” (ibid., Chapter 5). This chapter focuses on the relational mechanisms of “time intensification” and “time normalization” through an analysis of activists’ perception of time in general, and time acceleration in particular. During crises, protests, or dramatic changes, time “is in fact accelerated because of the breaking down of previous institutions, rules, and norms, and the capacity of movement actors to occupy these spaces, changing them in the process” (p. 155). Della Porta talks about “intense times” as “times of transition, in which crucial decisions have to be made quickly, in the heat of the moment” (p. 155). She finds that the perception of the acceleration of time during intense times goes together with contingency, the unexpected, and the unpredictable. Events are recognized as unexpected, surprise turning points, especially when unlikely new actors join the protests (p. 146-149). Unexpected actors include different, formerly unmobilized populations, but also new generations (p. 151-154). Predictability becomes unrealistic and contingency, uncertainty, and coincidence are accentuated at times like this (p. 156-157). Micro decisions can have macro effects in the chain of events that (retrospectively) become turning points. Unplanned, informal interactions, rumours, occasional or contingent happenings can have significant effects (p. 158- 161).

In a more recent article (2018), della Porta integrates the findings of her previously reviewed work into an outline of what she calls a “momentous approach to social movements”. She states that movements and protest have been studied as “normal politics” in “normal times” but characterizes the times we live in as “intense

times”, as “momentous”: “Great transformation, great recession as well as great regression” (p. 3). Abrupt changes in intense times, times of crisis and rapid transformation, are back on the table. In this article, drawing on her earlier work on democratic transitions, the literature on critical junctures, and social movement studies, she theorizes protest events that lead to intense and massive waves of contention.

Della Porta (2018) offers the terms cracking, vibrating, and sedimenting to identify the sequence of processes that starts at the moment of protest (the crack), which then spreads to other locations and a wider population (vibration), and ends with normalization (sedimentation). By integrating temporal aspects of these processes into her analysis such as how time is perceived, ruptures or breaks with routine, exogenous shocks, surprise, uncertainty, contingency, legacy, and memory, della Porta renames the different stages of waves of protest: “Protest cracks, as protests trigger systemic shocks, vibrating in catalysing moments of intensified interactions and later sedimenting in changes that are stabilized inside and outside social movements” (p. 13).

Three lines of further investigation regarding time in social movements are suggested in this article: Restlessness, prefiguration, and anticipation (p. 14-16). First, della Porta turns to Wagner-Pacifici’s conceptualization of events as “restless” to draw attention to the malleability of memory and of the past and how they are empirically observable in the present. She connects this line of work as contributing to our understanding of the role of memory during the sedimentation stage. She calls for more research into commemoration and the “re-enacting of previous eventful protests in other movements” (p. 15), citing Gillan’s (2018) work – reviewed below – on vectors as evolving patterns as a useful concept. The second avenue of research on

time in contentious politics that della Porta suggests is prefiguration as “the enactment of the future in the present” (p. 15), as reviewed above. She finds empirical research on this topic most relevant to the vibration phase of protests, where the initial “shock” is reproduced and spread in other people and in other places. Lastly, and most relevant to this study, della Porta refers to Tavory and Eliasoph’s 2013 article in which they lay out a theory of anticipation, pointing to a need for more research on the connection between the present and the future. She claims that the role of the future in the present is most important during protest cracks where perceptions about the future change, and that more research is required into the ways in which these cracks act.

Della Porta’s eventful approach to protests brings contingency and the emergent properties of protest to the centre of her analysis. Not only is this a more nuanced way of detailing the workings of “spontaneity” in situ and as it happens, it is also intrinsically a temporal approach. The trajectory of her thinking on this topic proves how useful the eventful approach is for a temporally sensitive analysis. However, I understand her “eventful protest” to speak less to temporal dynamics than to the emotional, cognitive, and relational dynamics at play during the event. Even though the latter do not exclude the former, her relatively earlier work on eventful protest focuses on the emotional, cognitive, and relational aspects of protests rather than, say, dissecting the temporal workings of each and then connecting them to the temporal aspects of the macro institutional setting, like she does in her work from 2016 and 2018. When left unpacked, the word “eventful” only points to a retrospective evaluation – by participants and academics – of the event as a memorable and important one based on its outcomes, which runs counter to the logic of contingency and its emergent characteristics that the eventful approach propounds.

Movement scholars' focus on protests as events is not new (see the above section on cycles of protest), and my critique of the cycles of protest approach applies here as well. Just as a protest or a series of protests does not necessarily make for a social movement, neither does the moment of protest make for the whole of the protest. Della Porta is well aware of the process that leads to and builds from protest, and this we gather from the whole of the vast variety of work she has produced. Nevertheless, it is worth cautioning against such simplifications that the eventful approach might cause when applied haphazardly.

Della Porta's 2016 book and her 2018 article, both of which have been reviewed in this section, look at the inter-subjective and collective workings of time perception in the context of what she terms "intense times". These works take temporality as an explanatory mechanism and alert us to how they operate at the micro, meso, and macro levels. These two works are significant also as calls for the study of temporality in contentious politics. Della Porta's suggestions for further research very closely resonate with my dissertation.

She draws attention to the need to study the connection between the future and the present and suggests that this connection is most salient at the initial stage of a protest event, when the protest makes a "crack" in what people thought of as possible in normal times. I concur with the insight that protest, especially when it is a mass protest that spills over to unexpected constituencies and places, helps the horizon of possibility to break into new possibilities, new ways of being and relating, a new society, a new political order. McAdam's 1988 study, *Freedom Summer*, tells the story of one such moment, only an elongated one. And I think the fact that the "freedom summer" and the "freedom high" lasted throughout a longer period of time than a single protest, and that its participants attempted to reinvigorate "the high", and that it

became a fixed point in time in the personal histories of its participants as well as for the history of the struggle for civil rights in the United States of America and beyond – a turning point, an event – is itself telling. The point is that the “crack” in horizons, when previously unthinkable trajectories come to be perceived as possible, do not only belong in the protest event, or the initial stage of a cracking protest. These moments not only become engraved in their participants’ minds, re-enacted as symbols or triggers of collective identity, and get carved into the very histories and stories of movements; they may also last longer, spring up at different stages in the life span of a struggle (beyond the cycle of protest), and change their form and content over time.

Indeed, my dissertation demonstrates that the future does not only appear as a crack in the horizon of possibilities, and it certainly is not limited to the protest event. The future makes an appearance in the present in a lot of different ways, for example through anticipations, expectations, possibilities, threats and opportunities, future imaginings, dystopias, the political calendar, urgency, anxiety, hope, and more. Moreover, it exists throughout the dissertation: At the initial organizing stage, at the peak of mobilization, and later during decline and disintegration. Importantly, the future does not always appear as a better future. The many faces of the future that I find in my research make the connection between the present and the future much more complex than what della Porta has foreseen. Therefore, we can see this dissertation as an answer to her call for more research on this topic, and a contribution to it.

Kevin Gillan is another scholar who thinks temporally and calls for a temporally minded approach to the study of social movements. In a recent article entitled “Temporality in social movement theory: Vectors and events in the neoliberal timescape” (2018), he offers a temporal theory of social movements that can account

for the interlacing dynamics of movements with the dynamics of the socio-political environment in which they are embedded. He critiques the extant literature of having a weak conception of temporality, whereby the cycles or waves logic (also mentioned above) tends to let individual waves to stand in for the movement itself and hence has a “foreshortened analytical timescale” (p. 3). The existing literature also overplays contextual factors, drawing a rigid boundary between internal movement features and external contexts (p. 3). The second temporality Gillan identifies in the literature is the interactional sequences logic, exemplified by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s *Dynamics of Contention* (2001). The sequences logic entails identifying causal mechanisms and processes of contention over short timescales and downplaying socio-political context (p. 3).

In order to bring forth a more temporally sensitive understanding of movements and their environments, Gillan (2018) asks “what do the key characteristics of movements – including conflict, organizational form, and subjective motivations – tell us about their socio-political environment?” (p. 2). Based on his examination of the literature on the Alter-Globalisation, Anti-War, and Occupy movements, Gillan introduces what he calls “timescape thinking”, where timescape is a “metaphorical placeholder for the socio-political environment in which social movements operate, with the intention to include both durable patterns of interaction and the events which often serve to make social change visible” (p. 4). To capture the dynamism within a timescape, he uses events and Sewell’s “eventful temporality” (2005) as contingent, uneven, and discontinuous processes that are subject to interpretation and construction by different actors, as Wagner-Pacifici (2010) conceptualizes the event. To capture continuities, he introduces the notion of vectors,

which represents patterns of interaction that, through repetition, get carried through into the future (p. 5).

Gillan contributes to the theory of social movements by adding a temporally sensitive approach to change and continuity. By examining the timescape through events and vectors, he accounts for the contingency of events, for micro-level relations coalescing into patterns of social relations, and for continuities within and among movements in a non-mechanistic way. Macro processes like neoliberalism come into view together with cultural and material dynamics of movements in this framework.

The timescape logic, including the notions of vectors and events, is susceptible to changes and continuities over time and at different levels. The article makes no specific methodological suggestions for the application of the framework, but the way the article is written points to a combination of methods. Ethnographic studies are used together with historical and theoretical work on movement histories and broader political economic analyses. As such, the framework tends to favour historical (i.e. retrospective) accounts, since the researcher needs to be able to pinpoint past events and gather the meanings that were attributed to them by their participants and witnesses; collect data on how the ongoing rhetoric and discourse is shaped with regards to these events and lived experiences in the present; and an overall understanding of the state of the world. When combined, these are the elements that are needed as data for an analysis of material, cultural, organizational, and ideational changes and continuities over time.

The timescape framework is helpful in framing processes in temporal terms. For instance, my research takes place within an authoritarian timescape, with a specific temporality at work that has to be predicted and according to which activists must orient themselves. This framing of the project lends itself to a theorization of the

temporalities of authoritarianism, closely linked to the temporalities of the state, which is beyond the scope of my dissertation and research. However, we see glimpses of the authoritarian state's control over the workings of time throughout the study, from the perspective of activists. In a similar vein, some of the cultural and material (in the form of the effects of repression, for example) changes and continuities come into view in each chapter, whether they be as organizational structure, ways of doing politics, or narrative and temporal orientations towards the future.

Ann Mische calls for a particular type of temporal approach, one that takes the future as the pivot around which action takes shape. In a 2009 article entitled "Projects and possibilities: Researching futures in action", she outlines a framework for incorporating what she calls "future projections", or future imaginings, into sociological literature and to our conceptualization of social action in particular. Responding to "practice theorists" like Bourdieu and Giddens, for whom action is structured via taken for granted understandings conditioned by a given actor's social position within a field (think habitus and structuration theory, respectively), Mische argues that "we should refocus attention on the open, indeterminate, "polythetic" perception of the field from the point of view of the actor surveying the future in terms of multiple possibilities, as opposed to the "monothetic" view of the actor (or observer) who interprets the decision after it has already been taken" (2009, p. 696). She offers nine cognitive dimensions of projectivity – reach, breadth, clarity, contingency, expandability, volition, sociality, connectivity, and genre – that can aid us explore the form and content of future projections and specify how they lead to action or inaction. The article concludes by calling for a "sociology of the future" that examines how future imaginings shape and are shaped by social processes (p. 702).

In a more recent article entitled “Measuring futures in action: Projective grammars in the Rio+20 debates” (2014), Ann Mische further elaborates on her previous framework. She suggests three methodological approaches to studying the variations in and effects of the different dimensions of future projections; namely, longitudinal survey research, narrative analysis of texts, and observations of performance and conversation, focusing in this article on narrative manifestations of future projections in text and talk. She examines the online documents of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and the ensuing “People’s Summit” of 2012 as “sites of hyperprojectivity” which she defines as “communicative settings, somewhat removed from the flow of day-to-day activity, in which the explicit purpose of talk is to locate problems, visualise alternative pathways, and consider their consequences and desirability” (p. 447). She argues that future imaginings inform action through affecting decisions, relations, and institutions; that they are empirically observable through the three methodological approaches she suggests; and that the future might be implicit in talk or routinized activity as well as explicit in contentious talk, especially in sites of hyperprojectivity.

Mische’s work has been immensely influential in my research as her work provides useful analytical tools and a language with which to analyse and present my data. The image of “the actor surveying the future” in an “open, indeterminate” field (we could also use “timescape” in place of “field”, in Gillan’s terms) with “multiple possibilities” is how I take the activists in my field site to be situated. The local “no” assemblies, one of the reasons why I chose them as my field site being the lively and contentious discussions being held in them, are sites of hyperprojectivity. I also focus on talk and narrative, using data gathered from participant observation and interviews, but I also elaborate on the material and cultural forms that future imaginings inform,

namely, organizational structure and a specific way of doing politics and of being political actors.

My focus on temporality eventually resulted in a contribution to the “sociology of the future”, as activists’ gaze or temporal orientation moved from the past towards the distant future at each turning point (hence the rotating angel of history in the opening of this chapter). As I have sketched a brief review above, social movement scholars have examined the past in relation to the present, and they have expanded our knowledge of how collective memory impacts identity building, movement histories, and narratives. Against the abundance of literature on the structural and historical dynamics affecting different aspects of movements, it comes to me as a surprise that social movement theorists have not incorporated the future in their analyses. The transitional and highly volatile political environment has surely facilitated the observation of such temporal dynamics, and possibly even made those dynamics even more prominent and fundamental to activism than under “normal” regimes and “normal” times. However, given that action, and political action in particular, always requires the consideration of the future in one form or another, I wish to incorporate futurity, possibilities, and open-endedness into my analysis.

Transitions and Social Movements

My primary contribution will be to social movement studies but as I have mentioned before, the political context in which I carried out the research for this study was marked by Turkey's transition to a constitutionalized authoritarianism. Therefore, I will now turn to the literature on transitions with a focus on social movements. More specifically, this section will identify two axes of literature within which I situate my study: The literature on transitions to and from democracy, and the literature on social movements in liberal democracies and in authoritarian regimes. While the transitions literature is useful for understanding the transitional character of the political context in contemporary Turkey, it has largely ignored the role of social movements. Scholars of social movements, on the other hand, have concentrated on either liberal western democracies or authoritarian regimes, without much attention to transitional periods. My study is situated at the intersection of these two axes and thus is a contribution, albeit an indirect one, to attempts at bringing together democratization studies with social movements. In what follows, I will start by reviewing the literature on transitions and then direct my attention to social movement studies and how they treat transitional periods. Even though there are some overlaps with the previous section in terms of the scholars I discuss, their work will be reviewed from a different point view and for different purposes.

There is a vast literature on transitions to democracy, and a growing interest in transitions from democracy. The literature on transitions, both to and from democracy, focus on structural conditions such as capitalism, economic development, and social classes on the one hand; and elite strategies and leadership on the other. Although the role of the working class and labor movements have taken their place in the literature,

scholars have accorded much less attention to the role of the broader category of social movements or grassroots mobilization.

Democratization studies initially looked at the role of economic development and class relations in transitions to democracy. Working within modernization theory, Lipset (1959) argued that there is a positive correlation between economic development and democracy, whereas O'Donnell (1973) argued that there is an "elective affinity" between "bureaucratic authoritarianism and high modernization", taking economic development and class conflict as his main explanatory variables. Moore (1996) also pointed at capitalist interest in authoritarianism, at the same time recognizing the role of class struggles in the early stages of democratization. While Moore concentrated on the middle class as the driver of democratic change, Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) argued that it was the working class that was the reliable force of democratization and not the middle classes.

Shifting the focus from structural conditions needed for democracy to the process of democratization, O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) stressed the role of elites and leadership during transitions characterized by "structural indeterminacy". In their study, what they called "the popular upsurge", where different groups come together to push for democratic liberalization, was observed to be only ephemeral. Huntington (1993) also wrote about mass mobilizations as a potential destabilizer of the political system. In 1996, Linz and Stepan argued that a vigorous civil society was important at all stages of the democratization process, but they still concentrated on elites and the institutional form of the previous regime. Kadivar more recently in 2017 argued that democratic transitions carried out by mass mobilizations were more likely to survive because they have the organizational structure, leadership cadres, and state-society ties amenable to keeping checks and balances in place.

Even more relevant to my study is studies of democratic breakdowns. These studies examine elite choices (Bermeo, 2003), the structural conditions of breakdown (Fish 2006), military and one-party regimes (Brooker, 2000), and political and institutional factors. As attention to the role of social movements is absent in this literature as well, I will concentrate on works that are the most relevant to the contemporary political context in Turkey. I leave out several studies that can be placed in this section such as Slater (2010) or Parsa (2000) because of their attention to social movements in authoritarian regimes. They will be discussed later in this section.

Milan Svolik is one of the most cited scholars in this literature, perhaps because his studies sum up the most consistent finding in this area: That a concentration of power in the executive is more likely to yield democratic breakdowns/regressions. In his article on the survival of democracies (2015) he argues that “incumbent takeovers”, where a democratically elected incumbent undermines key tenets of democracy (p.730), are a threat to democracies more than coups d’état. Using statistical models, he finds that “fuel exports and presidentialism raise the risk of incumbent takeovers but not coups; the Cold War and authoritarian neighbours raise the risk of coups but not incumbent takeovers; and a democracy’s military past raises the risk of coups but lowers the risk of incumbent takeovers”. His findings are supported throughout the literature. For example, Fish (2006) writes about “superpresidentialism” and Bermeo (2016) about executive coups.

Tomini and Wagemann (2017) use two-step fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis to examine varieties of contemporary democratic breakdown or regression. As the naming suggests, they consider this process as one of different degrees, ranging from a regression of democratic qualities to a transition to an authoritarian regime. Their findings point to two models of transition from a democracy to a non-

democracy: An opposition-based model and a crisis-based one. They state that contrary to the modernisation theories, economic development is not a necessary nor a sufficient condition for democratic breakdown. They also refute theories that place regional democratic context, the duration of democratic institutions, and the type of party system as a necessary or sufficient factor. Instead, they claim that “‘mutually reinforcing inequalities’, which combine economic, social, linguistic, regional, ethnic and political exclusions, appear to be [...] a strong indicator of a context that is prone to democratic breakdown” (p. 25).

In the opposition-based model, opposition forces coerce the government to implement, or abuse, a concentration of power in the executive. Tomini and Wagemann state that this type of democratic regression is more likely to lead to a hybrid regime with a powerful executive. A second version of this model is when the opposition comes to power and restricts freedoms and rights. The authors liken this version to Linz’s (1978) disloyal actors, and state that this version is more likely to give way to the rise of anti-systemic political parties and movements, gradually weakening the existing government and political parties.

In the crisis-based model, a crisis triggers anti-government protests, to which the government responds by taking authoritarian measures. Citing Svolik (2015) and Bermeo (2016), Tomini and Wagemann state that the result can be an “incumbent takeover” or an “executive coup” (self-coup or autogolpe), respectively. Another version of this model results in military reaction against the inept government. Here, the article refers to the 1980 military coup in Turkey as a reaction to the social and political conflicts of the 1970s (p. 23).

Deciding which type of democratic breakdown or regression defines the Turkish case is not among the concerns of this study. Such a decision would first of

all require pinpointing the beginning of the regression, which calls for a different kind of research. However, certain events in Turkish political history would qualify for the different types of democratic breakdown or regression that Tomini and Wagemann expose. I discuss some of these events using Bermeo's (2016) terms, which cover this article's arguments but provide a wider range of possibilities.

Nancy Bermeo (2016), in her article on "democratic backsliding", examines different ways by which backsliding occurs. She observes that since the Cold War, classic coups d'état, executive coups, and election-day vote fraud have declined, and that promissory coups, executive aggrandizement, and the strategic manipulation of elections are more likely to occur. The main argument is that these latter paths to backsliding indicate a slower pace of change, increased ambiguity, and the increased difficulty of defending democracy when the regime in question is ambiguously defined. This argument and the terminology that she provides are incredibly useful for understanding contemporary democracy in Turkey.

Bermeo discusses Turkey as a case of executive aggrandizement, whose defining feature is that "institutional change is either put to some sort of vote or legally decreed by a freely elected official – meaning the change can be framed as having resulted from a democratic mandate" (p. 11). Discussing the state of media freedoms and judicial autonomy as prime sites for democratic backsliding, she aptly places the political trajectory of the current president Erdogan and the ruling Justice and Development Party (Turkish acronym AKP) in the executive aggrandizement category.

It is beyond the purposes of this literature review to match each of Bermeo's categories to events in Turkey but disregarding obvious connections would be to waste an opportunity to make the situation clearer. Even though she refers to Turkey only in

the executive aggrandizement section, several events from recent history spring to mind while reading the rest of the article. For example, while the above-mentioned categorization (executive aggrandizement) surely holds true, one can argue that the state of emergency (that remained in force for two years) counts as an “executive coup”, defined as involving “a freely elected chief executive suspending the constitution outright in order to amass power in one swift sweep”(p. 7). Similarly, one could argue that election fraud has been carried out both on the election day (p. 7-8), as has been documented by independent election initiatives in the referendum of 2017, and strategically through manipulation via mass media, allocation of governmental funds, voter registration, changing electoral rules, harassing opponents, and the like (p. 13). We can add to Bermeo’s list of strategic manipulation tactics the use of bombings, arrests, and criminalization of political parties in the Turkish case, considering the events that took place before and between the two general elections in 2015. These observations leave us with the last type of backsliding: The classic coups d’état and promissory coups. Again, the most recent coup attempt by the military in July 2016 can be categorized as the former, and the coups of 1960 and 1980 as the latter.

Where this mix of backsliding pathways places Turkey in the democratic backsliding scheme is, as I remarked before, beyond the scope of this study. However, Bermeo’s point that backsliding occurs slower than before, and that it leaves regimes in an ambiguous position is valid in the Turkish case. After arguing that ambiguous regimes are more difficult to democratize, Bermeo ends her article on an optimistic note, by saying that “the dictatorships that follow failed democracies today are, on average, less authoritarian than their predecessors” and that “as long as some electoral competition takes place, power can be clawed back” (p. 17). My study looks at exactly

how the activist opposition tries to “claw back” democracy. As Chapter 3 will show, the difficult-to-reverse-gradual backslide argument trumps Bermeo’s optimism about the prospects of reversals for the activists in my study. On this note, I now turn to the literature on social movements.

The social movements literature has been dominated by studies based in the liberal democracies of the United States and Western Europe for a long time; the major analytical and theoretical concepts that emerged from that literature came out of liberal democratic empirical cases. Another strand of the literature on contentious politics seeks to explain less-than-democracies by focusing on the Middle East and Southeast Asia. My study, by contrast, that takes Turkey as a case, sits somewhere in between these two branches of literature: It is neither a democracy nor an established and stable non-democracy. Rather, it is undergoing a transition from democracy to non-democracy, in this dissertation called authoritarianism. Put differently, the activists I study are not (yet) fighting against an established dictatorship, nor are they fighting for a “better future” in a liberal democracy – they would first have to have enough democracy in the first place to fight for a better one. In fact, their struggle is for a return to more democracy, for the reversal of de-democratization, to be precise. Yet, both strands of literature have plenty to offer for this study.

The major theoretical approaches granted by the classic social movement literature are the resource mobilization model (McCarthy & Zald, 1977), the political opportunities or political process model (McAdam, 1996; McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 1996), and the framing model (Snow & Benford, 1988). These concepts have served scholars of social movements for decades and continue to do so. However, their overemphasis on structure, macro-political processes, and institutional politics has been criticised. In the early 2000s, scholars called for a more dynamic understanding

of social movements and change, stressing the need to uncover causal processes and their component mechanisms (McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001). Accordingly, studies that made use of social networks (e.g. Diani & McAdam, 2003; Osa, 2003) and those that employed a relational approach (e.g. Goldstone, 2004; Mische, 2009) proliferated. The need to unify the divide between institutional and non-institutional politics – a compartmentalization that had led to the isolation of political scientists who studied political parties and political sociologists who studied social movements – was also addressed (Goldstone, 2003). The “cultural turn” brought in culture (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999), emotions (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta, 2009), and narrative (Polletta, 2009) into our understanding of social movements and politics. All these latter approaches place agency at the core of their studies, examining actors’ strategies and the interactions among a variety of actors, while at the same time paying attention to meso-level factors such as the role of organizations and macro-level ones, such as structural opportunities or political processes.

We see a surge of studies in the 2000s that follow the above rationale. Of special interest to me are the ones that focus especially on political contention in non-democracies, as I believe these will provide this study with the concepts that it needs where the literature based on liberal democracies is unfit or insufficient. These studies have contributed to the social movements literature by using and revising its concepts, the literature on movement-state interactions, and the effect of repression in particular. Boudreau (2004), for example, expands the political process model by focusing on the interaction of repression and resistance in the Southeast Asian context. He identifies three ways in which repression affects styles of contention. The first effect is institutional and material: “Repression shapes the duration, direction and intensity of activist careers in ways that profoundly influence political contention. Where activist

forms and organizations survive state attack, generations of experienced dissidents bring their accumulated wisdom and leadership to the struggle; and provide a thicker and more complex network of support for new protest. Elsewhere, authorities may eliminate entire activist generations and deprive new claim makers of experienced leaders” (p. 10-11). This finding resonates with my field site where there is a history of military coups, disappearances, massacres, and banning of political parties. Boudreau’s second finding regarding the effects of repression is closely related to this history of repression, namely, its interpretive legacy: “Movements under authoritarian regimes must always anticipate state repression and explicitly incorporate this anticipation in their plans” (p. 11). This explains how history comes into play when activists make decisions or determine their strategies. His third and last finding is that “historically patterned modes of contention create distinct movement cultures in each setting” (p. 11). Boudreau contributes to the literature on social movements in authoritarian contexts by exposing the mechanisms through which repression affects the styles and trajectories of contention.

Schock (2005) similarly contributes to the re-theorization of the political process model with his comparative study on successful people power movements in South Africa, Philippines, Thailand, and Nepal. His focus is on movements’ organization and strategies with a special attention to key actors’ assessment of opportunities and threats. His analysis makes use of the literature on nonviolent action and earlier work on everyday resistance under repressive conditions (e.g. Bayat, 1997), and is part of a growing literature that takes everyday or covert resistance as a mechanism of contention (e.g., Johnston, 2006, Scott, 2008). Schock’s work shows how earlier acts of covert protest often serve as a springboard for the later stages of a movement. Thus, he offers a strategic agency approach to reveal how movement

resiliency occurs, and how movements take advantage of the illegitimacy of the states they contest.

Another comparison of Southeast Asian cases directs attention to elites and state formation and asks, “Why are elites more prone to act collectively in some political systems than in others?” (Slater, 2010, p. 4). Taking contentious politics as a producer of political institutions rather than an outcome to be explained, Slater contends that “contemporary divergence in the elite coalitions underpinning postcolonial state and regime institutions has been primarily produced by historically divergent patterns of contentious politics” (p. 5). The insights in this work about the relationship between contention and elite coalitions point to possible pathways that will become important later on in this study (Chapter 4).

Parsa ([2000] 2008) also studies coalition formation and its effects on mobilisation but employs a multiplayer approach in his comparative study of the revolutions in Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines. His work addresses the complexity of the opposition prior to mobilization, and identifies four main actors: Students, the clergy, the working class and unions, and the economic elites. By examining both structural conditions and actors’ strategies, Parsa expands our understanding of how movements – with their leaders, ideological and social divisions, strategies, and frames – shape class coalitions and the trajectories of the later stages of mobilization. I see Slater (2010) and Parsa’s work as complementing each other in terms of theorizing coalition building with particular attention to the role of contention.

The Middle East has also proved conducive to social movement theorizing in recent years. While the studies under review here all have roots in and contributions to make to the literature on social movements, the political histories of each region (and each country) have dictated different research interests. Therefore, whereas the

above-mentioned studies expand the literature on repression, those focused on the Middle East and the events of 2011 aim at extending or revising theories of revolution and of revolutionary situations. I will come back to this point when I discuss how this body of work is relevant to my study at the end of this section.

Kurzman, in his study of the Iranian revolution titled *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (2004), draws attention to the time- and place-specific actions of the people that constitute the revolution. This approach differs from comparative studies of revolutions, which pay greater attention to institutional transformations or structural causes of such outcomes, with its focus on individual actors. Kurzman's use of actors' situational logics also informs his 2012 article on the Arab uprisings, where he discusses how structural opportunities are not external givens to which actors respond but can also be created by said actors. He is not alone in his use of this version of the "political opportunities" model (e.g. McAdam et al., 2001; Goldstone & Tilly, 2001), but his contribution comes from the shift of focus from causes and outcomes to actors in ongoing situations, in a way doing what McAdam and colleagues intended to do in 2001.

After the upheavals in the region in 2011, studies of contentious politics burgeoned in search of new perspectives. In their article, "Towards a sociology of revolutionary situations", Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule (2012) point out the need to devise a theoretical and methodological approach that takes into account the unpredictability, ambiguity, uncertainty, or contingency of revolutionary situations. They differentiate "between revolutionary intentions, outcomes, and situations, especially as the latter tend to transcend the conditions of their creation and their outcomes do not allow us to comprehend them retrospectively" (p. 3), and argue that "researchers should abandon the search for causes and instead focus their attention on

situations and individual actions in said situations, and subsequently attempt to delineate the typical processes that lead to them” (p. 12). This statement chimes with the “dynamics of contention” framework with its emphasis on processes, but the article proposes to go beyond McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly’s (2001) framework and suggest examining the sequences of actions and identifying relational and cognitive processes that lead to revolutionary situations. Two factors seem to stand out in this perspective: Methodological individualism and sociology’s need to observe actions and motivations in situ. Persons’ biographical histories, activist experiences, and their calculations and choices at a given moment within a sequence of action are research priorities for Bennani-Chraïbi and Filleule. Thus, it is not surprising that they call for more longitudinal and ethnographic work to be done in order to analyse revolutionary situations. This article is an important contribution to the field of social movement studies, following the likes of Kurzman, Jasper, Duyvendak, and Filleule, with its emphasis on the ethnographic observation of actors and their actions in ambiguous situations.

Volpi uses the arenas of contestation framework and eventful sociology (Sewell, 1996) in his 2016 book, *Revolution and Authoritarianism in North Africa* to examine the different trajectories of revolutionary moments in Morocco, Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. He reveals the processes by which de-institutionalization and re-institutionalization occurred during and after the revolutionary situations in these countries. Placing the actors at the core of his study, he uncovers how new goals, meanings, and identities were constructed by these actors, and how these in turn affected political trajectories. This study is an important contribution to the study of revolutions because it aims at amending the dominant approaches to understanding

the region, putting Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule's above-mentioned approach to practice.

Scholars of social movements have a lot to gain from the limited selection of studies I included in this review. Empirically, they show how repression works, how contentious politics affects the formation of repressive regimes, how elites are situated within the contention-state response framework, and the changing styles of contention that certain regimes elicit. Theoretically, they stress the fluidity of circumstances, and add to our understanding of the dynamics of repression and of revolutionary situations, pointing out the limitations of the "mechanismic" approach (Gerring, 2010) to contention.

This study also takes place in a politically fluid structure, but instead of a revolutionary situation aiming at democratizing the polity (which is the subject of both studies looking at liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes), we are looking at a de-democratizing state. This specificity of the time and place requires a reassessment of repression and contention. The aims of activism, and the means available to activists are affected by this specific type of political transition, which creates avenues for theorization and the revision of sociological concepts.

Donatella della Porta is the exception in the literature. In her 2014 study, she compares two waves of democratization, Eastern Europe in 1989 and the MENA region in 2011, explicitly bridging the literatures on democratization with social movements. In this work, she uses fundamental social movements concepts such as framing, political opportunities, and mobilizing structures, as well as examining the role of key actors traditionally used to explain democratization processes such as the military, elites, or civil society. She then incorporates the role of different forms of mobilization into her analysis.

She finds that mobilization from below is present in different paths to democratization, identifying three paths with regard to the extent of the role played by protest, social movements, or both. She terms these paths eventful democratizations, participatory pacts, and participated coups d'état. Protest is most important in eventful democratizations, where a lively and democratic civil society faces closed political opportunities. In participatory pacts, faced with a divided elite, social movements bargain for democratic reforms, and participate in coups which is the most troubled path to democracy, a weak civil society faces strong repression, and especially with a split in the military, disruptive military coups occur. Della Porta places Turkey in the second category, that of participatory pacts, stressing that social movements have accompanied the multiple waves of democratization and democratization between 1946 (first phase of liberalization) and 2013 (Gezi protests).

As one of the most important results of her attempt at bridging two disparate literatures, Della Porta confirms the emergent theoretical contributions of contentious politics in the Middle East and North Africa. More specifically, following Bennani-Chraïbi, Fillieule, Duyvendak, and Volpi (all of whom are discussed above), she highlights the eventfulness of protest, taken to mean that the logic of the situation creates its own resources and opportunities. Della Porta's study is an encouraging one that manages to bridge democratization studies with social movements. It is a welcome addition to the comparative-historical, large-N studies in the literature. In fact, the majority of the research in the areas under review in this section are comparative, macro- or meso-level studies that rely on historical data. My study differs from these studies by introducing an ethnographic perspective to the study of regime change and contention.

Outline of the Dissertation

In the Introduction, I presented my topic, research questions, the main contributions I wish to make in the rest of this dissertation, and the methodology I used to study this topic. I included two literature reviews; one on how scholars of social movements have studied questions of time and temporality, and one on how social movements have been studied in the context of democratic or authoritarian transitions. Before pointing out scholars who have called for a more temporally sensitive approach to the study of movements, I argued that social movement theory has used time overwhelmingly as an analytic framework in which a certain time period is chosen for study, or cyclical and sequential events are chosen as the object of study and/or as a framework with which to analyse the lifespan of protests/movements. Reviewing the literature on transitions and social movements, I argued that studies of activism during authoritarian transitions were scant and situated my study at the intersection of social movement studies and authoritarian transitions.

Chapter 2 presents my methods in greater detail. In addition to providing information on why I chose political ethnography and qualitative interviews to study grassroots activism, this chapter also discusses how I use data, its relationship with theory, and my understanding of political ethnography. Chapter 2 introduces the local “no” assemblies via a detailed description of how I chose them as my field site. I walk the reader through the different stages of the research from the initial design to finding and integrating into the field site to the analysis and final writing-up stage. I also discuss how recent political events affected this study throughout my field work and in later stages. Finally, the difficulties of conducting research in a risky political environment, ethics, and my positionality as an activist researcher are expanded.

In Chapter 3, I focus on the organizational structure of the assemblies and ask the question of why the local “no” assemblies were organized the way that they were, at the time that they were. I trace the specificities of the structure of the assembly that I study to the Gezi protests in 2013 and a series of local initiatives and grassroots mobilizations that followed. I find that the continuities and changes that grassroots organizing went through from 2013 to 2016-2017 were the result of a process of rapid political learning due to the effects of an elongated period of regime change punctuated by numerous transformative events in the span of only a few years. Regime change did not only result in these events and episodes of mobilization, but also the expectation of a more repressive state, which further affected how activists organized. This chapter accentuates the re-reading of Gezi as a point of reference for organizers, and thus deals with the re-evaluation of the past through present and future political needs.

In Chapter 4, I look at the period around the 2017 referendum and observe that activists were much less interested in the past during this time. The puzzle in this chapter is that even though the assembly was regarded as a success and all its participants agreed on the need for the opposition to unite against the common threat, the assembly split up and was disbanded. After describing what the distant future and the threat looked like for the activists at the time, I move onto analysing a series of meetings that marked the dissolution of the assembly. The main topic of the conversations revolved around what to expect in the near future, and more specifically, whether to expect an early election for which the assemblies should campaign. I find that the different dimensions of contending future imaginings were the underlying reason behind the participants’ inability to coordinate their actions and set a common

trajectory for the assembly as a whole, even though they agreed on the need to take collective action against a fascistic future.

In the last substantive chapter, I look at the effects of the early presidential and general elections in 2018. In the face of a disbanded local assembly and no room for grassroots activists to intervene in national politics, the elections mark a turning point as a defeat, unlike the 2017 referendum. In Chapter 5, talk of hope serves to reclaim activists' decrease in political and temporal agency. Finding themselves in the dystopian future they cautioned against, activists tone down such dystopian imaginations and instead use a narrative of historical struggle that covers both the past and the future. Placing themselves within this much longer term and future-oriented narrative helps activists reclaim a sense of agency and hence, hope. I end by reconceptualising hope based on the complexities that I found at work throughout the chapter.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I review the main findings of each of the substantial chapters and draw out the common threads that link them together. I emphasize the importance of studying the role of temporality and the future in politics. Then, I outline the contributions of the dissertation for social movement studies and authoritarian transitions. I end this chapter and the dissertation by pointing out some of the theoretical implications and avenues for further research that have arisen from the findings of this study.

Chapter 2

Methods

In this chapter, I will lay out the methodological approaches that underpin this study. I will provide a detailed discussion about the methodological choices that I made at the different stages of the research cycle. This chapter will proceed in three parts. After introducing my case and field site, in part one, I will discuss the type of ethnography that I conducted, how I used data and theory, and will provide detailed information about my interviews. In part two, I will go into the specifics of my fieldwork and the writing-up period. In part three, I will delve into my own positionality and into the tensions involved in being both an activist and a researcher, the difficulties of doing participant observation in a transitional context, and the ensuing issues of risks and ethics that I have encountered, before concluding this chapter.

The research on which this study is based relies on 16 months of ethnographic fieldwork and 46 qualitative interviews with activists, conducted over a period of one and a half years. My choice of the field site is typical among ethnographic studies of social movements where small activist groups or social movement organizations are investigated to understand internal dynamics of these formations or to make broader theoretical contributions (e.g., Burawoy, Burton, Ferguson & Fox, 1991; Luhtakallio, 2012; Blee, 2012). My field site is an informal (i.e. not formally institutionalized), local, grassroots activist group that came together on the occasion of the 2017 referendum, to campaign for the “no” vote against regime change. I study one of the

local “no” assemblies as a way of understanding the continuities and changes that grassroots activism went through in recent years in Turkey, and to see the effects of regime change on activism during a period characterized by rapid descent into authoritarianism.

There were several reasons behind my choice of the local “no” assemblies as a field site. First, they offered a good place to observe the state of the social and political legacies of the Gezi Park protests of 2013, most importantly because they were founded by a group of activists that were actively involved in both the Gezi protests and the political initiatives that followed in its aftermath. Second, although local assemblies were initiated with the goal of campaigning for the “no” vote in the referendum, they quickly evolved into a long-term political project that viewed the assemblies as potentially long-lasting political formations based on popular participation. This was a good opportunity for me to examine the development of the assemblies over time. Third, the assemblies consisted of non-partisan individuals, members or sympathizers of political parties, and members of political organizations. This amalgamation of political activists opened up fruitful grounds for me to observe the intersection of social movement and political party activism. And lastly, the assemblies were not only sociologically but also politically important in that they carried out one of the most visible independent referendum campaigns in Istanbul and spread throughout the city’s major districts, gaining international and, as much as the state-controlled media allowed, national attention.

The reasons behind my choosing of this specific local assembly were numerous: it was one of the first assemblies that were established, so I could observe its formation from the very beginning; it came to occupy a central position with regards to other assemblies, meaning it was almost an ideal-type local assembly during

the peak phases of mobilization; the central location of the district (being a transportation hub and one of the most central districts of Istanbul) made this assembly an important site of campaigning, adding to the assembly's significance; and due to the ideological background of the district and the assembly's participants, it was among the most promising assemblies in terms of making itself permanent after the referendum which meant that it had the potential of institutionalization and building itself as a permanent political actor. The leftist and socialist leanings of the district made the discussions at the assembly a local embodiment of debates within the left-wing opposition in general; turning the assembly into a micro-level manifestation of the opposition that included both the left and the left-leaning, liberal, secularist CHP voters.

Part One

Ethnography and participant-observation

Ethnography is a contentious concept in the sense that what merits the label of ethnography has become a prickly subject. With the cultural turn in sociology and in social movement studies in particular, some have come to reserve the label for research characterized by what Geertz (1973) termed thick description, with a focus on the "cultural whole" in which specific issues are situated (Baszanger & Dodier, 2004, p. 13). Others define ethnography as "a written account of the cultural life of a specific group, organization, or community which may focus on a particular aspect of life in that setting" (Watson, 2008, p. 100). Following this definition, others have put forward yet more expansive definitions of ethnography, in which "ethnography is writing" (Humphreys & Watson, 2009, p. 40), where it is more than a methodology for doing

research, and a way of giving a written account of the cultural workings of a case. The subject has become so controversial that it is commonplace to hear, both in the literature and in face-to-face academic environments, phrases such as “quick description”, “would-be ethnographers”, or “anthropological tourism” (Bate, 1997). For this reason, it is crucial to specify what I mean by ethnography and the particular strand of ethnographic scholarship that I subscribe to in my dissertation.

I use ethnography to mean “writing about the world from the standpoint of participant observation” (Burawoy, 1998, p. 6). More specifically, I follow Paul Lichterman’s definition of ethnography in which the term “refers to research in which the researcher observes and to some degree participates in action as the action is happening. In sociology, ‘participant-observation’ names this mode of research more precisely [...] Ethnographic research, unlike other research methods, investigates action in the setting of the actor, in the time of the actor” (Lichterman, 2013, p. 239). Here, the emphasis is on the concurrence of observation and the action that is being observed, with a focus on the method of ethnography for sociological inquiry rather than a strictly anthropological project that advocates for thick description. This definition does not monopolize ethnography as a method for the study of culture¹⁶ and it is open to different approaches to the relationship between data and theory, as I will elaborate in the next section.

More specifically, this study is a political ethnography. As Auyero and Joseph (2007) point out in their introduction to the edited volume, *New Perspectives in Political Ethnography*, political sociology in particular and the study of political processes in general can benefit from ethnography since “much macrosociological work in political sociology rests on conceptually weak microfoundations and on an

¹⁶ Although Lichterman works on culture, his methodological writings on ethnography are not exclusively for cultural sociologists.

understanding of politics that removes from sight much of what politics is really about (power, yes, but also desires, sacrifices, emotions, etc.)”. They go on to argue that ethnography “is useful for understanding how political hegemony is constructed, challenged, and reconstructed, how political habits are constructed, how activists make (or fail to make) choices, how “culture” enables and constrains individual and collective actions, how party or social movement politics connect (or disconnect) from everyday life” (p. 6). Following political ethnographers such as Lichterman (1996), Eliasoph (1998), Baiocchi (2005), Auyero (2006), and Mische (2008), I use political ethnography to study political actors, encounters with formal politics, and the lived experience of the political, as Baiocchi and Connor (2008) classify different types of political ethnographies, which I will elaborate more on in a moment. This methodology distinguishes my research from other studies on similar topics, as it enables me to examine the day-to-day practices, expressions, and actions driven by larger political processes and the oppositional structures produced by people outside of formal political institutions.

Baiocchi and Connor (2008), when they distinguish between three types of political ethnography, acknowledge that it is usually the case that a combination of the three is found in any ethnographic research. My research mainly comes under “ethnographies of political actors and institutions”, which is defined by the authors as “studying politics, defined as the events, institutions, or actors that are normally considered ‘political’ (e.g., social movements, or states), but in an ethnographic way: at a smaller scale and as they happen” (p. 140). I study activists who are overtly political actors, and who self-identify as such, in the original place and time in which they act. The scale is small in that I focus on a specific group of activists that have coalesced into a group at a specific point in time. In this sense, I do not make a claim

of representativeness; I cannot claim that this case represents the whole of activism in Turkey in this period. A study of that range would need to be a much larger one, spanning more groups and a wider time frame. However, considerations of why this group formed in the shape that it did and at the time that it did (see below and Empirical Chapter 1) gives us insight into the historical development, continuities, and changes that local activism has been going through in light of larger political processes.

Throughout the dissertation, I look at activists as they try to position themselves with regards to events. The major events that organize the thesis are the Gezi protests of 2013 and the declaration of the state of emergency in 2016 (Chapter 3), the referendum in 2017 (Chapter 4), and the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2018 (Chapter 5). All three events establish turning points in contemporary politics in Turkey. They are also moments in which “encounters with formal politics” crystallized. Baiocchi and Connor define ethnographies of this type as “studying routine encounters between people and those institutions and actors, encounters normally invisible in nonethnographic ways (e.g., the encounter between organized social movements and nonparticipants; or the encounters with state bureaucracies or welfare agencies)” (2008, p. 140). Although all of these events are highly visible instances of political mobilization, observable by non-ethnographic ways as well as ethnographic ones, they were sudden and regime-changing impositions by the state to which the opposition had to respond. In this sense, temporality as the orienting theme of this dissertation emerged owing to the extensive and long-term ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted. In other words, I could look at grassroots actors’ encounters with the state from the perspective of temporality because ethnographic methods allowed me to observe temporal patterns and experiences much better than non-ethnographic methods. My own embeddedness

within both macro-political processes and the internal dynamics of the group I was studying led me to recognize temporality as an organizing factor in social movement politics.

To a much lesser extent, but still worth mentioning, is this study as an ethnography of “the lived experience of the political”. Baiocchi and Connor define this type as studies about “other kinds of events, institutions, or actors altogether, that while invisible from non-ethnographic vantage points, are of consequence to politics in some way (e.g., apathy, or nonparticipation in social movements)” (p. 140). This study, with its focus on temporality as an explanatory factor in social movements – whether it be in the form of the lived experience of time, future imaginings, or narrative – is loosely connected to this type of political ethnography. I found that time – how it is experienced, used, and narrated – is consequential for politics through the way they enable or constrain activists. Although not directly a politicized topic, temporality helped me to explain the different stages that I observed in the field.

Data and theory

There are two main approaches to sociological ethnography that draw from competing epistemologies: grounded theory and the extended case method (Tavory & Timmermans, 2009). Each has its own take on the relationship between data and theory. On the one hand, grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) encourages theorization “from the ground up” through systematic coding, analysis, conceptualization and constant comparisons with similar research areas. It requires micro-level, close-up data to generate empirically grounded theoretical claims. The boundaries of a case, and therefore the narrative of the research, originate in the field

and its members, as they experience and shape their social world. On the other hand, the extended case method (Burawoy, 1998) prioritizes theory reconstruction, increasing the empirical content of a (usually grand) theory. Leaving the core postulates of their “favourite theory” intact, the researcher looks for “anomalies” and “extends” an already existing theory to accommodate such differences. As Burawoy himself puts it: “We begin with our favourite theory but seek not confirmations but refutations that inspire us to deepen that theory. Instead of discovering grounded theory we elaborate existing theory” (1998, p. 16). In the extended case method, “these theories provide the boundaries and structural plot of the narrative” (Tavory & Timmermans, 2009, p. 255).

Building on the above, I used both grounded theory and the extended case method. While I went into the field with particular research interests in mind, I did not have a “favourite theory” that I wanted to reconstruct by “extending” my case. Still, I was interested in grassroots politics at a time of political turmoil, and my previous degree was on social movements, so I tended to think more in terms of social movement theory. I did not, however, go into the field with the goal of reconstructing the political process model or resource mobilization, for example. In terms of setting the boundaries of the case, I let the fieldwork itself direct me, but I did not exclusively and not always primarily rely on “ethno-narratives” (Tavory & Timmermans, 2009), or the narratives people in the field constructed about themselves. In terms of theorization, the themes in this dissertation are empirically “grounded” and emerge out of the data, but they are not confined to how people in my field site theorized the social and political world. Much like the activists I worked with, I am interested in the larger social forces that shape the situations in which we are embedded, as the extended case logic propounds.

In order to make sense of this combination, I turn to Lichterman (2002) once more. Building on Burawoy's extended case method but also drawing on Glaser and Strauss (2012 [1967]) for some "analytical techniques" that "can assist a project that follows extended case logic" (ibid., p. 120), Lichterman makes a distinction between field-driven and theory-driven participant-observation. In the former mode, "[a] given subject matter 'in the field' directs the goals of the research [...]" A 'theory-driven' project, in contrast, aims to address a theory, rather than to elucidate a substantive topic or field site with perhaps several theories" (p. 122). In this sense, mine is a theory-driven project in which the "researcher 'extends' his [sic] view of a case by theorizing it as a very specific instance of social and cultural structures or institutional forces at work. Participant-observers make these analytic moves into the macro by building on pre-existing theory." (p. 122-123). Just like grounded theory, this type of ethnography looks at the "how", but for the purpose of understanding how larger forces and structures shape action in the particular context in which it happens, as it happens. Temporality for me is the "analytic move" into the macro from the micro that explains the "how" and "why" of the processes I observed.

The extended case method focuses on anomalies for theory reconstruction. I do not reconstruct social movement theory based on the observation of an "anomaly" in my field site defined as a divergence from existing theory. I was more prompted by an "unbearable silence" (Lichterman, 2002, p. 143, note 8) in the theory. That is, I experienced and observed others experience or talk about the impact of time on action in the field. Even though what activists did and talked about constantly was related to some element of temporality, this was a theme that was missing from the theory, or at best was left under-theorized. My attempt at theoretical innovation is thus driven by

an obvious observation that I think needs to be incorporated into our understanding of activism.¹⁷

Both grounded theory and the extended case method emphasize going back and forth between theory and data, expectations and observations, or the researcher's concepts and the concepts readily found in the field. As is encouraged by grounded theory, I used my field notes to notice "problems" in the field, things I was surprised about, or instances that made me uncomfortable. I used these to form new questions and expectations, with a view to search for an answer the next day, the next session, or in the next period. Concepts, themes, and topics emerged out of this day-to-day back-and-forth between theory and data.

Theory-driven participant-observation not only helped me to extend my micro case into the macro, but it also allowed me to have a critical lens while at the same time writing from the standpoint of the activists that I was studying. Rather than pure description and an unquestioning reproduction of what I heard and saw in my field site, or of what people told me, theory-driven participant observation enabled me to contribute my own analysis and theorization into both the activism that I was engaged in, and the theory that I was interested in expanding.¹⁸

¹⁷ In this dissertation, I remain at the level of theorizing the social and political processes that I observe, and only suggest implications for broader social forces and regimes of power in the conclusion.

¹⁸ Uncritical engagement, whether it arises out of pure "objective" observation or of an embeddedness in the movement that one studies, risks blind glorification of the movement. In the case of Gezi, for example, some well-meaning scholars' uncritical engagement led to celebratory accounts of the Gezi protests and their organization. These accounts were informed by the participants' sense of empowerment and the enthusiasm that came from participation in mass protests. Celebratory stories of horizontalism in scholarship were bounced back to the participants in return, with a focus on the *forms* of protest and organization rather than the *goals*. Defining the protests in terms of its form and not content led to the reproduction of the horizontalist rhetoric, which proved unsustainable for groups aiming for national-level change, and possibly affected the outcomes. Surely, the fascination by horizontalism and related phenomena like leaderlessness, anti-institutionalism, etc. cannot be attributed solely to activist-scholars' work. The point here is that although being an embedded researcher gives us a sense of "giving back", reciprocity, or being an "organic intellectual", it is important to caution against uncritical engagement and celebratory accounts as they might do more harm than good in the long term. Not only activist scholarship, but "militant ethnography" (Juris 2007) also runs this risk.

Interviews

I use interviews in conjunction with ethnographic observations. I conducted 46 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with activists both within and outside of the local assemblies. These interviews serve to test my observations, fill in the gaps in my data, and to enlarge the immediate circle of the assemblies. The majority of my interviewees are participants of the specific local assembly that is my field site, even though their level and time of participation differ. Most of these are core organizers or regular participants of the assembly, although participants of other assemblies in different neighbourhoods are also included in my sample through their interactions with my field site. Other interviewees include members or leaders of organizations that have campaigned for the referendum without being involved in the assemblies. I also spoke with two HDP and CHP former and to-be MPs. As a result of their greater level of engagement with the assemblies, members, supporters, or local representatives of the HDP are represented more than CHP supporters and members. As leaders, representatives, or influential figures within groups are already more vocal and visible in the field, I prioritized interviewing less vocal and less visibly influential participants. I also tried to keep a balanced gender representation, even though I did not ask my interviewees for their gender identity, as it is irrelevant for the research.

I conducted half of the interviews in the second phase of my fieldwork, most of which were done after the referendum in April 2017. The other half was done in the third phase, before and after the elections in June 2018. My rationale was to trace the changes that these events might have caused. The second round of interviews had a slightly different focus, or rather, my questions were more focused and tailored

according to my respective chapter themes than in the first round. After the first interviews and the initial analysis, I revised my questions so that they were more apt to answer the themes that emerged from the first round of data collection and the new orientation of the dissertation around temporality.

Most of the interviews were between an hour and a half and two hours long, although my first one lasted more than five hours, and I had one interview that was a bit longer than 30 minutes. I conducted the majority of interviews at cafes and bars that activists regularly frequented in the neighbourhood, and I met a few interviewees in their homes. I either knew my interviewees or was referred to them through personal connections, so gaining access and trust was relatively easy. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Before I started recording, I informed my interviewees of the topic of my research and the kinds of questions that I would ask and asked for their verbal consent. In a high-risk political environment, I chose verbal consent over a written or recorded one, as documenting the participants' consent would be to risk exposing them to legal troubles in case they were confiscated from me (more on this in the risks and ethics section). It would also make the interviewees uncomfortable because a more formal consent would entail a more formal interview setting and also seem overly litigious in this context. Even though nearly all of my interviewees (except for two CHP members) told me that they would not mind their name appearing in this work, I anonymized all names, locations, and organizations throughout the dissertation.

I asked non-directive questions to make room for my interviewees to express themselves in their own terms (Weiss, 1995). I approached the interviews as a “guided conversation” (Lofland & Lofland, 1995) where I tried to make the interview setting a familiar one – a conversation or a discussion – in which I as the researcher was an attentive listener that guided the conversation through prompts, follow-up questions,

and probes. I typically started the interview by asking broad questions about the interviewee's political biography; continued by asking about the reasons for their participation in the assemblies (or other structures if they were not involved in the assemblies) and their role in them; went on to ask about their interpretations and predictions about past or coming events (e.g., past involvement in different organizations or movements, the 2017 referendum, the 2018 elections); and ended by asking if there were any topics that they would like to talk about that we have not covered. Throughout the interview, I asked clarification questions, more specific questions about particular events, discussions, or clashes that I witnessed, and follow-up questions based on the significance the interviewee accorded to certain subjects or happenings. Therefore, my interviews have an analytically fruitful degree of digressions, misunderstandings, and everyday conversations, as well as my efforts at deconstructing the taken-for-granted assumptions of my interviewees (e.g. variations of sentences that start with an off-handed "you know", that assumed that I had witnessed an occurrence, and experienced and/or interpreted it the same way as they did).

Part Two

The first phase of the fieldwork (July 2016 – January 2017)

The first four to five months of my fieldwork were highly exploratory as a result of the dramatic political events that significantly changed the course of my research. I spent most of this period trying to understand how different social

movement organizations or activist groups reacted to the state of emergency that followed from the failed military coup attempt in July 2016. During this phase, I was trying to make sense of the grassroots political scene, find a field site that was both politically significant and responsive to my newly emerging research interests, and gain access to a diverse range of groups.

I went to Istanbul in June 2016 to conduct ethnographic fieldwork at an LGBTQ+ organization with the aim of studying the relationship between movements and parties from a relational (Emirbayer, 1997) perspective. I had three interrelated questions: how do ideas and practices travel across networks of political action? How – if at all – do some networks congeal into discernible institutional forms? And how do these networks change or stagnate as an effect of their interactions? I was interested in the field of political action; the object of my analysis was relations; and I wanted to question the boundaries between social movements and political parties as they were drawn in the literature. In choosing my field site, I prioritized those spaces in which multiple networks came together to construct “empirically observable boundaries in interaction”, as I phrased it in my SO500 submission at the end of the first year of my PhD studies. I wanted to observe different politics coming together in one space, where people’s multiple social and political identities clashed, merged, or interacted in some other way. Grassroots mobilization in Istanbul at the time was suspended, so to speak, as it had only been a little more than six months since the two general elections of 2015. Given these considerations, I had chosen an LGBTQ+ organization as a primer.

However, none of the above was actually carried out as only a short time after my arrival in Istanbul, in 15 July 2016, there was a military coup attempt. It was one of a series of unforgettable life events that also changed the course of this research. The path it paved in the social and political life in Turkey marked every stage of my

field work, analysis, and thesis. While the coup attempt had a decisive impact on my research, it did not completely overturn my research interests; I still wanted to study grassroots activism, but my initial research questions seemed far less significant now, and maybe even irrelevant, at least to me. I was unclear about my research questions because I was also unclear about the political situation. What was going on in the army? What was happening between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gulen Movement, who were long-time shareholders of the state? How would the Gulenists react? What would happen to the Gulenists within the AKP? What would the other political parties do? These and many more questions were up in the air, but there were even more basic questions: What happened? Who did it? What would happen now?

The answer came without further ado, on 20 July 2016, with the declaration of a three-month long state of emergency, which was reissued seven times in the two years following its first announcement. It was lifted anticlimactically on 18 July 2018, after two elections carried out under undemocratic circumstances. As I have included more information on this period in the Introduction, I will only reiterate here that the crackdown on the opposition intensified with emergency rule.

These developments threw my neatly planned research design out the window and I had to start exploring anew. I was curious about how the opposition evaluated the situation after the declaration of the state of emergency and which course of action they were planning to follow. I attended everything I could find – panels, meetings, conferences, forums, closed group meetings, neighborhood gatherings – that were organized by a variety of organizations ranging from feminist organizations to peace activists, from environmentalists to neighborhood associations. I also had my eye on another political platform, “Unity”, that was newly founded in mid-2016, led by two

former CHP MPs as an autonomous political platform (a “democracy platform” as they called themselves), which called for the unification of all democratic forces against war, autocracy, and lawlessness. It aimed at creating a ground for struggle and focused on topics such as equal citizenship, humane working and living conditions, a renewed understanding of secularism/laicism which includes the freedom of religion and conscience, to name a few. It was an elite organization bringing together intellectuals, politicians, celebrities, and the like. Accordingly, its preferred instrument of collective action was press conferences. It had generated excitement within the opposition with its opening proclamation and was welcomed as a potentially effective new political force. Moreover, its connection to the CHP and the HDP, the two opposition parties in the parliament, together with leftist political parties and organizations suggested it was the ground on which the cooperation and conflict I needed to observe were taking place. The coordination meetings which were attended by high level executives and independent activists could give me clues as to how “high politics” was conducted. I thought Unity could become the site through which I could connect the micro-politics of the grassroots with macro-politics of political parties, and the site in which I could observe grassroots activism connect to or disconnect from elite politics.

In Unity, political parties (CHP and HDP, but also smaller leftist parties from within the HDP and other Marxist-Leninist parties), non-governmental organizations, social movement organizations, and important political figures from the left were involved. The platform had declared that they were constituted of more than 100 organizations, including the HDP and the CHP. Seeing these two parties together was highly unusual in Turkey, so I thought the platform would be both politically significant and methodologically interesting to study. Since they claimed to have a

non-hierarchical structure open to everyone, I tried to gain access to them the way I gained access to all the others: It was usually as simple as signing up to the listserv or following their social media accounts, and then showing up at their meetings or other events. If that did not work, I would ask around and find someone who was involved to tag along with them. However, I could not get access to this platform, either because they did not hold public meetings, or I did not hear about them, except for their press conferences.

At the same time, I was involved in a small group that later became pivotal in my search for a field site. “Solidarity” was a group that was established in November 2016 after HDP co-leaders Selahattin Demirtas and Figen Yuksekdag were arrested. The idea was to gather those involved in the previous independent election initiative for the parliamentary elections of 7 June 2015, to think of possible actions to take in protest against the arrests, as their election campaign was for the HDP less than one and a half years ago. By December 2017, this group had already taken the initiative to design a pamphlet against the extension of the state of emergency, in a form that was particularly suited to be distributed into people’s mailboxes.¹⁹ They had been inspired by Unity’s campaign for the same cause in which facts about the costs of the state of emergency were listed. Solidarity used these and added more facts to their creatively designed pamphlet. This was both creative and effective; anyone who found the pamphlet in the mail would read it. Solidarity had re-activated their ties in other cities – ties they had from the 2015 election campaign – to spread the flyer. With the declaration of the referendum in January 2017, they added a “no” stamp to the pamphlet, which became one of the very first materials to be distributed by the

¹⁹ For purposes of anonymisation, I cannot disclose the exact shape and content of this campaign material.

assemblies. I will come back to this point in more detail when I reflect about the second phase of fieldwork.

From the end of July 2016 to the end of that year, I went from one group to the other, trying to figure out what each did, their interpretations of what was going on, their plans for how to resist. I was trying to choose a field site where I could observe the effects of regime change on grassroots politics. All these groups I was plugging in to surely went through some changes, but they mostly stuck with their earlier agenda, tactics, and organization. For example, the environmentalists, who were a remnant of the Gezi protests, kept working on their campaign against the third bridge, without making any changes to their tactics or organizational structure. Feminists acknowledged that women and minorities would be hit the hardest, and there was increasing anxiety around the laws by decree²⁰, but they, too did not go through an immediately observable transformation. The attempts at building neighborhood networks were covertly an attempt at bringing the dissipated local initiatives back together, and overtly a preparation for the Big Istanbul Earthquake, the nightmare of all Istanbulites. However, these initiatives were too local, too small, and too unreliable and volatile to make a case or be a site. I wanted a site where I could observe the effects of the new regime, as well as something that could be permanent, that took on the new challenge, that engaged with politics at the national level, that could have an effect, and that brought diverse actors together. I was not observing significant changes in these organizations at the time. This does not mean that there have been no effects and no changes; they should be studied. I, however, was impatient (read: I had

²⁰ Feminist groups are probably the ones that have the most academics in them, and the clampdown on academia in general and the Academics for Peace in particular was especially relevant in these organizations/groups.

no time) and I still had not found the kind of site that would answer my questions until December 2016 and January 2017.

The second phase of the field work (January 2017 – September 2017)

The second phase, which I roughly delineate from January 2017 when the referendum was announced to September 2017 when I returned to London, is the one where I gained access to Unity, during which the local “no” assemblies were formed, and when I decided that my field site would be the local assemblies instead of Unity. The period covers the referendum campaign and its aftermath. In this phase, I found my field site and more importantly, I became immersed in it as an activist and as a researcher. I also conducted my first round of interviews during this time.

This phase starts on a candle-lit, snowy night in January 2017, after the parliament voted for the 18 constitutional changes to be made, which brought about the constitutional referendum of 16 April 2017. It was the first public meeting²¹ of what would later be called the local “no” assemblies. I was invited to the meeting through my connections with Solidarity. There were about 30 people in the room with long windows with a view of the sea, and no electricity because of the snow, hence the candles. The meeting was organized by a well-connected local organizer, 24 years of age, who was involved in Unity and who also had contacts with other local organizers, political parties, and organizations. When the constitutional referendum passed from the parliament, the need for a grassroots campaign was obvious to everyone.

²¹ In my later conversations and interviews, I learned that this meeting was not the first time that the idea of creating local structures to campaign for the “no” vote in the referendum was discussed. It was the first narrowly public meeting – narrow because activists and organizers were invited; there had been no call for the wider public.

The meeting was constituted of various political parties, organizations, and individuals, as well as different grassroots groups, like the environmentalists, Solidarity, or the local women's groups. I was, for the most part, lost in that meeting because I did not know most of the participants, and could not make sense of where they were coming from only from the few sentences they had the chance to utter; there was also confusion among the participants as to the institutional character of the meeting. The general understanding, as far as I could gather from the questions and conversations before, during, and after the meeting, was that Unity had made the call. In reality, as I would later find out, it became clear that it was only loosely Unity's idea to call for this particular meeting, and more the initiative of the young organizer. The meeting was relatively well attended because of the extra-partisan nature of the referendum and because the idea to put together a campaign was already brewing among disparate actors. Therefore, it was not surprising that at the end of the meeting, it was agreed that a non-partisan, bottom-up, localized referendum campaign that would speak to a wide voter base should be convened. This was the beginning of my field work, as what would soon become my field site partly emerged out of this meeting, even though I did not know it then. I met with the organizer who was from Unity and gained access to it, thinking I would be studying them. I also followed the formation of the local "no" assemblies but was not involved in the initial backstage proceedings.

I started going to Unity's coordination meetings, as it was difficult to come by a general assembly meeting open to the public. At this stage, the bill that was designed by Solidarity had attracted Unity's attention and travelled there through personal connections of those within Unity²². In February 2017 the local "no" assemblies were

²² These were former partisan or organizational ties, and local organizers' personal connections to different groups and other organizers.

instigated with a general forum attended by some 600 people. Within the initial organizers, who helped materialize the idea of a grassroots “no” campaign in the form of local assemblies, were a few participants of Solidarity. At first, I expected Solidarity, the local “no” assemblies, and Unity to work in tandem with one another, each fulfilling a different function. Solidarity would be the creative leg of the campaign, designing and producing campaign materials; the assemblies would be the main vessels through which the campaign would be carried out, and they would be autonomous local bodies where local decisions were made and the campaign tailored according to each city, district, or neighborhood; and lastly, Unity would serve as the coordinating body, “the scaffolding” around the local assemblies as a member put it, that would publicize, financially support, and nationally spread the assemblies. However, participants of Solidarity decided to work within the local assemblies instead of with them or separately from them, seeing the assemblies as much more influential than their own group. In the meanwhile, the assemblies started fast, grew big, and spread in Istanbul quickly – within a few weeks. Unity started talking about its relationship to the assemblies, whether they should be called “assemblies” in the first place²³, what their respective roles would be, whether they should remove Unity’s logo from the flyers that they wanted the assemblies to distribute, as they had more “human resources” and better reach to the “street”. Slowly, but retrospectively surely, a hostile relationship developed between Unity and the assemblies. Even though I was very much interested in this hostility, I was more and more drifting towards the local “no” assemblies as my field site.

The reason why I was drifting towards the assemblies was because the assembly that I was following, when compared to Unity, was much more advanced in

²³ A completely irrelevant discussion as it had been already decided by local participants that they would be called “assemblies” and not something else.

its discussions, starting from February 2017 when it was first established. Assembly participants were self-reflexive, critical, forward-looking, and much more flexible in their discussions; whereas Unity avoided all conflict and only focused on tasks like organizing a press conference, calling the media, putting together the press release, and so on. They also relied heavily on a senior, renowned member's writings, waiting for him to write important documents that sketched out the groups' strategy and rhetoric. The assembly was action-oriented, without shying away from discussion and conflict; Unity was talk-oriented, and evaded debates to the point where they could not discuss crucial topics like the structure of the organization, the content of the campaign, or what they would do after the referendum.²⁴ The assemblies not only did more and talked more, but they were also closer to what I wanted to study in the sense that they had succeeded in drawing the attention of and recruiting the non-affiliated, non-organized, local people. Taken together, assemblies were sites of hyperprojectivity "in which the explicit purpose of talk is to locate problems, visualise alternative pathways, and consider their consequences and desirability" (Mische, 2014, p. 447).

From then on, my relationship with other groups were defined by this primary affiliation to the assemblies. I still went to Unity, but as a participant from the local assembly; I went to the CHP's meeting with non-governmental organizations to ask for support with printing and complain about the municipality; I talked at press conferences as an assembly participant; I went to the Istanbul coordination meetings

²⁴ For example, the internal structure of the coordination group was on their agenda for more than six months, until I left the field. The content of the campaign was left to a "working group" headed by an advertisement agent which was pretty much unchecked by the rest of the coordination, let alone the larger general assembly that was supposed to be the main decision-making body of Unity. In terms of planning, they were so focused on the immediate logistics of press conferences that they were left with tens of thousands of flyers with their logo on them one week before the elections, because they had not planned for their distribution.

of the assemblies as a participant from a specific local assembly. The intensity of my involvement in these sites varied considerably depending on the structure of the organization, the type of politics they pursued, and the type of social capital that counted as reputable. For instance, I was mostly an observer at the meetings and press conferences that I attended at Unity while in the local “no” assembly I had more opportunities to participate. I was, indeed, one of the organizers of the assembly: I attended meetings and commemorations, participated in the decision-making processes, handed out campaign flyers, helped organize events and protests, was a note taker and a moderator, and so on. It also helped that I was living in the same neighborhood as most other participants, and I had the same everyday world as everyone else: I followed the writers and media they followed; I watched their online programs and read the interviews they conducted; I went to the bars and cafes they went to, and shopped at the local shops they shopped at. Meanings between the lines and the underlying patterns of communication would not be accessible to me had it not been for this involvement. By means of this social network, I was able to reach a wider range of organizations and activists than my immediate field site, allowing me to secure interviews with activists from outside of the limits of the assemblies.

After an intense campaign and the few weeks right after the referendum in April 2017, the assemblies started to have discussions about the new role of the assemblies and their possible institutionalization through Unity. I sped up my interviews after the wave of protests rejecting the referendum results subsided, while still being actively involved in the meetings and actions of the assembly.

The third phase of the field work (December 2017 & January 2018; May 2018 – September 2018)

For a month from December 2017 to January 2018 and then for about four months around the time of the elections that took place in June 2018, I visited Istanbul for a second round of interviews. Although I had no intention of carrying out fieldwork as extensive as I had before, I was curious about the state of the assemblies in January and wanted to witness the political atmosphere of the elections first-hand in the summer. So, in the third phase, I experienced the dissolution of the local assembly that I studied, I observed the 2018 elections, and conducted more interviews.

When I visited Istanbul for a month in the winter, the assembly had been going through a rough time. The “assembly” had downsized to the coordination group only, and there was a deadlock about the path that the assemblies would take after the referendum in April 2017. I never lost contact with the assemblies: I was still part of the WhatsApp group and their email list, but I was also personally in contact with several participants. I had an idea of the general developments within the assembly, but I was still curious and wanted to see for myself. The first day I arrived in Istanbul, I went to the coordination meeting, interested to see what they were up to and excited to see my friends. I was a bit late, so the meeting had already started when I got there. I was hoping to sneak in from the second door in the back and find a free chair without disturbing the meeting, but I was seen. A few people immediately called my name, welcoming me, telling me how glad they were to see me. They stood up to take a cigarette break with me in the small kitchen opposite the meeting room. The person who was speaking had to stop and greet me.

As happy as I was with the reaction, I could see how it was also caused by the heaviness of the conversations, the seeming impossibility of resolving the deadlock, and the way in which the conversations were being carried out (see Chapter 4)²⁵. The room was full, with about 30 people around a rectangular table, and with lots of new faces that I did not know from before. This was unexpected and a positive development; although they had been discussing the same thing – whether to campaign for a possible early election or the elections of 2019, or to campaign against the state of emergency – for months by then, I did not know the severity of the situation. Soon, I was invited to a splinter meeting, from which the “election assemblies” emerged, and different groups started doing different campaigns around the elections. I went to these meetings too, as much as I could in a month, to grasp the groups and their trajectories more clearly. My second empirical chapter is based on the data from observations made during this period.

When I was back in Istanbul in the summer of 2018 to observe the elections, the local assembly that I studied had disintegrated, and the variety of organizations that emerged out of it, or like it, were more aligned with certain political organizations or parties than with the “grassroots” per se. I attended their meetings and conducted interviews with participants who had also been at the local assemblies, but I did not actively participate in their campaigns. My participation during this period was limited to making observations and discovering the new scenery, while at the same time carrying out my interviews. The particularities of this phase are reflected in the way I use the data in the relevant chapters, which I will turn to in the section below.

²⁵ I was surprised at how tense and even insulting the way talk was delivered in this meeting. For example, people from one organization were making faces or hand gestures to each other that implied disapproval of a speaker, and I witnessed verbal attacks questioning how revolutionary the speaker was, which were highly unusual for the assembly.

Writing-up

In the first empirical chapter that I wrote, in which I discuss the changing organizational structures of local organizing towards a critical engagement with the organizational and ideational legacies of the 2013 Gezi protests, I repeatedly found myself emphasizing past experiences as well as expectations about the future. Activists talked about the lessons learned from Gezi, but these lessons were drawn in accordance with their expectations of what was going to happen. It was based on their interpretations of Gezi, of the 2015 elections, or the state of emergency and regime change in Turkey, but it was also based on an understanding of the necessary fit between the regime and the types of organizational structures that were and would be needed to face an authoritarian regime that was in the making.

I decided to follow up on this realization about the central role of expectations in the next chapter and took on the challenge of writing about temporality and its effects on action. Looking at how the assembly disintegrated at a time when coordinated action was deemed absolutely essential, I found that future imaginings were a crucial element in not only decision-making and tactical choices, but also movement orientation and trajectories more generally. Activists thought of themselves and other actors around them – other activists, organizations, political parties, the state, etc. – in relation to each other and to possible changes in politics and the political situation. They constantly talked about how they imagined the political situation in the distant future, as well as what they expected to happen the next day, the next week, or in the next elections – whenever they might be. Additionally, all this was happening at a specific period that was extraordinarily eventful. The temporal aspects of regime

change and of activists' temporal orientations were a significant and necessary contribution to make to social movement theory.

The second empirical chapter that I wrote led me to reorient the dissertation around temporality²⁶, and sensitized me to the temporal aspect of hope and defeat that I had experienced and observed in the third phase of my fieldwork around the 2018 elections, which became my third empirical chapter. This thread of inquiry also made me tailor my questions in the second round of interviews.

In the third empirical chapter, I use data from my observations at different meetings and everyday life but rely more on interviews. The ethnographic observations in this chapter mostly appear as auto-ethnographic experiences that sensitized me to certain patterns, when compared to the previous chapters. There is a practical and a methodological reason for this change: the practical reason is that the collapse of the local assembly meant that the “field” was much more dispersed, there were a number of newly established groups and assemblies that some of the former assembly participants joined, but some remained unaffiliated, scattered around the neighborhood or in between different groups. The methodological reason follows from the practical one, in that my observations grew more scattered within this more limited amount of time, and it was harder for me to rely on observations based on fewer observations made at each meeting. Therefore, allowing my observations to sensitize me to debates and emerging struggles, I chose to rely more on the interviews.

²⁶ Ironically, this meant that I needed more time to think through my topic and analysis and go back to the literature and the data; a normal process in research but a luxury that we do not have in academia today.

Part Three

Temporalities of activism and research

Participant observation is characterized by studying an ongoing process in its own time and place, as it develops. As such, it is a method that is inherently sensitive to the temporal dynamics of the phenomenon that is being researched. The ethnographer goes through the workings of a process as a participant while at the same time being exposed to the specific temporality of research, too. I consider this as another tension in the dual role of being a participant observer.

I conducted field work during a period that was particularly eventful and uncertain. The future is always unknown, but it was the stakes that were involved in activists' ability to change a dreaded future that made my research especially prone to experiences and observations perceptive of temporal dynamics. It was difficult to predict what lay in front of us. Therefore, ambiguity and tentative anticipation informed my study not only thematically but also methodologically. I paid attention to what people said *before* the event, for example, instead of relying only on retrospective accounts. By doing this, I attempted to replicate as closely as possible the original temporality that was experienced or imagined at the time. In the cases that I do use retrospective reflections, I therefore make it clear in the text. I wanted to replicate temporal processes in the analysis and in writing, by writing from the perspective of an activist from within the moment as events unfolded, in activists' own time, without knowing how things would end. I tried to preserve the open-endedness of changing political situations in which we (activists and I) were embedded in the

themes and structure of the dissertation, and to reflect shifting temporal orientations in each substantive chapter.

However, at certain moments, temporality as experience of time came into conflict with the temporality dictated by research. The week of the referendum in 2017, a week spent organizing protests that declared the rigged results illegitimate, was one such moment. We had not planned for a week of protests, so we had a lot of preparing to do. Alliances were made; meetings were held; banners, leaflets, slogans, declarations, and social media materials were created; risks, goals, relations with the press and the police were discussed; protests were evaluated; self-critique was made... We slept very little and worked long hours. We had to consider waning participation over time, as well as the fact that immediacy (of the need for action) was of utmost importance if the protests were to have an effect on the government. Acting quickly was also key to sustaining the momentum; to not lose the numbers that showed up to the first night of protest. In the middle of all this, I was doing research.

Taking notes takes time and writing up field notes takes even more time. My notes from that week are therefore all retrospectively written. I did not take notes during meetings as extensively as I usually did, for example, and I did not take time off from the work of organizing the protests to write field notes. The political moment was ephemeral, and I prioritized political action over research. In a way, the tension here was between the ethics of politics and the ethics of academic work. I was responsible to the people I worked with and being involved was also a political responsibility.²⁷

²⁷ A similar type of clash of temporalities exists between the requirements of the academy and those of research. Academic production is expected to be fast – we have to publish; we have to be writing; we have to be “productive” – whereas research is a relatively slow process. We design projects, apply for grants, conduct research, analyse, write, present, publish. There is no time to make mistakes, to change our mind, to take a step back. Juggling these two (somewhat opposing) temporal demands seems to have been established as part of doing academic work.

Being an activist researcher

Activist scholarship, participatory action research, positionality, and reflexivity, and reciprocity are some of the keywords that circulate among scholars who are actively engaged in the spaces they study. These debates are simultaneously about epistemology, methodology, and ethics, and therefore impossible to cover in a section of a chapter on methodology. In this section, I have a much less ambitious goal: I will focus on some of the questions I have been asking myself throughout this research based on my position as both an activist and a researcher.

I will follow Colin Barker and Laurence Cox (2002) in starting with the observation that academic work is “parasitic”; we rely on the facts, knowledges, and histories that movements we study have produced. It is not uncommon to observe cases where movement scholars in the academic industry use the movements they study purely to further their own – academic – careers, but the parasitic relationship is not confined to such careerism. We produce concepts and theories tailored to fit in or expand the literatures that academia deems important (which might or might not be deemed important by activists). Given the pressure to publish and the demands of an industrialized academy, it is not always acknowledged that movement actors themselves theorize at every turn, and academic theorizing usually tends to lag behind. How, then, can we contribute not only to an academic literature but also to the movements that we study? In other words, how do we reciprocate?

I will leave aside simplistic solutions such as making donations or presenting one’s academic work to groups of activists. I find monetary contribution to not be worthy of the label “contribution”, especially because the movement that I study is by

nature against such transactional relationships, where even the “hierarchy of labour” is actively rejected. Presenting one’s academic work to an audience of movement actors might be a meaningful contribution, although emphasizing its contribution runs the very realistic risk of overemphasizing the value of the knowledge produced by the scholar while underemphasizing the fact that the knowledge has, in reality, been produced collectively, and hence already known by the audience. Moreover, the concepts and mechanisms that academics come up with to speak to an academic audience can make those processes less accessible instead of more conducive to a better understanding (I presume that we all read books and articles where a simple point is made in convoluted ways and in an obscure language that do not lead to a meaningful – academic or otherwise – contribution).

I am not in any way exempt from such a parasitic relationship. In fact, I have struggled with what I think of as a dual relationship; I was a PhD student studying activists, and I was also one of the activists that I studied. The difficulty for me comes from my largely cynical view on the value and uses of academic knowledge production; I do not believe that a public policy section at the end of the dissertation is of any importance, and I do not believe that I know more than the people I study. It is true that as academics, we have the time and resources to compile the knowledges produced by movements, historicize them, compare them to others in other places and times, but our knowledge is only partial, like activist knowledge, and can only be one among all the others. Nick Crossley (1999) refers to this as academicism, where academics have a certain “hexis”, or style of expressing themselves, that non-academic activists find alienating (and even condescending, in my case). Indeed, the all-knowing scholar at meetings, or the academic who writes in a public journal about

a movement of which they witnessed a couple of meetings, induces antipathy in my field site.

As an activist, I try to avoid academicism. The practical antidote to the academicism that might arise from my dual position as an activist who is also a researcher has been, for me, to separate the two roles. Although other fellow activists knew that I was a researcher – and I always took extensive notes, it was hard to forget that I was doing research – I did not speak as a researcher in activist and social contexts. This was not to deny my privilege as a PhD student at LSE, who had “one foot abroad”, when most of the activists I worked with either had to or wanted to live in Turkey, regardless of the risks, dealing with repression and involved in everyday struggles, whereas I could leave and live abroad.²⁸ I also do not deny that I was putting into practice what I had been learning in my academic studies alongside my experiences in activism. In this sense, the distinction between the two roles appears to be artificial, but it is useful where academic arrogance is a common trait among engaged scholars in these fields.²⁹

To clarify, I will go back to Colin Barker and Laurence Cox. Following Gramsci’s (1999, p. 131-162) “traditional” versus “organic” intellectuals, and Eyerman and Jamison’s (1991) “established” versus “movement” intellectuals, Barker and Cox (2011 [2002]) introduce a distinction between “academic” and “movement” intellectuals.³⁰ They argue that these two types of intellectuals theorize differently,

²⁸ This is a statement about class and privilege, although a native researcher’s relationship to their field is more complicated than just the ability to leave the country.

²⁹ Feminist scholarship and activism are a good example of the convergence of the two roles, and feminist theorists have a more developed and critical understanding of knowledge production than (most) social movement scholars. Even there, these are questions that have not been solved; I have in mind trans exclusionary radical feminism, the intervention of queer theory, or the interventions of trans activism, for example, and how activism and scholarship feed into each other, through mutual learning but also through conflict.

³⁰ I will not go into this discussion to avoid digression, but the category of “intellectual” should also be questioned.

from different perspectives, and for different goals. For example, while academic intellectuals engage in contemplative theorizing, activist theorizing involves making practical proposals (p. 2-3). Movement intellectuals therefore do not only observe a movement but offer practical solutions as well as justifications for the movement (p. 4). They carry out intellectual, and at times directive, activities on behalf of subordinate classes and groups (p. 5). And lastly, the “role of ‘movement intellectual’ has to be won and won again as a much more uncertain qualification. For the settings in which movements act and argue and the strategic and tactical problems movements they [sic] face, and in which movement intellectuals make their contributions, are such as to demand constant rethinking and innovation” (p. 5). I would also add time, commitment, generative insights, diligence, and inter-personal relationships, among other factors, to the requirements of the role of the movement intellectual. Furthermore, as Barker and Cox (2002) also acknowledge, the directive role of these intellectuals (or in Gramscian terms, their “intellectual function”) are usually undertaken not by individuals but by groups within movements, or cadres. Some of the backstage intellectual activity goes unrecognized as intellectual activity per se (p. 5).

One of the key underlying points in their article is that activist groups work with different sets of credentials, status symbols, and value systems than the academic field. In my experience, mixing the two – so, thinking that one’s credentials as an academic will suffice to be taken seriously by or be useful for activists – can very quickly lead to academicism as discussed above. This is partly what I mean by separating the two roles. I worked with activists as an activist, learning and helping to create a specific way of speaking and relating to one another, contributing to decision-making processes when I could, organizing protests, going leafletting, colouring

banners, negotiating for funds from institutional bodies, and so on. I was involved both in the “back office” and in “front-line” work (Smeltzer, 2012). In other words, I did not confine myself to the purely academic role of “knowledge production” within or for the movement. I was, however, involved in strategizing groups at certain points during my field work, as someone who was trusted within activist circles.³¹ In this sense, I was using the skills of my academic discipline to further the group’s immediate and long-term goals. My practical propositions and directive role were channelled into these debates, in practice, and as part of a group of activists.

In terms of theorizing, this thesis is more “contemplative” than “activist”, in Barker and Cox’s terms, aiming to understand a process and contribute to an existing body of academic literature. Temporality was not a topic that was problematized in my field site, that is to say, it was not worded as such. However, it was and is, as I argue in the dissertation, an important part of the processes that I study and that activists problematize: how to organize spaces of contention, how to strategize and make decisions, how to sustain resistance. While my thesis does not offer any concrete solutions to specific problems, I do, however, think of this work as part of the self-reflection and self-critique that activists carry out after intense periods, and wish to contribute to ongoing discussions on defeat, organizing, and resilience, among others.

As can be deduced from the discussion above, I have not found a definitive way to resolve the tensions arising from my dual role as activist and researcher. Still, I believe immersing myself fully in the struggle that I studied was a crucial ethical choice in this particular case, both politically and in terms of research ethics. Having

³¹ I had already been involved in previous struggles and was relatively well-connected when I started my field work, although not everyone trusted me as an activist from the beginning. In fact, researchers are notorious for their exploitative and misrepresentative or overly simplifying tendencies in my field site. My being involved in almost every stage of organizing from no-risk to more risky situations, my long-term commitment, and personal ties helped me build trust.

said this, I agree with Gillan and Pickerill (2012, p. 135-139) when they argue that immediate reciprocity (being embedded in the movements we study and doing the work of activism) is not necessarily more ethical than general reciprocity in the form of a contribution to knowledge developed in and for the academy. It does not exempt me from the responsibilities I have as a researcher either. These questions are not to be resolved. Instead, they require persistent reflexivity.

Risks and ethics

I have already started discussing ethical issues in Part three, but a methodology chapter calls for a more conventional section on risks and ethics as well. In the following section, I will therefore turn more deliberately towards a discussion of the risks and ethical concerns my study entails.

Most notably, the topic of this dissertation is a risky one by nature: the people I study are actively opposed to the current government and the regime. Moreover, there was a state of emergency throughout the period I am looking at. Around a dozen people I personally knew were arrested and imprisoned during my field work, several of whom I interviewed either before they were detained or after they were released. Protestors being taken into custody was common, and more often than not, after a week in jail, they would be arrested and imprisoned without trial for months. Police raids to political parties' offices and members' homes were also common during this period and are ongoing at the time of writing. Right after the 2017 referendum, more than ten local assembly participants were taken into custody at a protest in support of Nuriye Gülmen and Semih Özakça, an academic and a teacher who were on hunger

strike protesting the laws by decree that purged thousands of people from their jobs after the military coup attempt. At around the same time, activists' homes were being surveilled by the police, including mine, so we had to live in other places to avoid getting arrested in case of a raid. Notes from a local assembly meeting were quoted at length in an indictment charging human rights activists for aiding terrorist organizations. In sum, the people I studied were at risk.

I study activists, who, by definition, have consented to the risks involved in doing activism in an authoritarian regime. The design of this research project did not expose activists to more risks than they had already consented to. However, the information I was gathering was highly sensitive. As a precaution, I anonymised all names, locations, and organizations to protect participants' identities, to avoid this thesis from being misused by the government in case it gets fully or partially published. I was careful to not disclose any information that was confidential to a group, so that I would not carry confidential information from one group to another. I stored all digital data on the LSE's server and not on my personal laptop. I never kept more than one interview on my recording device and uploaded them onto my LSE account as soon as possible before deleting the copy from my device. I kept my handwritten notes in different and safe places to avoid confiscation in case of a house raid.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I laid out the methodological approaches that are constitutive of this dissertation, including detailed information on my field site and the data collection process. In the first part of the chapter, I presented my approach to political

ethnography as theory-driven participant observation, following Paul Lichterman (2002). I then discussed how the data that I gathered inform my theoretical contributions, and how my theoretical interests inform the way I use the data. In the second part, I went into a detailed account of how I chose my field site, the difficulties I encountered, and how the whole research process – from the necessity to rethink my research questions to choosing an appropriate field site, to ethical considerations – was affected by major political events as well as the internal dynamics of the groups involved. In part three, I turned to issues of risks and ethics along with the details of my positionality as an activist-researcher in a high-risk political environment with access to sensitive information.

Now, I will turn to my research findings, starting with the first substantive chapter entitled “Re-reading the Past, Engaging the Future: The Local Assembly”. I will explicate the changes that grassroots organizations and their organizers have gone through since the Gezi protests, the type of politics that the local assembly embodied, its organizational structure and activities. I will focus on the role of organizers’ accumulated experiences in shaping the assembly and how activists’ reading of the past and the future influenced their politics.

Chapter 3

Re-reading the Past, Engaging the Future: The Local Assembly

Previous episodes of contention were organized in a variety of different ways, but none had taken the form of local assemblies. This chapter aims to answer the question of why the “no” campaign took the organizational form that it did at this specific moment in time.

Tracing the transformation of grassroots organizational forms back to the Gezi protests of 2013, I will identify the continuities and changes that grassroots organizations went through between 2013 and 2017, when the local “no” assemblies were first established. I will then discuss how activists re-read the Gezi protests in light of the current political environment and adapted the way they did politics. I will argue that regime change led activists to combine rapid political learning through accumulated experiences with their expectation of increasing repression, which resulted in the specific form and structure of this local “no” assembly. In addition to the assembly’s organizational structure, this chapter will also detail the kinds of activities and events that the assembly organized, the materials they created and distributed, and the assembly’s position with regards to other local assemblies that were established after it.

“Gezi was ages ago!”: Gezi and its Aftermath

“So, are we going to talk about Gezi? It was ages ago!” reacts a potential interviewee, in May 2017, on the phone, when I tell him that I work on grassroots politics in Istanbul and would like to interview him. It is telling that he immediately thinks of the Gezi protests in 2013 upon hearing the phrase “grassroots politics”, that is, Gezi comes to mind as the only grassroots mobilization on a mass scale in contemporary Turkey, other than the decades-long Kurdish liberation movement. It is also telling because it was only four years ago that the largest mass protests in living memory had happened, and yet it felt “ages ago”. He was not alone in feeling like this either; what he said was only one of the variations on the same theme of Gezi seeming to have happened a long time ago, which was a common reaction by interviewees when I first told them about my research topic.

The reasons for the perception of the Gezi protests having happened a long time ago were twofold: The first was the number of political events that took place between Gezi and the referendum; the second was the meaning of these events, or in other words, the change in the political context. A young organizer of the assemblies who had been a part of the Gezi protests, and who has been involved in grassroots activism since then, put it concisely:

I learned so much from these experiences [...] we lived through everything in a very condensed way, you know? There was Gezi, then squats, then there were the presidential elections in 2014 and [the HDP’s candidate] Demirtas won nine percent, then the local elections, then general elections [in 2015] and the threshold was passed [by the HDP], then there was 1 November [2015], then the

referendum. We experienced victories and defeats all together. We experienced in four, five years what a normal person could only fit into 50, 60 years.

The eventfulness of the period between the Gezi protests in 2013 and the referendum in 2017 led to the feeling of having experienced “50, 60 years” of political change. Again, this was a common perception in my field site. “We have undergone a lifetime of political experiences during this time”, another participant of the assemblies texted the common WhatsApp group of all the assemblies in Istanbul, a week before the referendum. As the interviewee quoted above makes clear, the condensation of political experience in a short period of time led to rapid political learning for those who were actively involved in the various campaigns or attempts at organization since Gezi. As I have already elaborated on the political significance of these events in the Introduction, I will concentrate here on the different forms that grassroots attempts at mobilization that preceded each electoral event took.

The Gezi protests of 2013 were a series of protests that started with the uprooting of trees in Gezi Park next to Taksim Square in Istanbul. The protest to stop the destruction of the park quickly ascended to a mass protest after videos and photographs of police violence became viral and then spread across the country. A considerable amount of academic, semi-academic, and journalistic articles was written about the Gezi Park protests since then. Activist milieus mostly focused on the politics of the commons, horizontal organization structures and leaderlessness, direct democracy, new social movements, and urban social movements and the right to the city (e.g. *Express Dergi*, 2013, Issue 139). After the occupied Gezi Park was evacuated, participants gathered in parks in their neighbourhood and established local forums. Forums met regularly (every evening in the beginning, then every week until they transformed into other structures), and they aimed at having inclusive

discussions. The park forums lasted for a few months until winter. Some of these forums dissolved altogether; some were replaced by local initiatives, associations, and squats; and some turned into neighbourhood solidarity groups in 2014.

Local initiatives established after the park forums were the remnants or the legacy of the Gezi protests and the park forums. They were organized to keep participation at a stable level and to have more permanent structures in place so that Gezi's organizational structure of non-hierarchy and leaderlessness, its decision-making procedure based on consensus, and its political culture of inclusiveness, anti-sexism, anti-racism, and respect for one another could be kept alive.³² These initiatives focused almost exclusively on local issues such as running the squat, late-night noise in residential streets, and protesting against the construction of a new car park in the neighbourhood. Some of these initiatives are still up and running.³³

With the 2015 general elections, grassroots political activity gravitated towards election campaigns. This form of organization and mobilization started with the first general election in 2015,³⁴ followed by the snap elections 4 months later, and

³² I am drawing on my unpublished master's thesis (2015) based on ethnographic research conducted in the summer of 2014 in one of the squats in Istanbul. The thesis looked at the ways in which the squatters combined contentious forms of protest that were directed against the government with autonomous forms of protest that rejected institutional politics as a point of reference.

³³ Onur Eylül Kara has recently published his book, "Yapabileceğimizi Yapmak: Minor Siyaset ve Türkiye Örneği" (2019) which analyses local initiatives in Turkey, established before and after the Gezi protests.

³⁴ The 7 June 2015 general elections have taken their place in the collective memory of the opposition as its biggest victory in a long time. What makes this election so important is that it was highly regarded as a moment of success beyond an electoral victory. The success was due to the HDP's passing the 10% election threshold to put an end to the AKP's 13-year long seizure of power as the governing party, and the HDP's proving itself as a strong mass political party and the 3rd largest party in the parliament. This perception in the opposition did not change after the government recommenced the war in Kurdish cities, when bombs started to go off in both the east and the west of Turkey, and when the HDP was "hollowed out" by way of being imprisoned charged with aiding terrorist organizations, engaging in terrorist propaganda, and/or insulting the president or the Turkish state, in the months leading up to the snap elections on November 1st of the same year. The most noticeable effect of this success on leftist and socialist activists was the reappraisal of doing mass politics: Doing "mass politics" – meaning, doing politics with the masses – was an important lesson for socialists in particular, whose political parties on the margins of society had little to no contact with non-socialist voters since the late 1960s. The HDP, being a "mass party", was partially successful at reaching out to the non-Kurdish, non-socialist voter and by becoming the third party in the parliament, it proved itself as a political force, a player in the game, so to speak. It became the only viable option for those on the left of the economic

continued with the constitutional referendum in 2017. Independent election campaigns organized by grassroots activists were independent initiatives in the sense that they were not connected in any institutional or organizational way to the political party for which they campaigned (in this case, it was the HDP). The nature of these initiatives surely differed from previous grassroots organizations; whereas election campaigns were overtly targeting national politics, previous grassroots initiatives targeted their neighbours, local issues, and focused more on involving as many residents as possible into their daily lives and activities. However, for the organizers of these initiatives, there is a continuity between all these different forms of organizing that resulted from not only an overlap in their organizers, but also from the rapid accumulation of experience. In the case of the election initiatives, the continuity and the process of political learning manifested themselves in the adaptation of organizational structure and the decision-making process.

This background of a series of grassroots organizations and mobilizations that correspond to different episodes of contention within only a few years is important to answer the question of why the “no” campaign took the organizational form of local assemblies. In the following sections, I will discuss how the Gezi protests were re-read as part of the self-critique of its participants, describe the adaptations in organizational structure and the problems encountered during and after the campaign, and give a detailed overview of some of the materials and activities that the assembly organized.

and social spectrum, their only chance at democratization in the period until the referendum. After the referendum, the assemblies’ main concerns were becoming permanent political actors, institutionalization, and having a say in the negotiations for a democracy front, but in matters concerning protests or campaigns, discussions centred on the key phrase “regime change”, a point I will come back to below.

From the Gezi Spirit to the Ills of Gezi: Adapting Organizational Structure

The literature on Gezi and the park forums, neighbourhood collectives, and local initiatives established in its aftermath has consistent references to the “Gezi spirit”. Most commonly, the term refers to the inclusive nature of the protests and the initiatives that followed. A squatter in 2014, for example, remembers Gezi and calls for a return to such politics: “She remembers the camp in Gezi Park, where people of all ages, genders, classes, from all kinds of religious, political or ethnic backgrounds lived and resisted together [...] ‘So we need to keep reminding, keep growing, keep spreading this united spirit [...]’, she says” (Zucker, 2014). Forums that were established following Gezi tried to revive Gezi’s “spirit of togetherness” (Ugur-Cinar & Gunduz-Arabaci, 2018, p. 18). Inceoglu (2014) similarly characterizes the Gezi spirit as being “about hearing and negotiating with the ‘other’” (p. 28) and claims that the local elections in 2014 “hijacked” this spirit, a claim supported by others as well (e.g., Çarkoğlu, 2014). Likewise, Karakayali and Yaka (2014, p. 128) confirm the overall characterization of the term when they state, “what was popularly meant by the term was collectivity and solidarity on the one hand and the sisterhood of the people of all ethnicities and identities, on the other”. Here is another description of the period, from Zeynep Tufekci (2017, p. 74):

The forums tried to replicate the Gezi Park experience, which people had taken calling the “spirit of Gezi”. People gathered and took turns speaking, but no formal decision-making or organizational mechanisms emerged, and there were no existing networks of civil society that were widely accepted and able to mediate conflicts that arose in these spaces. Over time, energy waned, and the

forums were attended increasingly by younger people with time to spare, or by ideologically less representative but more committed people from fringe political groups.

The Gezi spirit, then, did not only refer to a spirit of togetherness and solidarity with the “other”, but it also denoted certain mechanisms of decision-making (i.e. consensus) and a non-hierarchical, horizontal organizational structure, even though they were not formalized, as Tufekci points out in the quoted passage above. Yegenoglu (2013, p. 4) captures the solidarity, inclusivity, and the consensual (as opposed to oppositional) aspects of the Gezi spirit when he writes on the Gezi protests:

The specific culture and spirit that materialized in the protests attests to the emergence of, or perhaps the desire for, the advent of a democratic sensibility whereby people with different lifestyles, political leanings, religious inclinations and identities are able to express mutual care and listen to each other, thus seeking inclusivity rather than following the oppositional politics instituted by the secularists and Islamists over the last 90 years or so.

The “democratic sensibility” to which Yegenoglu (2013) refers was indeed part of the Gezi spirit, and it manifested itself not only in the culture of inclusivity but also in the way people organized. Participatory and direct-democratic mechanisms were adopted and cherished during the occupation of Gezi Park and after, in park forums.

In sum, the legacy of Gezi was horizontal organization based on participation among equals: A non-hierarchical, participatory-democratic way of doing prefigurative politics, a “politics of doing” (Gumus, 2017), of living on a smaller scale the way people aspire to live (as was evidenced in experiences with squatting and neighborhood solidarity initiatives in the aftermath of the Gezi protests). Ideas of direct democracy, of a more participatory democracy, inclusivity, non-violence, non-

hierarchy, and openness to different worldviews were all legacies of the Gezi protests, what people mean when they refer to "the Gezi spirit". However, as participants of these political initiatives accumulated experiences, another side of the same coin, namely, "the ills of Gezi" started to bubble up. These ills referred to the same features of Gezi, but from a critical perspective: The fascination with horizontalism that did not lead to any tangible political results; people who "played the democracy game", who were so blinded by being democratic that they could not take action against undemocratic ideas or practices among themselves; an antipathy against hierarchy so complete that led some people to reject the idea of political parties or institutional politics (i.e. aiming to be in power) altogether; and a focus on local politics so overarching that the bigger picture was lost. The realization that the application of these principles held activists back, making them politically inefficient, led to their adaptation. It is through the subsequent endeavours of the most committed activists that these lessons were learned and transmitted. As the leader of a left-wing party put it in November 2017, "we have not been able to transfer the outcomes of Gezi to the political field. 20, 30, 40-year-old political habits are still casting a shadow on Gezi's legacies. We are in a phase of learning" (WebIz, 2017).³⁵

A re-reading of Gezi and its aftermath was a fundamental part of the self-criticism of those involved in grassroots activism. Below is an example of such self-critique:

To be honest, Gezi was an attempt at democratic revolution ... The main reason for its collapse was the lack of a claim, a programme, and a goal around which the movement could organize in order for it to recreate itself in new platforms, to

³⁵ Erkan Bas, head of the People's Communist Party of Turkey (HTKP), WebIz TV, programme titled "The timeliness of leftist and socialist politics", on 16 November 2017. In the 2018 general elections, he was elected as an HDP MP, and later switched to the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP).

spread the insurrection ...As time went on and we lost momentum, the game of democracy became the disease [*illet*] of park forums. It gnawed on the forums from within; the podium got drowned in epic rhetoric, romantic poems and songs. In the face of hundreds of ideas, the creation of effective decision-making mechanisms was avoided and the forums, which consisted of thousands of people, became both unmanageable and weak, disappointing masses of people who had high hopes before they [park forums] dissolved altogether. (F., Interview, April 2017)

Listening to F., who is an unaffiliated (i.e. not a member of a political party or organization) activist who has been a participant of Gezi and all the other initiatives that followed, it is difficult to see Gezi and its aftermath through rose-coloured glasses. F. traces mistakes all the way back to the Gezi protests, where the lack of a goal and programme caused the potential of the uprising to go to waste. His unapologetic comments help him name “the disease”: “The game of democracy”. He goes beyond the dream-like ghost of the “Gezi Spirit” and locates the problem to move forward. This diagnosis came to be known as “the ills of Gezi” (*Gezi’nin illetleri*), used widely by the core group of activists to refer to the legacies of the Gezi protests which turned out to be an obstacle in the way of organizing.

Note the emphasis on mechanisms and efficiency. By 2016, the focus was on devising mechanisms that would allow quick and effective decision-making, while maintaining the participatory-democratic values of horizontal organizing. Another participant of the assemblies, N., who was also involved in other types of grassroots organizing since the Gezi protests, confirms the “ills of Gezi”:

Every attempt at organization after Gezi was too democratic. There was too much democracy, but it was not really democratic. It was stealing people’s time, dragging out the discussion, and repelling people outside of these activities. It makes no sense at all to discuss for five hours how to move this glass from this

table to the other. I think everyone comprehended how ridiculous this thing called consensus was. Of course, coming to an agreement is important. Yes, it is valuable to come to a decision that will be implemented with peace of mind by everyone. But we must accept that consensus is not always possible. I think this was the biggest downside. We could have done so much more instead of racking our brains about unnecessary drudgery for days, weeks, months. Going through a month of discussions to paint a wall was ridiculous, unnecessary, disappointing, and repelling. We tried to avoid this in the “no” assemblies. We talked about excessive democracy not being democracy when we were organizing the assemblies. We tried to minimize the inability to make decisions, and thus the inability to cover ground. And then the units that we had established in the independent election initiative in 2015 were transferred wholly to the “no” assemblies.

The independent election initiative in 2015 was the campaign organized by people not affiliated with the HDP, to campaign for the HDP. More specifically, these were activists who had met during Gezi, or at the local initiatives established after Gezi, who saw the political (and arithmetic) importance of the HDP’s passing the 10 percent electoral threshold. As one of my interviewees who took part in the election initiative told me, “For me, the 7 June 2015 elections were the presidential system put to trial because Erdogan had already declared that he would speed up the transition to a presidential system after the elections. The campaign was one in which the opposition against the presidential system would be explained through the 10 percent threshold”. Another participant of the election initiative recounts how it was established in our interview:

[After the forums and the local initiatives disbanded,] their participants still wanted to stay together. We were already friends, by that time all of us were living in the same neighborhood, and [the 2015] elections were getting closer. The local solidarity association was over. But the habit of doing politics together remained. We were talking among ourselves, “it will be a strange election, the

electoral threshold is something that the CHP voters and the secular liberal strata can be convinced of, shall we do something?”. One of us came up with the idea of doing an electoral campaign. It was possible to do something harsher, but we could not predict if that would serve the purpose. So, we started archiving all the written material that was out there [in newspapers, journals, the internet]. Everyone was writing about the need for such an initiative. We started to get together every day. We were nine people. We were brainstorming. We came up with [a name for the initiative]. We decided to focus on the HDP’s passing the 10 percent threshold. We first kept the initiative to ourselves, reaching out only to the people we had worked with three to five months ago [at local initiatives]. This independent election initiative was an electoral campaign for the HDP carried out by people who had done politics together after Gezi, so it had a direct and organic connection to Gezi. This is true for the local “no” assemblies as well.

In this snippet, the links between the Gezi protests, the initiatives founded in the aftermath of Gezi, and the local “no” assemblies are established in terms of the continuity of participation from one local initiative to the other. However, it was not only persons that the local “no” assemblies inherited from earlier political experiences. Going back to N.’s point above, it was also the organizational structure devised in the 2015 election campaign that was replicated. N. had prepared the presentation that introduced the organizational units to which she refers in the quote above. This organizational structure had been presented and agreed upon as the structure of the emerging assemblies in the first big meeting that launched the “no” assemblies at the end of January 2017. The same form, with slight changes, was adopted by the other assemblies that were established soon after the main one was founded.

The units to which N. refers are the legal, finance, production and communication, and the coordination and organization committees. The legal committee’s function was to advise on legal applications and to “get us out of trouble”

if need be, as N. put it in her presentation.³⁶ The finance committee dealt with finding funds and kept track of expenditures. The production and communication committee came up with ideas for the campaign based on the decisions made in the general assembly, prepared printed and digital material, and managed the assembly's social media accounts. The coordination and organization committee ensured synchronization with the neighborhood assemblies and other initiatives, advised new neighborhood assemblies, managed the distribution and circulation of the printed materials, and organized events. The last two committees were the most active. The first three committees – legal, finance, and production and communication – reported to the organization committee which met every week to review what had been done throughout the week and to plan the next. As N. explains, “anyone who had an expertise in a related area, or anyone interested in working on that subject could join whichever committee they wanted to join; and in terms of the labour that went into the work, we shared the workload”. In addition to the permanent structure of the assembly, smaller commissions were formed temporarily when practical issues arose, such as the management and organization of an event for which a sound system, a place to hold the event, additional bullhorns, and the like were needed.

The coordination and organization committee was linked directly to the general assembly that was called “the no assembly”, as the former served to implement and “concretize” the decisions made in the latter. During the three months leading up to the referendum, the general assembly met regularly every week. Participation was open to everyone and was announced weekly on the assembly's social media accounts. These meetings were usually the most crowded ones during the campaign, as people from the neighborhood assemblies and the general public joined them as well. The

³⁶ The legal unit dissipated due to inaction. In its place, the production and communication unit broke up into two units in practice.

number of people who participated fluctuated from about 30 attendants to 100 at “normal” times, when the next week’s action plan was debated. The number of attendants fluctuated based on the agenda: When the neighborhood assemblies had enough material to distribute for the next week, and enough events organized, less people would participate; when a new plan was needed, more. General “inclinations”, suggestions, and “tendencies” were drawn out from these meetings, which were then given shape and direction by the organization committee. Even though anyone could join this committee at any time, it was encouraged that at least one or two people from each neighborhood assembly participate to ensure communication between different levels of organization. However, it was usually the more committed participants who joined the organization committee’s weekly meetings. The people I refer to as “the core organizers” were typically involved in this group.

Even though the general assembly was the decision-making unit, the coordination and organization committee functioned as the place in which the particular “voice” of the assembly was shaped. In one of the early general assemblies in February 2017, it was agreed that “our propaganda language must not be like the AKP’s. We should not use the language of fear and instead use positive language. We need to get the upper hand in morale and rhetoric”. Suggestions from the general assembly that did not comply with the principles of the assembly were filtered out in the coordination and organization committee (as well as the production committee). For example, Kemalist voices of the general assembly were minimized in the material produced for distribution, instead adopting a more inclusive language that could embrace both CHP and HDP voters. “Laïcité”³⁷, the Turkish flag, or images of Atatürk

³⁷ Instead of this word, “libertarian laïcité” (*özgürlükçü laiklik*) or “freedom of religion” were used, as laïcité has historically been used by the state to repress the religious and conservative strata of society in Turkey.

(the founder of the republic), and words like “terror” that are associated with the Kurdish movement and even the HDP for some voters of the CHP were avoided. Sexist language was also beyond limits. Likewise, overtly socialist or communist language was avoided, filtering out propaganda that used words (and colours) associated with the left in Turkey, such as “fascism” or “revolutionary resistance”. Inclusive language was crucial in reaching out not only to the “no” voter, but also to the undecided and even some of the “yes” voters. In other words, language was part of the agreed-upon strategy of the “no” campaign.

The coordination and organization committee was hierarchically higher with regards to the other units, including the general assembly, because this was where strategic decisions were given shape. The committee would update the general assembly on its activities, and individual neighborhood assemblies could always use their own materials or devise their own strategy, but the need for fast decision-making during the campaign meant that the committee could take the initiative on what to say and how to say it. This somewhat special status of the coordination committee never became a problem during my field work, and my interviewees confirmed this observation. The introduction of rotation and monthly moderation were crucial in this respect.

The rotation of volunteers attending the coordination meetings and having a monthly moderator aimed at equal division of labor, maintaining minimum hierarchy, and training activists. Equal division of labor meant that certain tasks did not become a burden for a few people who constantly volunteered for the same job; minimum hierarchy meant that everyone was allowed to take part in any part of the process, at any time, and that no one monopolized their position; and training meant that someone who had never moderated a meeting could learn how to moderate, or someone who

had never organized a protest could join the protest organization committee and be responsible of security, slogans, or negotiations with the police. Whenever the question of who the next moderator would be was met with silence, the purposes of these practices would be explained. These two mechanisms were on the one hand a lesson learned from previous experiences and a way to systematize the structures put in place for efficiency while ensuring decentralization, and on the other hand it was preparation for a possibly more repressive future regime. Training activists was part of this preparation.

Consensus as a decision-making mechanism was another structural element that was adapted in the local assembly. The “ridiculous, unnecessary, disappointing, and repelling” discussions over simple and complex decisions alike were believed to stem from an understanding of consensus that required every single person present to agree on the decision being made. Instead, what was called “systematic consensus” was put into place, where a general inclination towards a decision was deemed enough to start working on the details of the decision. Alternatively, the option that was least opposed would pass as the decision. Systematic consensus worked well when the decision to be made was relatively non-contentious or when it did not hold strategic or political significance. I will demonstrate an example of such a contentious topic shortly.

Systematic consensus worked well for the most part of the campaign period, as participants were happy with the democratic and inclusive yet fast decision-making process. The success of this mechanism was largely due to another principle, that of individual participation (*birey hukuku*). The assembly hosted participants who were also members of political parties and organizations, but individuals had to leave their institutional hats out the door when they attended an assembly meeting. Their partisan

identity was acknowledged but they were expected to be open to persuasion by others and to not push for agenda based on pre-determined decisions made in the context of their own organizations. Like consensus, the principle of individual participation was not formalized in the lifespan of the assembly. This led to problems when the issues at hand were politically divisive or strategic. I will discuss one such instance in the section on the problems encountered in the assembly.

The non-conflictual understanding of politics to which the Gezi spirit adhered was also challenged by 2016-2017. Building trust, being respectful of others, building long-lasting relationships with each other did not dissipate and lied at the heart of how participants related to one another. However, in terms of tactics and the specific understanding of politics, activists who organized the local assembly were much more openly conflictual and did not shy away from saying so. Immediately after the referendum, when participants were discussing how to proceed, an assembly participant said, “we should continue to fight with the certainty of the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ decision, as we did during the referendum campaign. We should continue the head-on collision. Forget about tangential issues”. By “tangential issues”, he was referring to those participants who wanted to proceed by turning to local issues and working with residents to deal with their problems. Contrary to the period after Gezi, the stress was on being a countervailing force, on making the most of a political opportunity that was the referendum. Surely, action brought activists together relationally – waking up in the morning to hand out flyers to people going to work, organizing protests, discussing politics in meetings that last until dawn all help to build trust and solidarity among participants – but this was not an end in itself. The “head-on collision” in the quote above makes a clear distinction between the regime (including the current government) and the opposition. Hence, it calls for a grassroots politics that does not

limit itself to the local; in fact, it sees the problems of the local as “tangential issues”. The main idea here is to extend the “momentum” of the referendum campaign to spread the assemblies and institutionalize them.

The last point about institutionalization brings us to the issue of the scope of engagement that the activists were willing to take on. Activists in 2016 were much more oriented towards “general politics”, or national, macro-political, institutional politics. In fact, activists during my field work were concerned with becoming permanent and recognized actors in the field of politics, alongside political parties and politicians. Being permanent actors in politics was a long-term project that viewed the local assemblies as the smallest unit of a broader constellation, or structure, of contention and democratic order. For example, listen to an assembly participant speaking at a joint meeting with another political platform:

We need more than just to coordinate [activist groups]. We need a lucid and clear address. Fascism is being constructed. We should be discussing how to establish a [political] front that includes the opposition within the capitalist class and the democratic Islamists ...The coordination debate is way behind this discussion. This is a matter of creating mechanisms where the minority can exist [as a minority]. Let's discuss whatever it is that we need to discuss to this end ...Politics is a matter of asserting oneself/of claim-making [*iddia meselesi*]. Many institutions were obliged to hand out flyers in a symbolic way. We need to be a force in politics. We need to aim to build healthy, organic relationships, be an address, and to become an actor in the stage of politics. (From my field notes, June 2017)

These words are indeed assertive. We see again the emphasis on building efficient mechanisms, but what is more remarkable is the sense of urgency imposed on the speaker by the threat of fascism. This urgency drives him to push for a united front against the current regime, which points to the scope of engagement he addresses. He

centres his argument on the need to be “an actor in the stage of politics”, while retaining the previous emphasis on democratic relations (“where the minority can exist as a minority”). “To be a force in politics”; “to be an address”; to assert oneself” are all part of the definition of being “an actor in politics”, as well as institutionalization.

When I asked what they meant by “the stage of politics”, another activist told me:

Lately, these three events are given as examples quite frequently: Gezi, June 7th [the first of the two general elections in 2015], and the “no” phase [the referendum campaign]. So, periods of mass mobilization when people work day and night to make things visible in the streets, making people discuss those things. What I mean [by being on the stage of politics] is to be involved in politics on the basis of certain commonalities, even if not as goal oriented as these three events were. The way the referendum campaign created a common ground, or the way the HDP was a political agent during the election campaign in 2015...What I mean is to stir action in the bloc against the AKP through this kind of agenda-setting. (S., August 2017)

According to S., the stage of politics opened space for popular participation via a mass uprising, the elections, and the referendum. These instances served to intensify the “head-on collision” with the regime, most recently through the referendum campaign, where activists organized the “no” vote against regime change, personified in the figure of President Erdogan. The collision was perhaps the most obvious in this period, when the activists’ “no” was so clearly and straight-forwardly against the regime. In the last two quotations, two inter-related goals are highlighted: Being engaged in *institutional politics* as a way to intervene in matters concerning the regime (i.e. the stage of politics), and being *political agents* within the field of institutional politics (i.e. actors on the stage of politics). Listen to another assembly participant, this time at a meeting in June 2017:

We find the pointers as to how to move forward in the process since the establishment of the assemblies. We set out by saying “no” in a way that included the whole of society. The assemblies widened the struggle by reaching out to the masses, by sharpening the target, and by placing the regime at the core of its argument. We won at Gezi, in June 7th [the 2015 general elections], and at the referendum. Our main target was regime change in all of them. As we move on, the goal of the assemblies should be to continue to be the places where we connect with the masses, where we maintain our existence in institutional form, where persons do not participate with their epaulettes.

Once more, “maintaining our existence in institutional form” is emphasized. In this context, institutionalization meant becoming permanent political agents. This ambitious goal of institutionalization (which did not have a clear path, but signalled permanence and effectiveness in macro-politics) stemmed from the sense of success that this particular local assembly possessed after the campaign. Notice how three events, Gezi, the first elections in 2015, and the referendum are considered as successes, even though the potential of Gezi as a mass protest soon dissipated, the second elections in 2015 saw the AKP and Erdogan regaining the majority in the parliament, and the referendum was officially lost to the “yes” vote. As I will describe in the next section, the assembly was considered to be a success by its participants because of the visibility of the campaign, its having become a model for the other assemblies, and its participants’ decision to take to the streets on the night of the referendum. We will see in Chapter 4 how in a few months, this sense of victory dissipated, but it is important to make a note of it here, when the activists are trying to have the wind of a successful campaign at their back.

The Gezi protests, the June 7th elections, the referendum, the March for Justice [of the CHP], and the Conscience and Justice activities [of the HDP]³⁸ are the most striking examples that show the potential the grassroots holds in the country, and they are instances that demonstrate that the success of the democratic struggle is only possible with a grassroots movement... In this environment where the channels of doing politics in the Turkish National Assembly have been so tightly constricted, the struggle must be pursued in the streets... It is imperative that politics be relocated to the public sphere... MPs to the local assemblies! (Circulated meeting notes, August 2017)

In the quotation above, we see the same three events again as instances of success. Moreover, this quotation taken from circulated meeting notes from August 2017 makes clear that tendency in the assembly was to think of the assemblies as part of a longer-term project for a different kind of politics. The call for the struggle to be pursued in the streets, to allocate “politics” to the public sphere, and calling for MPs to do politics in the assemblies instead of a parliament stripped of its democratic functions help describe this project, even though it was not a mature plan at the time but more of an idea to be developed.

Contestations

In the previous sections, I have sought to show the organizational structure of the assembly and the values it inherited and adapted from earlier episodes. The assembly carried out a successful campaign during the three months of intense mobilization leading to the day of the referendum. However, neither the content nor

³⁸ The CHP, on the night of the referendum and the following week, discouraged its voters from taking to the streets. Instead, in June 2017, the leader of the CHP Kemal Kilicdaroglu started to walk from Ankara to Istanbul to protest the government crackdown on the opposition and the corruptness of the judicial system. The CHP’s decision to protest the crackdown was triggered when a CHP member, Enis Berberoglu, got sentenced 25 years in prison. Having hundreds of their members imprisoned by then, the HDP expanded the justice activities and launched a series of events in July 2017.

the structure of the assembly was set in stone; that is to say, debates around organizational structure and issues of strategy were a constant struggle within the assembly. In this section, I will discuss some of the problems that were encountered in the assembly during and after the campaign.

The organizational repertoires I have demonstrated above were not unproblematically implemented. Partisan identities remained a source of suspicion and mistrust. The most common cautionary remark I heard during field work was “let’s not turn this into a meeting of politicians” (in Turkish, “*siyasetler toplantısına donmesin!*”), which refers to the partisan identities of the participants. As I mentioned earlier, although participants’ political affiliations were recognized, everyone was expected to participate in the discussions as individuals and not as representatives of their organizations. This expectation meant that all participants, regardless of their political affiliation, had to be open to persuasion by others. The application of this principle, however, was imperfect: An experienced participant in the meetings could easily understand how some individuals insistently defended their respective organizations’ decisions. Participating in the meetings as representatives (perceived as such by others) manifested itself in the way people talked about the positions of certain individuals about a given subject. For example, outside of the context of the meetings, instead of referring to these individuals by their names, people referred to them by the organizations or political parties with which they were affiliated: Rather than saying “Ali wants to organize a protest”, they said “the Labour Party wants to organize a protest”.

Aside from running the risk of non-partisan disengagement, these partisan conflicts led to distrust in the commissions and working groups – smaller, issue- or task-specific, temporary groups created to discuss and decide on a particular issue or

to coordinate logistics – especially when the issue was highly politicized. Two instances of highly politicized issues that led to the rejection of forming commissions are particularly illustrative. The first of these was about whether to read a letter from the imprisoned coleader of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtas, at an event organized by the assemblies (March 2017), and the second was the drafting of the aims and the political trajectory of the assemblies (August 2017). In both these instances, the suggestion of a smaller commission was rejected based on the openly expressed concern about the domination of the commission by one or more political organizations. “The commission will turn into a meeting of politicians!” and “everyone will want to be a part of the commission, what’s the point of creating one?” were how participants voiced their unease. Importantly, this concern was met with respect, even though it was not shared by everyone: “Okay, so we’ll hold another meeting. We obviously need to discuss more, so we will talk about this, even if we need to stay here all night”.

A similar unease broke out when the assembly had to work in tandem with a different body of activists. In April 2017, a temporary platform was formed to organize a protest march against the fraudulent results of the referendum. The platform consisted of political organizations and parties that worked within the assemblies, and others that did not. The rationale was to bring together the social bases of these organizations for a larger mobilization, but it also aimed at planting the seeds of a broader coalition of grassroots groups for the long run. The platform lasted for a week before it dissolved when the group of organizations that was not a part of the “no” assemblies claimed ownership of the protests in their news outlet. Regardless of the success of the platform, the coming together of different organizations was an opportunity for me to observe how the assembly drew its boundaries, as well as its interactions with other organizations.

The issue of partisan identities arose when the different organizations within the assemblies, participants who put aside their partisan identities when working in the assembly, put aside their identity as an assembly member and took on their organizational roles. In other words, they participated in the platform meetings not as individuals like they did in the assemblies, nor as assembly members, but as representatives of their organizations. The crisis crystallized during a discussion of whether to organize another protest in the weekend. The assembly had decided to organize the protest, and participants were expected to carry this decision to the platform. However, each organization within the assembly restarted the discussion during the platform meeting instead of communicating the assembly's decision. About an hour into the discussion, one assembly participant who was also a member of a political organization, blurted out, "friends, haven't we already made a decision on this topic? I'll act as a representative of my own organization if we're here as representatives!".

This minor crisis did not build up to a major identity crisis, probably because the platform did not last very long. It was interpreted as "confusion", "misunderstanding the individual participation principle", "the lack of clarity regarding the rules defining the relationship among participants". It was a mismatch between the assembly's participation principle (where each person participates as an individual and not as a representative), and the platform which basically involved several other organizations outside of the assemblies, which participated in the platform as representatives. This arrangement required the assembly to act as an organization, a wholistic entity, alongside the other organizations. The confusion arose from this dual requirement, and before the participants had time to spell out the rules of participation, the platform dissolved. Even though the partisanship issue did not

grow into a bigger problem in the assembly, it foreshadowed similar deadlocks when participation waned and the assembly practically contracted into the coordination and organization committee.

After the referendum and soon after the protests came to an end, in May 2017, a meeting with approximately 100 attendants was organized. The goal of the meeting, which was called a “workshop”, was to collectively think about and try to agree on a roadmap for the assembly. The organizers of the workshop, of which I was one, anticipated unfocussed and messy discussions, typical of meetings with a large number of people and without a clear question to be answered. Therefore, it was crucial to limit the length of the meeting (from 3:30 pm to 8:00 pm, with a half-hour break in the middle) and structure it beforehand. In the first half of the workshop, two people presented what the assembly had achieved over the campaign and compiled a list of issues that were recently being debated. The list, in which a couple of major issues were highlighted to structure the second half of the meeting, was printed and handed out to attendants on the day of the meeting. Moderation was of utmost importance in our attempt at structuring the day, so two experienced moderators, who were good at summarizing the main points in a discussion and leading speakers back to the subject of the meeting if they digress, were decided on before the meeting. We also decided on a notetaker as always, and we added an additional note taker, me, who took notes on the board for everyone to see as the discussions were proceeding. Planning was part of our structuring attempts.

The main goal of the meeting, as I mentioned before, was to decide on a roadmap, and if agreed upon, to draft a programme for the assembly (an issue I will come back to below). Deciding on a roadmap, in this case and at the time, clustered around two main axes: Means and ends. The former crystallized as doing local work

versus speaking to “high politics” and dealing with macro-political issues. The latter crystallized as doing issue-specific campaigns versus drafting a programme for the assemblies. I will start with the first issue, then move on to the question of the programme.

A group of people, which included members of a political organization but was not limited to them, pushed for local activities. Suggested activities were discussion or reading groups where topics like historical materialism or Marxist theory would be discussed; festive gatherings with music bands and a picnic that involved assembly participants offering homemade cookies to passers-by to recruit more people; and attending to the issues of the neighborhood such as problems regarding parking lots or the local high school being turned into a religious high school. Others advocated being involved in bigger, national, macro-political issues such as calling for Erdogan to resign, drafting a new constitution, and having a programme. It was a heated debate. During recess, I was talking with one of the most active participants of the assembly. In disbelief, she said: “For God’s sake, there is no middle ground. Okay, we might not be able to make Erdogan resign, but there is no need to bake cookies! The disease of Gezi...this is exactly it”. Later, when it was her turn to speak, she drew attention to the link between the local and the general/national. She said:

I think what everyone has in mind when they say “local” is different. The local versus general discussion was also a popular topic after Gezi. We are an assembly with neighborhood assemblies. So, we have assemblies in neighbourhoods and when we campaigned for the “no” vote, when we had that macro rhetoric, we organized it locally. What I have in mind for what is next is the same thing. We will say something macro again. We will organize our macro politics at the local level. (Circulated meeting notes, May 2017)

She proposed to rent a place for the assembly, based on her prior experiences: “Having that space would be one of the biggest tools to organize at the local level. We have friends here with experiences with this. I also worked at the squats after Gezi and we witnessed how useful it can be. Of course, we cannot be stuck with the place and risk not being able to act outside of that place. But we have the experience”. Indeed, many people in the audience agreed with this suggestion, although some who had worked at these initiatives after the Gezi protests feared “being trapped in the local”.

From baking cookies to renting a place, doing local politics was a highly contentious issue. Considered by some as one of the ills of Gezi, concentrating only on local work brought about the fear of “being trapped in the local”, or being politically ineffective;³⁹ one of the lessons learned from Gezi and its aftermath. Past experiences were still called on, even after the referendum, when the same issues resurfaced.

When I asked her about this meeting in our interview and reminded her about her comment on baking cookies, the owner of the last quote above laughed and linked the discussion on local versus general politics to that of structure: “There really is no need to bake cookies. We have to be flexible, not loose [*gevşek değil esnek olmalıyız*]. We can do macro politics, but we have to be able to make local issues ours in some occasions. The reason why our endeavours after Gezi could not be made permanent was this looseness”. Inclusivity, organizational structure, and strategy are interlinked in these conversations.

The debate on doing local politics was a contentious issue and doing macro politics was just as contentious. The debate on whether to focus on single-issue

³⁹ Renting a place brought about its own troubles; from worrying about how to pay the rent every month to legal issues (the assemblies had no legal standing in the sense that they were not official, registered organizations), from the difficulties of running the place to concerns about running the place becoming an end in itself, there were multiple meanings attributed to renting a place.

campaigns or to have a programme for the assembly reflected similar dynamics as the discussion above. Those who advocated for a programme came up against reservations about the risks involved in institutionalization. These reservations mostly reflected the type of politics that Gezi and its aftermath popularized, namely, anti-institutionalist, anti-partisan, local politics. Proponents of institutionalizing the assemblies by way of having a programme, however, referred to the change in regime type and the coming of a new political order as part of their argument.

The need for a programme was argued to be a tool to make the assembly into a permanent political actor. Here is one of the attendants at the meeting elaborating on why he thinks the assembly needs to have a programme: “What I mean by programme and rules is actually our principles to keep us together. People who will join us later should know where we stand. Why we are together, how, what our internal rules are, these are very important. If we don’t have principles, we will disband and disappear”. A programme, in other words, is necessary for the survival of the organization as well as for recruitment purposes.

Those who opposed a programme worried about inclusivity and resembling a political party:

It was not only the AKP who lost in the referendum. It also suffered a blow in terms of the institutionalization of fascism. But when we are defining our assemblies, we should avoid such sharp-edged observations [...] We should avoid being like those organizations with a programme, committees, and a management. We can only be the voice of society if we adopt a dynamism that enables us to renew our goals and reshape our structure. If we rent a place and have a programme, we will have spontaneously created a node of power. (Circulated meeting notes, May 2017)

In this quotation, we see how a programme is associated with a rigid structure that would create centralized power; an association that lies at the core of anti-institutional and anti-partisan ideas. Indeed, the fear of turning into a political party was voiced very clearly by another participant:

This is what I worry about: In the year 1998 I was organized [*örgütlendim*] as a socialist youth. Since then, goals and programmes have been decided by older brothers and sisters. We thought they were probably right and tried to go along with them [...] In my personal history, I did not see any good coming out of it. In the last four, five years, from the HDP and the HDK⁴⁰ to Gezi, to other parts of the world, the idea is being formed that direct and a more participatory model works better. (Circulated meeting notes, May 2017)

Here, the political party is contrasted with the “direct and participatory” model of the assembly. We see again the association with an organizational structure that produces centralized power. However, this anti-institutional and anti-partisan position was challenged by others, as this was against the flexibility (and not looseness, as we have seen earlier) that was cherished during the “no” campaign.

Those who advocated for the programme called for permanent structures of resistance; structures that could be replicated and adapted in other places, so that the local assemblies as an idea and as a structure could spread and become established as a political tool. Expectations about the future political order were a significant part of this reasoning:

I think what we need is to draft a programmatic frame according to the needs of society. What we are faced with today is the threat of a totalitarian regime. We

⁴⁰ HDK is the Turkish abbreviation for the Peoples’ Democratic Congress, the HDP’s grassroots counterpart that organizes as local assemblies.

need to weave the broadest oppositional front against this threat [...] As our actions are shaped around the programme, we will always be acting and discussing, so according to the social dynamics and the political agenda, some points in the programme will be brought to the fore and others will remain in the background. They will be determined during this process. (Circulated meeting notes, May 2017)

The speaker here is trying to break the binary between having a programme and having a democratic structure. He draws attention to the malleability of the programme and to the importance of action, dynamism, and flexibility.

For us to not be flung by the political agenda that is imposed on us, we need to put before us a political goal, a political route, and act accordingly. We can call this a programme or something else. But if we are going to have neighborhood assemblies and the committees that we had during the campaign, we will need to define clearly what each unit's function is and how they are connected to one another. And this, I believe, would be a programme. If we want to make the assemblies into a permanent structure and to recruit more people, the first thing we should do is to specify our goals. We can call it a programme, a goal, or a vision, we should decide on that.

What these debates soon after the referendum demonstrate is that both the form and content of the assembly were still debated at the time. The main axes of discussion were the level of political engagement and the goals of the assembly. Other issues like organizational structure, specific actions, and institutionalization were discussed under these two headings. Gezi was still the main reference point in the past, and it was frequently mentioned together with the lessons learned or experiences gained from it. However, past experiences were not the only point of reference. The implementation of a more repressive regime was brought up in these deliberations. At least some of its participants thought of the assembly as a potentially permanent structure of resistance

against the political order of the future. Spaces of contention had to be made to fit the organizational and political needs of the time, as a long-term strategy.

Despite these contestations, the assembly made the decision to continue being active with the same structure but with a different name. There were three suggestions: people's assembly, citizens' (*yurttaş*) assembly⁴¹, and democracy assembly. After months of deliberation, the assembly took the name "democracy assembly", once more indicating the nature of the struggle and its participants' decision to engage with national-level politics.

The Campaign: Activities

The first call for a public meeting to discuss avenues for a grassroots "no" campaign took place in late January 2017 in a historic French Catholic church, currently used as an arts centre owned by the municipality. An estimated 600 people attended this first gathering. In the first week of February, a general assembly was held and neighborhood assemblies were established. The first activity of the local assembly was to screen the film "No" directed by Pablo Larraín, about the tactics deployed by political campaigns in the 1988 plebiscite in Chile to decide on whether Augusto Pinochet should stay in power. The film was a morale booster and it also helped recruit people into the assembly – the sign-up sheet in the entrance had columns for name, neighborhood, and contact information (email and phone number). Soon after the film screening, each neighbourhood assembly started organizing their own activities while remaining in contact with the general assembly and the organization and coordination

⁴¹ The word "yurttaş" translates into English as citizen. However, Turkish has another word that means citizen, "vatandaş". While the latter denotes a legal status, the former has the root word of "home". The word choice was deliberate.

committee. Below, I will first introduce the online leg of the campaign and then provide an overview of the kinds of activities that were organized offline, on the street.

Social media campaigns

One of the first actions taken by the organizers was to set up social media accounts. By the end of the campaign, the assembly's Twitter account had been viewed by more than a million people. Its Facebook account was less popular, probably due to the differences between the two social media platforms, with around 700,000 viewers. One leg of the campaign was on social media, and announcements for events, activities, meetings, and relevant news were shared on these accounts. Weekly event calendars were posted at the beginning of every week, and events had their own page where people could mark themselves as interested or going on Facebook (the assembly's Twitter account provided a link to the event). There was also a website that was launched by this assembly on behalf of all the other assemblies, on which links to the other assemblies' social media pages were found, all the materials (for online or offline use) created were uploaded for anyone to print and use or be inspired, and the weekly calendars were posted.

One of the first online campaigns was a series of questions typed in front of brightly coloured backgrounds. These were called "no questions", "hayırlı sorular" in Turkish, with a pun in the word "hayırlı", which means both "with no" (so, questions with the answer "no") and also "with good luck" or "for the better". One such question was "would you like the President to assign his/her whole family as his/her assistant?". The post did not include the answer and instead prodded the viewer to come up with a "no", and such questions were posted every day, for about 10 days.

Another social media campaign documented the activities of different neighborhood assemblies. These videos involved a wide range of activities like handing out leaflets at major transportation hubs, preparing stencils, or protests. This series was called “hayırlı işler” or “works with no”, again a pun on both the word “no” and the whole phrase (“works with no” and “have a nice working day” are the two meanings of the phrase). Another video series showed short street interviews conducted with a diverse population all calling for voters to vote “no”. Another video series was called “promises and realities”, in which someone from the assembly explained in each video one of the promises of the AKP and its social and political significance. These included the promise of fast and efficient decision making; the parliament getting more powerful; and jurisdiction becoming independent and unbiased. Yet another type of social media campaign used funny clips from old Turkish movies, adapted for the “no” campaign, shared with the hashtag “HAYIRKazanacağız”, which means “no we will win”.

Towards the end of the campaign, the assembly’s social media posts aimed at getting the vote out, and recruiting participants to the assembly, or more generally the assemblies, depending on potential participants’ place of residence. For example, when the deadline for registrations to become polling clerks was approaching, the assembly shared a post, on plain, bright pink background with white letters: “Go and register to be a polling clerk; if you wish to observe the counting of the votes on the day, they will not let you!”. A minimalistic image of a ballot box was used to attract more attention, with the caption, “attention – last 10 days!”.

Another target was people who would vote “no” anyway, but who could also participate in the assemblies; or people who would vote “no” but were hopeless about the results. Two posts (as well as a leaflet for distribution) were prepared for these

groups. One had the image of a conversation bubble that read “I already say no!”, and the other, “I will vote no, but yes will win”. The first post encouraged people to join the assemblies, to “work more efficiently towards multiplying the “no” votes”. The latter, acknowledging people’s worries about the referendum being rigged, encouraged “no” voters to register to become a polling clerk and to join the assemblies.

Offline activities

Even though a strong, semi-professional graphic design group and an active social media presence were deemed indispensable in my field site, “being in the street” was stressed even more as an essential part of the campaign. Printing materials like leaflets, posters, information cards, and the like required money, therefore one of the first events that the assembly organized, after the screening of the film “No”, was a solidarity party. The party was organized together with a bar/night club whose owners and managers were known to be leftists. The tickets for the party were sold beforehand and at the door, of which the price was set to a minimal amount, although the tickets worked more as an opportunity for individual donations rather than a ticket to an event. Two such parties were organized during the campaign to support and fund the assembly.

In March 2017, the campaign made a peak in terms of the events organized besides the usual leafleting every morning and afternoon. The assembly bought a “balloon screen” (*balon ekran*), an inflatable screen on which online material could be projected and set it up every afternoon at rush hour at the harbour, where all the other political parties had campaign stands. The balloon screen was set up opposite the HDP’s stand and close to the CHP’s stand, and there was an unwritten agreement on

when each stand would turn up the volume of their own jingles and music. The balloon screen was one of the most successful tactics used to distribute fliers and get the assembly's message out, as it was not obvious at first whether it campaigned for the "no" or the "yes" vote, and funny clips and catchy images led to the screen being encircled by an interested crowd.

Festive weekends were another type of activity organized by the assembly. Local musicians were invited to perform, and there was food (courtesy of businesses in solidarity), and games for children. These activities took place in a park or a square in the neighborhood to be as visible to passers-by as possible. These events typically involved a forum and sometimes a panel. Forums in these events were spaces where both assembly participants and people who were not involved in the assemblies could speak about current events, or problems in their neighborhood. Panels hosted political figures, speakers from political parties, and academics, as well as participants of the assembly. The assembly gathered panels only a few times during the campaign, since the "expert opinion" that the panel format offers were regarded as contradictory to the inclusive and non-hierarchical values of the assembly. However, some neighbourhood assemblies used the panel format more often in their own events.

To distribute printed materials, assembly participants met at transportation hubs and city squares in the morning and in the afternoon. Besides this routine, the assembly organized collective "walks" that combined a protest march with leafleting. During these marches, we used a shopping cart, a sound system borrowed from the city, and bullhorns borrowed from political parties or organizations. The make-shift sound system that we had consisted of one or two loudspeakers that we placed inside the shopping cart and dragged along with us during the march. Jingles made by amateur music collectives or professional bands were played throughout the march,

alongside slogans. Our repertoire of slogans included one that was a remnant of the Gezi protests, “this is only the beginning, continue with the struggle”; a line from one of Bertolt Brecht’s poems, “there is no liberation alone, it’s all of us together or no one at all”; a list of social problems to say “no” to, such as “no to war!”, “no to the one-man regime!”, “no to a dependent jurisdiction!”, “no to workers’ murders!”, or “no to women’s murders”; an old slogan from the 2015 HDP campaign, “we will not let you be the President!”; and “thief, murderer, AKP!”. These walks were done in a festive mood, with the songs attracting attention from the residents, the passers-by, and people in their cars as well. Each walk took two to four hours, where we walked through a designated neighbourhood. Participation in the walks was high, with 30 to 50 people attendants throughout the day. During the campaign period, there was minimal police interference in these activities.

The printed materials were diverse and ranged from info-cards to stickers to leaflets and bigger posters. Info-cards were first used during the 2015 election campaign for the HDP. They were cards the size of a business card, that read “NO” in capital letters on one side and a question on the other. They came in three different colours; orange, green, and blue. Each aimed at explaining the presidential system that was being voted with an analogy. The orange card likened the presidential system to handing over all of one’s possessions to the guard of one’s apartment building; the green one likened it to a football match in which the director, goal keeper, and the referee were all the same person; and the blue card was about pensions being taken away after retirement. Info-cards were good for attaching on cars and slipping under entrances of apartment buildings. Around 500,000 info-cards were distributed in total during the campaign.

Stickers either had the image of the official stamp that read “choice” (*tercih*) with the caption “no” above, imitating the ballot; or they simply had the word “no” in capital letters, on a red, blue, or purple background. A little over 500,000 of stickers were stuck on doors, walls, cash withdrawal machines, bins, pipes, etc. Leaflets contained information on the referendum and the suggested presidential system; introduced the assemblies and invited people to join; or they were printed versions of some of the online material that was used for social media. Overall, more than 1,000,000 leaflets were distributed throughout the campaign. Posters were only used to announce big events and for recruitment (e.g., a poster read, “there is something you can do!” and invited people to join their neighborhood assembly), and they were glued to the walls of the district and distributed to sympathetic cafes, bars, and restaurants.

Throughout the campaign, the constituents of the assembly, both its unaffiliated participants and partisan groups, worked in tandem with one another. The diversity and inclusivity of the materials, along with their catchy designs, were not challenged. In fact, the materials that this assembly produced and the events they organized were often adopted and adapted by other assemblies. Calls made by this assembly for joint meetings, events, and demonstrations were well received and most of the time, accepted. Soon after it was established, this assembly became a model for the others as it was considered to be a “real assembly”, meaning, it was not only the sum of political organizations and parties working under the guise of a grassroots campaign. Rather, it was a “real assembly” because local residents joined and counter-balanced complications or conflicts that might have otherwise resulted from partisan affiliations. The model status of the assembly became even more pronounced on the night of the referendum and the following week.

The night of the referendum

The referendum was not free, especially in Kurdish cities where military officials had a constant and threatening presence, and it was not fair either: It took place when the rule of law had been suspended by the state of emergency. Moreover, on the day of the referendum, the High Electoral Council (Turkish acronym, YSK) passed a bill that allowed unsealed and unstamped ballots to be counted as valid votes, thus increasing the likelihood of fraud.

When the “yes” vote won that night, assembly participants had gathered to watch the proceedings together. News of rigged ballot boxes, instances of forced open voting or voting under pressure, and replaced ballots were streaming in. The High Electoral Council’s decision further motivated people to protest. Some assembly members were quick to go to the district’s Electoral Council building to protest against the fraudulent results, others waited for the official confirmation of the results. Where we were gathered, there was talk of taking to the streets, but no organization or political party had called for a protest.

As news and videos of people leaning out of their houses’ windows and balconies while making noise with kitchen utensils, accompanied by drivers in cars honking their horns in support of this protest in a number of districts in Istanbul, participants of the assembly were encouraged to call for protest. By word of mouth and later by text message, an impromptu meeting was organized to discuss whether the assembly should make the call. About 35 people gathered in a political association’s offices in which we frequently held meetings throughout the campaign. Jammed in a corner on the ground floor of the building, the small room unusually

filled with smoke and sombre faces, we were trying to make a quick decision. We were concerned: “What if there is a fascist attack?” “What if someone gets stabbed?” “What if there are provocateurs?” “Would people join us at all?” “People might be afraid to get out of their houses” “How will we ensure security?” were some of the questions I jotted down in my field notes for that night. Everyone was concerned about security and about ending up with a weak protest of only a couple hundred people, maybe even less. The videos, however, were a sign that people might join a protest, only if someone called for it. And then there was the question, “if not now, then when?”.

We stepped out of that building, some holding kitchen utensils, into the dense residential streets of the neighborhood, hoping that people would join us. And they did. A few streets down, and we were already more than a hundred. A couple more, and the numbers reached a thousand. An estimated 3000 to 4000 people took to the streets in the neighborhood. At the end of more than three hours of marching through the streets, an assembly member announced that we would be there again the following day and advised the crowd to look out for announcements on the assembly’s social media accounts. The next day, the number of people who joined the protest doubled, and the protests continued for a week.

This impromptu protest march started discussions about whether it would turn into a second Gezi, both in the opposition and the AKP alike. It also drew the attention of political platforms and parties to the assemblies as a legitimate and powerful political actor. The debates around becoming a permanent political actor in politics took their legitimacy and motivation partly from the successful campaign and partly from the assembly’s decision to take the initiative to take to the streets.

Conclusion

Gezi felt like it had happened ages ago, yet its effects were visible in the way organizers of the local assembly critically re-engaged with it. As I have outlined at the beginning of this chapter, occupiers and protestors in Gezi Park and in the many neighbourhood associations, squats, or forums that emerged in the aftermath of Gezi were strong believers of “horizontalism”. Marina Sitrin, one of the most prominent scholars of this school of social movements, conceptualizes horizontalism as “a critique of hierarchy and authority, but it is more than that. It is about creating new relationships. The means are a part of the ends. It is not a question of making demands, but rather the process, which is a manifestation of an alternative way of being and relating” (2011, p. 1). Her emphasis on the means, the process, and the creation of a new way of relating resonates well with a classification made by Baiocchi, Bennett, Cordero, Klein, and Savell (2014). When they theorize the different types of “civic imaginations”, they distinguish three types: Those that are centred on power, those that emphasize solidarity, and a third category that focuses on problem solving. Sitrin’s characterization of horizontalism, widely shared by protestors during and after the Gezi protests, is closest to Baiocchi’s solidarity-centered imagination, which is defined as “the world of fellowship, neighbourliness, camaraderie”, where “civil society influences the political by fostering a sense of community” (p. 56).

Indeed, a sense of community had been attempted to be fostered in the grassroots initiatives in the aftermath of Gezi. The Gezi spirit, as it was frequently called, had to be kept alive. However, from the summer of 2013 to that of 2016, the political environment changed from one that was lenient to change, that had seen the largest mass protest in living memory, that had seen a global wave of protests, into

one that was marked by laws by decree, a crackdown on the opposition, and institutional and legal changes to constitutionalize an authoritarian regime. With frequent transformative events during those years, preceded by episodes of contention, activists learned from their experiences. Activists had to critically re-read Gezi and its aftermath in light of the political needs of the time. The Gezi spirit that was cherished only a few years ago gave way to the ills of Gezi, and organizational structures and forms were adapted accordingly. The local “no” assembly was chosen as the organizational form of the campaign (which was also a longer-term project). The specific continuities and changes in its structure, which was inherited from Gezi and its aftermath, were the result of activists’ engagement with the past and the future.

Organizers of the assembly inherited ideas like horizontal organization, decentralization, non-institutionalism, consensus decision-making, and other values such as inclusivity and anti-racism, gender equality, and mutual respect. Both horizontalism (understood as a strict principle of non-hierarchy) and non-institutionalism were adapted during this period for an organizational and interpersonal flexibility that would allow for quick decision making. Similarly, the non-conflictual “spirit” of Gezi was also challenged. As participants of the assembly showed a tendency to expand the scope of political engagement, conflict with the government and the role of power in politics (e.g., becoming political actors in the stage of politics or making the assembly a permanent unit of contention) became the dominant, albeit contested, way of doing politics.

This orientation to politics is in line with what Baiocchi et al. term a power-oriented imagination, which “commonly involves naming an opponent or adversary and using confrontational and militaristic language” (2014, p. 60). “Head-on collision”, “fascism is being constructed”, “becoming an address” all point to such

oppositional politics. However, it is important to note here that these distinctions do not perfectly map on to any single group or type of activism. In fact, understandings, imaginations, and tactics evolve as circumstances change, as I have sought to demonstrate. This chapter provides historical and empirical insight into how that change occurred, and what its consequences were for the political spaces that were created in a specific point in time.

Even though the assembly was a model for the others, the campaign that they carried out was regarded as a success, and the legitimating effect of the initiative taken on the night of the referendum was beneficial to their project of institutionalization, the assembly split up 7 months after the discussions included in this chapter. In the following chapter, I will discuss how the assembly disintegrated and the temporal reasons behind its disintegration.

Chapter 4

Future Imaginings and Disintegration: The 2017 Referendum

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the local “no” assemblies came into being and the types of practices they were engaged in during the referendum campaign. I have argued that the structure and the operational logic of the assembly was the result of an accumulation of experiences and political learning: It was a combination of the non-hierarchy, inclusivity, and decentralization principles popularized by the Gezi protests of 2013 with engagement with national (or “high” or “macro”) politics, flexibility in relationships with institutions (especially political parties and party members), and longer-term ideas about the goals and function of the assemblies. I have further argued that the specific form that the local “no” assemblies took, and their repertoire of contention were the result of activists’ re-reading the past with a view towards the future. Organizers discussed the lessons of Gezi, but also the political needs of the time, in expectation of a more repressive regime. It was on the basis of these considerations, of both antecedents and anticipations, that they created these new spaces of contention. The last chapter’s focus, however, remained mostly on Gezi, a past event, and the way it was re-read by activists.

In this chapter we turn our gaze, together with the activists, from the past to the near future. As the referendum was left behind, the question for assembly participants became much more about how to repurpose the assemblies and to predict the political schedule. The period this chapter looks at covers the dissolution of the assembly. As we have seen in the last chapter, the assembly was well attended during the campaign; it was a model for the others; it managed to mobilize a series of protests

against the rigged results of the referendum that started on the night of the referendum and lasted for a week; and most importantly, its break-up happened at a time when all of its participants agreed that the best way to move forward was to stay together and coordinate action. Hence, the disintegration of this assembly in January 2018 was as significant as it was unexpected. The question, then, is why and how what appeared to be a successful grassroots organization disintegrated at the time that it did.

The Referendum

This chapter engages with the question of coordinating action during transitional and politically volatile times, in high-stakes situations. I take grassroots activism in Istanbul, Turkey between 2017 and 2018 as a case in point, when a constitutional referendum and presidential/general elections took place, under the state of emergency, to institute a dictatorial regime. The overarching argument is that future imaginings are a necessary temporal dimension that has been largely overlooked by social movement theory. During transitional periods such as the one I am looking at, uncertainty is observed in the myriad possibilities that are constantly up for debate everywhere and at all times. Acting within the context of a transition means not only that the present is more unstable than in an established political order (whether democratic or undemocratic), but also that the future is under construction in a way that opens up quantitatively more and qualitatively more unpredictable possibilities.

I look at how the local assembly disintegrated at a time when coordinated action was perceived as the only viable strategy by the participants. This is a particularly revealing case to explore the dynamics of sense-making, decision-making, and coordination under increasingly repressive circumstances marked by threat and

shrinking political opportunities. Even though this case is not unique, in that movement actors everywhere go through similar processes, it is one where their dynamics are exposed in a short period of time, making them more starkly observable and yielding to theorization.

In this chapter, I focus on the period around the constitutional referendum that was held on 16 April 2017. The referendum put to vote 18 amendments to the constitution that would abolish the post of prime minister, remove the parliament's right to initiate a motion of no confidence, give the president the power to appoint the cabinet, and allow the president to be affiliated with a political party, among other changes.⁴² Overall, the amendments would change the political system in Turkey from a parliamentary to a presidential system with no checks and balances and with great powers to the executive.⁴³ The “yes” vote won by 51.41% against 48.59% of the “no” votes. However, the results were shown to be rigged by independent election initiatives.⁴⁴ Not only was the referendum carried out during a state of emergency, but also the voting process was not free and fair, especially in the east and southeast regions of the country.⁴⁵ Moreover, on the day of the referendum, the High Electoral Board (Turkish acronym, YSK) declared that unstamped ballots would be counted as valid unless they were proven to be fraudulent.⁴⁶

⁴² For the National Bar Association's analysis, see:

http://anayasadegisikligi.barobirlik.org.tr/Anayasa_Degisikligi.aspx. For the state's official declaration, see: <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2017/02/20170211-1.htm>.

⁴³ The Venice Commission's report on the proposed changes to the constitution also cautioned against them: “the proposed constitutional amendments would introduce in Turkey a presidential regime which lacks the necessary checks and balances required to safeguard against becoming an authoritarian one” (Venice Commission Report, p. 29). For the full report, see:

[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2017\)005-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2017)005-e).

⁴⁴ For Oy ve Otesi's report, see: <https://oyveotesi.org/referandum-degerlendirmesi/>.

For Hayir ve Otesi's report, see:

<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/185913-hayir-ve-otesi-referandumda-olu-secmen-tespit-ettik>.

⁴⁵ For the HDP's report, see:

<https://www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/Referandumu%20Baskı%20ve%20ihlal%20Raporu.pdf>.

⁴⁶ For the original declaration, see: <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/tr/duyuru/duyuru/5574>.

For the opposition, the 2017 referendum was a political opportunity to reverse the transition to dictatorship. In the period leading up to the referendum, especially with the popularity of the “no” campaign, there was increasing hope and belief that the referendum would be won, although the consequences of that win were ambiguous. The memory of 2015, when, after the electoral success of the HDP, the state recommenced the war on Kurds and the opposition in general was still fresh in activists’ minds. As uplifting as it was, the “no” campaign was carried out under an increasingly repressive and authoritarian regime, one that ruled via the unending state of emergency. The anxiety generated by this paradox was carried over to the period after the referendum as well. The difference was that before the referendum, during the campaign, the goal was clear: campaign for the referendum as a first step towards the way out. It was both a crucial institutional political opportunity whose strategic importance was undeniable, and it was also an external imposition with a deadline set before us. In the one year after the referendum, until the 2018 general and presidential elections were announced, there was no deadline, and no structural imposition that activists could agree on as a specific goal. The initial *raison d’être* of the local “no” assemblies, campaigning for the referendum, was no longer in existence. This is not to say that there were not enough issues to fight over: there was the state of emergency, laws by decree, hunger strikes, workplace deaths, arrests, to name a few. But it was difficult for the different groups involved to agree on the strategic significance of these events, as well as their public resonance. The local “no” assembly that I study, after months of deliberation, decided to change its name to “democracy” assembly, agreeing enough on the centrality of a vague “democracy” for the struggle to be pursued from then on. What everybody agreed on was the threat of fascism as I demonstrate in the section titled “the future”. However, this agreement was not enough

by itself to keep the different actors together, as they anticipated divergent routes in the near future in the absence of a pre-determined political schedule.

In what follows, I first provide an overview of the relevant literatures. Then, I proceed to show what the future looks like for the activists that I study and move on to a detailed discussion of an assembly meeting that marks the dissolution of that particular local assembly. Using ethnographic field notes, I show how differences in temporal frameworks eroded the basis on which activists usually coordinated their next steps, leading to an unresolvable mismatch in expectations and hence, in action. I conclude the section by reflecting on the importance of future projections for movement orientation and trajectories.

Social Movements, Future Projections, and the Imaginary

In an article reviewing the use of temporality in social movement theory, McAdam and Sewell (2001) concentrate on long-, medium-, and short-term processes. According to the authors, scholars of social movements have used two temporal templates: "long-term change processes" and protest cycles. The first template refers to processes like industrialization, urbanization, and state-formation, and has been employed by a wide range of scholars from classical social theorists through to McAdam's political process model. The second template, protest cycles, is a term coined by Sidney Tarrow (1989) and has been used to define the most active phase of a movement. Protest cycles get at the cyclical rhythm of mobilization with a focus on the medium-term, whereas long-term change processes focus on effects of historical developments and processes. McAdam and Sewell (2001) offer two new temporalities for the study of social movements and revolutions. The first is transformative events,

which embody a different temporality than the previous two. It is a short and punctuated temporality, where contingencies and the sequencing of actions may have durable and structural effects in the long run (p. 102).⁴⁷ The second is what McAdam and Sewell (2001) call “cultural epochs of contention”. Like Charles Tilly’s (1977) repertoires of collective action, some forms of contentious politics remain available for long periods of time, being mobilized in times of transformative events (p. 112-113). In their short review of temporalities in social movement theory, McAdam and Sewell go from long-term change processes to medium-term protest cycles, to the short-term, punctuated temporality of the event, and end with another long-term temporal concept, the epoch.

The treatment of temporality in social movement studies has been limited to long-, medium-, and short-term processes or their effects. Even though we see references to temporality throughout the literature, they remain mostly implicit. From social movement framing to narratives, from strategies and tactics to the political process model, from identity to emotions, the literature on social movements takes into account past, present, and future orientations and goals; diagnosis as well as prognosis. Yet, temporality runs in the background of these theories rather than being an *explanan*, the thing that does the explaining.

Ann Mische, one of the first social movements scholars who called for a temporal approach to study action (2009), employs temporality as a major element for explaining social movement phenomena. She offers the concept of the “project”, or “projectivity”, to go beyond the static, overly instrumental, or overly structural (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999) undertones of social movement theory. She argues that the concept of the project implies a more dialogical understanding of the processes under

⁴⁷ See also: Sewell’s “eventful temporality” (1996).

construction in social movements, as well as “a more or less open-ended horizon of possibility, culturally structured through existing narratives yet still implying orientation, mission, even vocation, in a self-conscious engagement of a changeable future” (2001, p. 139). Indeed, activists can be defined as agents who are actively and purposefully involved in the making of the future, a future that is changeable, regardless of how they anticipate it to be. The past, as Mische also acknowledges, plays into this process as culturally structuring narratives, and I would also add, as organizationally structuring repertoires and interpretive frameworks. She gets at this point when she writes, “the process of project-formation also entails the capacity to interpret and coordinate one’s actions in accordance with the motives and projects of other actors” (p. 139). It is the interplay of future projections, or the imaginative engagement with the future, and the coordination between different actors on which I aim to elaborate in this paper.

I use the language of imagination because it denotes a) the construction of a mental image of a society that is not (yet) in existence and b) the construction of a relationship with others, whether individuals or institutions, whom one does not know and who may or may not exist in the present. The classic example for the first aspect would be utopian futures in the form of science fiction or intentional communities. Examples for the second include Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities" and Charles Taylor's "social imaginary". These two elements do not exclude each other; imagining a future society takes into account how people and institutions would relate to one another and imagining relations might involve thinking about alternative ways of relating. I highlight these two aspects separately because the scholarly use of the term tends to give weight to one or the other. Actors who strive for change are usually thought of as striving for a *better* future. For instance, Baiocchi et al. (2014) have

coined the term “civic imagination” as “the ways in which people individually or collectively envision a better political, social, and civic environment, and work toward achieving that future” (p. 20). They argue that the type of imagination that groups foster affects action, recognizing that it changes with changing circumstances. To take another quotation where they recap what they mean by civic imagination: “Civic imaginations underpin the processes of identifying problems and solutions, envisioning better societies and environments, and developing a plan to make those visions of a better future into reality” (p. 55). Imagining as an act of understanding, of interpretation, of “identifying problems and solutions” as they call it, resonates well with how I use it. Still, the concept does not account for situations where opportunities are shrinking and the drive for action is not a better, but a worse future. In such situations, the question becomes how people continue to act when they imagine the future to be *worse*, not better. And what if the future is so uncertain that they cannot make *plans*?

Taylor’s (2004) “social imaginary” gives weight to the second, relation-oriented aspect. He explains: “I am thinking [...] of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (p. 23). It is “what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society” (p. 2). He uses the term to elucidate the rise of Western modernity which requires undertaking a historical project, where “historical” alludes to the past and covers the present. But what about how actors imagine their social positions in the *future*?

My use of the term imagination combines these two points: based on past and present experiences, activists imagine their social and political environment in the

future in a bid to understand what is going on which they then use to prevent a dreadful scenario from coming true. However, “the future” is not one big chunk of temporal imagery. I find the different dimensions of future projections that Ann Mische (2009, p. 609-701) has identified useful when dealing with the more intricate properties of imagination. For example, as social movement scholars have acknowledged, actors engage in long-, medium-, and short-term imaginings (reach). But there is more to temporality than reach. Imaginings involve different levels of detail (clarity), different ranges of possible scenarios (breadth), and varying degrees of considerations about relationships with and between other actors (sociality); the future can be seen as fixed or dependent (contingency), contracting or expanding (expandability), moving toward or away from us (volition). I will be using this language to look at how, during a time of rapid change induced by regime change, variation along these dimensions affect the way activists make sense of the situation and make decisions on which to act.

Making sense, making decisions, and action do not resolve themselves automatically, especially in times of crisis when the future is opaque and ambiguous. David R. Gibson (2012) in his study of the Cuban missile crisis uses conversation analysis to understand how crisis-related talk shaped and was shaped by the machinery of conversation and the relationship between decision-making and wider external circumstances (p. 10-11). He describes the crisis John F. Kennedy and the ExComm (his advisors) faced as one in which all options were bad options, where no option seemed better than the others. One of his key findings is that the most important activity the ExComm engaged in was what Gibson calls “foretalk”, or talk about possible future scenarios in the form of stories of events that have not yet occurred. These stories are different than stories about the past (p. 33): There is no “epistemic authority”, meaning, no one has “been there” before; conditional assertions (if...then

statements) are commonplace which shift the criteria for plausibility from what happened to the causal relationships between events; and closely related to the last point, narratives become path dependent and contingent, making them extremely sensitive to the sequencing of each moment/event in the story. These elements complicate the processes of sense-making, decision-making, and action. In my field site, we will see that this was also the case especially when the issue at hand was concerning the near future. It was extremely difficult for participants to predict what was going to happen, when, in which order, and the effects of their actions. Agreeing on all of this required coordination through foretalk.

Iddo Tavory and Nina Eliasoph (2013) call the process by which “actors orient each other toward their futures”, “coordinating futures” (p. 909). They identify three modes of future coordination that might fuse, disentangle, or clash with one another in everyday interaction. Two of these modes are particularly relevant to my work: trajectories and temporal landscapes.⁴⁸ Trajectories refer to the series of moves actors make, often with a shared assumption of where they are going (p. 913), situating themselves within an extended time frame and taking their next steps accordingly. As I understand it, trajectories are located at the level between the immediate future (that would be what Tavory and Eliasoph call “protentions”, the level I leave out) and even farther horizons, or “temporal landscapes”⁴⁹. The authors distinguish temporal landscapes from trajectories by its degree of naturalization: “People usually experience this kind of future as so naturalized that it forms the bedrock on which other future-oriented trajectories are being performed” (p. 916). In times of large-

⁴⁸ Protentions is the third mode that I am not using. It refers to the moment-by-moment anticipations that actors usually take for granted. This level of analysis, however, risks being stuck in the moment and does not tell us much about the wider environment which I focus on in this paper.

⁴⁹ The term “temporal landscape” implies spatiality although I am not sure if this is intended, as their theory of anticipation does not explicitly deal with the relationship between space and temporality.

scale, historic change, the temporal landscape starts breaking down and is denaturalized. They suggest that in times like this, the relationship between trajectories and landscapes changes. Rather than being unable to make sense and know which trajectories to expect, people start glorifying individual projects (p. 928).

The point at which the glorification of individual projects begins, if it begins at all, gives us insight into the relationship between trajectories and temporal landscapes. In this study, I use events as critical turning points that define the changes in this relationship. As we will see, the referendum was one such event, but not the one that led to the individualization of projects. It is also useful to think about Tavory and Eliasoph's work in tandem with Mische's dimensions of future projections. The differences between trajectories and temporal landscapes might be their scope (the near future versus the distant future) and the degree of naturalization, but they also differ in their level of clarity, range of possibilities, or volition, for example. Events as turning points marking the different stages of regime change alter the various dimensions of future projections, thus affecting trajectories.

The ongoing regime change during my field work is the historic change that corresponds to a shifting temporal landscape. To use the spatial analogy implicit in the word "landscape": the ground on which activists stand is snatched from under them. What is, under stable circumstances, routine and predictable becomes irregular and unreliable. The most glaring example, and the one that is debated in the meetings that I use as data in this paper, is the electoral schedule. Some of the uncertainties include questions like, "will we have elections? Local or general/presidential? When? Will they be rigged? Will the government start a war, domestic or abroad? Will they pass new laws to legalize their actions? Will we be allowed to win? What would be the consequences of a win? What is the political significance of the next elections?" The

transformation of the temporal landscape leads to these practical but politically charged questions, which are directly related to the trajectories that can be conceived as available at a given moment in time.

In this formulation, we see a particular relationship between the anticipated temporal landscape and possible trajectories. One might assume that when the temporal landscape, and the process leading to it, looks almost the same for everyone, it would be easier to agree on trajectories (what to do next). But that is not the case. In a transitional period during which the dreaded future seems more likely to be realized than the reversal of its implementation, there is nevertheless still some leeway for change, for reversal. However, after the referendum, in the absence of a structural opportunity in the near future, the trajectories to choose from were multiple and highly dependent on expectations about the sequence of events, as well as their pace. Therefore, the direct relationship between the temporal landscape and trajectories that could otherwise be assumed was broken, and activists were faced with the problem of coordinating futures, or in other words, the coordination of expectations about the near future. This is where foretalk comes in.

The Future: A Dystopian Temporal Landscape

“We have an uncertain, colourless, grey process ahead of us” (S., assembly participant, field notes from January 2018)

We are in a political party's office on the third floor of an apartment building. This week, we are trying out presentations to listen to and understand each other, desperate to solve an issue.

During the third presentation, we hear a helicopter hovering very close to the building. Motorcycle noises follow. There are the flashing blue lights of the police on the windows. For some seconds, the presentation goes on, but no one is listening. Those who sit by the windows lean in to see what is going on. I listen, almost wait, for the quick and aggressive steps of the police climbing up the stairs of the building. The person sitting next to me, who is a member of the party whose office we are in, turns off his phone. And at last, someone voices what we are all thinking: "is the party being raided"?

After the danger has passed, we talk about how bizarre it would be to get arrested there, because only a few people who are at the meeting are actually members of the party. One of them, a party member, says; "fascism does not discriminate", as if to prove a point he had made earlier in his presentation, that we need to stand together. (Field notes from January 2018)

Our worry that what we were hearing could be a police raid was not without foundation, nor was it the result of overly anxious paranoia. In fact, raiding of activist homes, party headquarters, and public meetings was commonplace around the time of the referendum in 2017. Our instant assumption that we were being raided, and the way we nonchalantly talked about getting arrested point to the everyday expressions of the repressive regime.

The casualization of repression was not met with acceptance, and it was not normalized. Rather, it engendered anxiety and an urge to act (i.e. the need “to do *something*”). Through experiencing in the present and on a smaller scale⁵⁰ how they imagined the future to be, these activists felt the need to devise ways to alter the awaited course of events. Their experience of the present was, as the excerpt above demonstrates, marked by threat. The source of the threat was the establishment of a new political order in which civil liberties, freedoms, and rights would be eliminated, making opposition activists much more vulnerable with regards to the state. In other words, the future held a dreaded, instead of a desired, political order. Dystopia replaced utopia as a driver of action.⁵¹

I use the word dystopia to describe the kind of future that activists construct. It refers to a situation in which all scenarios about the future are nightmarish and difficult to change. Importantly, the dystopian imagination does not exclude the possibility of change or exit. In fact, dystopia, like utopia, is less about the perfect (perfectly good or perfectly bad) future and more about the present. As Ruth Levitas (2013) reminds us, "dystopia portrays the darkness of the lived moment, the difficulty of finding a way out of a totalizing system. It is not necessarily anti-utopian: anti-utopianism actively opposes the imagination and pursuit of alternatives" (p. 110). Indeed, activists were fully aware of political opportunities, such as the 2017 referendum or the 2018 elections, as events that gave them a chance to make a “crack in the system” which could then be deepened. But notice how even the prospect of

⁵⁰ The scale is smaller in the sense that daily repression in its various forms is experienced not by the opposition at large, but by active contenders of the regime. The non-engaged member of the opposition knows little, if at all, about the level of repression. What they hear about is the imprisonment of famous journalists, businessmen, and other public figures without necessarily feeling immediately and physically at risk.

⁵¹ Dystopia *replaces* utopia because after the Gezi protests, utopia as a “better future” was a possibility that motivated certain types of grassroots politics.

winning an election or stopping a dictatorship via the referendum is only a “crack”; it is not a full victory. Winning in this case would be a morale booster as well as give the opposition a structural political opportunity, but it did not guarantee it. Even in the case of a win, the damage done by de-democratization would take years, maybe decades, to reverse; and worse, the regime could come out even stronger by crushing the opposition altogether, as it had done in 2015 after the HDP’s election victory – “we lost the election we had won 4 months ago”, as campaigners describe. The rigged referendum was lost in the same way: the “yes” vote to change the regime won by a margin – “neither yes nor no came out of the ballot box”. The state of failure-in-success, the difficulty of making *just a crack* by winning a historic referendum, not knowing what will happen in case of success, and knowing that even if the AKP and Erdogan peacefully abdicate the throne so to speak (a highly unlikely scenario), re-democratization would be extremely difficult and require an extended period of time is exactly what I mean by dystopia. Therefore, I use it as “a route into the debates of our time” (Sargisson, 2007, p. 32), not to conjure up a helpless and hopeless state of passive waiting.

What seems to be the central theme of the excerpt in the opening of the section, that “fascism does not discriminate”, appears in the form of a warning for what is to come. It speaks to the shape of the future that is anticipated by the activists, calling attention to the totalizing effect of a regime that will be unsparing in its repression. The presidential system that was the subject of the 2017 referendum was interpreted by some as “the last nail in the coffin” (Goktas, 2016). Throughout my fieldwork I heard people say, “we might not be able to do this meeting here in 2 weeks/2 months/6 months”, suggesting the type of policing that activists anticipated, extrapolating from their experiences in the present. Once, when an assembly participant used the word

authoritarianism to describe the future, another activist remarked, “what authoritarianism? Are we in the EU?”, assigning the word authoritarianism an uptown meaning, a thing only for privileged people. What we will have is not authoritarianism but something far worse; “they’ll cut our asses off” was a repeated phrase. This is indeed the stuff of dystopia.

The dystopian imaginary was grounded in recent memory. The Turkish state, controlled by the AKP (Justice and Development Party; Turkish acronym AKP) government, had shown the terror it was capable of inflicting. During Gezi, the then-prime-minister Erdogan had declared that he was “barely holding the 50% (his voters) in their homes”, a threat that meant he had full power over what his support base did. In 2016, during the military coup attempt, he did not hold them back but called his supporters to take to the streets to confront the military, and they did. The death toll was 240 people, and the photographs of the “democracy martyrs” were displayed in public places for months. Between the two general elections in 2015 which were four months apart, the war on the Kurdish people recommenced, cities were reduced to ruins, hundreds of people were killed and displaced in the process.⁵² During these four months, 33 young leftists died in a bombing in Suruç, a border-town close to Kobanê, on July 20th, and 103 died in the bombing in the capital Ankara on October 10th. In January of 2016, a bomb went off in Sultanahmet in Istanbul, and another on Istiklal Avenue, Istanbul, in March 2016. The bombings were blamed on ISIS by the officials,

⁵² For HDP’s report on Cizre, see:

<https://www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/HDP'sCizreRaporu.pdf>. For the Human Rights Association’s report on Cizre, see:

<https://www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/TIHV-IHD-DiyarbakirBarosuCizreRaporu.pdf>.

For HDP’s report on Sur, see:

<https://www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/Surraporu.pdf>. For the Human Rights Association’s report on Sur, see: <https://www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/IHD-TIHV-DTOSurIncelemeRaporu.pdf>.

For the HDP’s Yüksekova-Gever report, see:

<https://www.hdp.org.tr/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/geverraporu.pdf>.

but the widely held belief in my field site was that Erdogan and his State were the real perpetrators of these terrors, either through direct involvement or indirectly through neglect.

As I have reviewed in the Introduction, the AKP's terror was not limited to militaristic techniques. They were coupled with arrests, imprisonment, criminalization of the opposition, and mass firings due to political or religious affiliation. More than 100,000 public sector workers were purged;⁵³ tens of thousands were arrested and imprisoned, most of them HDP MPs including its co-leaders;⁵⁴ elected mayors were removed from office; hundreds of media outlets and tens of publishing houses were closed down;⁵⁵ hundreds of journalists were jailed;⁵⁶ and Academics for Peace were purged and indicted with aiding terrorist organizations.⁵⁷

Therefore, the dystopian imagination was rooted in the present and the recent past. When the future is so bleak, the question of action arises: How do people act when they expect the future to be worse? The open-endedness of the future and a sense of agency combined with foreseeable political opportunities marked this period. Hence, in the field, I usually heard about the future as an "if – then" clause: "a fascistic regime awaits us *if* we don't do something". Of course, both the first and second parts of this formulation changed according to the speaker's naming of the problem and the solution they offered. But the idea remains the same. The first part describes the

⁵³ See: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/turkey>. For detailed reports on the purges, consult the website: <https://turkeypurge.com/>.

⁵⁴ For the Human Rights Watch's report, see: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/20/turkey-crackdown-kurdish-opposition>.

⁵⁵ For the Human Rights Watch's report, see: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/12/15/silencing-turkeys-media/governments-deepening-assault-critical-journalism>.

⁵⁶ For the Amnesty International's report, see: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur44/6055/2017/en/>.

⁵⁷ For the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey's report on Academics for Peace, see: <https://www.tihvakademi.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Barisicinakademisyenlervakasi.pdf>

dystopia, and the second the action to take to reverse the process leading up to the dystopia.

The “if-then” formulation hints at two distinct but concurrent ways of experiencing temporality. The first is the urgency to act, coupled with the sense that there is no time.⁵⁸ The fascist regime of the future is imminent and all-encompassing. The threat is structural and political; it is also personal and physical. “We have no time – we are dying!” exclaimed one of the activists at an assembly meeting, a couple of weeks after the referendum. He meant what he said literally, referring to the massacres of the last couple of years, where hundreds died in bombings, among them his friends and comrades. He wanted to build an alliance between movements, now. Some thought it was impossible. Others said it was not the right time. But for some, “the right time” was a luxury that they did not have, there was simply no time.

To have no time means, in practice, that we experience time as accelerated time. Too many events happen in a short period, making last week’s news old news, allocating them to the sphere of the past. As events explode and then lose their importance as “event”, activists adjust their understandings, actions, and position. Adjustment means choosing from a range of possibilities. Activists need to make sense of the situation, compare possibilities, discuss their meanings and their pros and cons, rearrange their goals, review their principles, agree, disagree, negotiate, reorient their positions, think about their audience, core values, and a lot of other things. This process itself is not new or extraordinary. What is extraordinary is the frequency with which it is renewed and repeated under conditions of political uncertainty and looming dystopia. The most trivial of decisions become political quarrels, every single event is viewed as a critical opportunity that should be acted on – if not, we may never have

⁵⁸ Gibson (2012) uses the term “environmental impatience” to describe the same phenomenon.

the chance again. So, the “uncertain, colourless, grey process ahead of us” that S. (quoted above) foresees does not preclude possibilities. On the contrary, at these moments of reorientation, there are too many of them. In this sense, it is not the case that there is no time; rather, time stops.⁵⁹ And this brings us to the second way in which temporality is experienced.

Inundation with critical political decisions to make every other day, or every week, leads to the suspension of time, which opens up space for possibilities by way of slowing down our perception of temporality. Imagine a basketball player shooting the ball from a distance exactly when their 24 seconds are up. It takes only a few seconds, maybe moments, until the ball reaches the basket. During this time, everyone falls silent and holds their breath. Even the players stop for that moment. Especially if the point is a critical one, a decisive one that will determine the winner and the loser, the participants of the moment go through a range of emotions and consider a variety of possible scenarios; what they would mean, how to react, what the team should do next. This all happens in a moment of uncertainty and anticipation, when we experience time in abeyance. Something similar happens in my field site. When the “disaster” is around the corner, every move becomes critical and politically charged; there is no time and simultaneously, it slows down, exposing us to the wealth of possibilities to choose from quickly and efficiently, all the while the dystopia of the fascist state looming closer and larger.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Similar to what Wagner-Pacifici (2000) describes as “the standoff”.

⁶⁰ In Mische’s terms, volition: the future is coming towards us.

Scenarios: Competing Anticipations, Trajectories, and the Disintegration of the Assembly

Participants of the assembly shared the dystopian view of the future, especially after the referendum was lost. This view involved more repression, a greater risk of arrests and imprisonment, less opportunity to voice dissent, less participation, and fewer avenues of struggle. Everyone agreed that the overall political situation was getting worse, that the temporal landscape looked dystopian if it was not reversed, but not everyone agreed on what to expect, and when. The discretionary nature of the regime made sure that people stayed in the dark about the political schedule, disrupting the rhythm of politics itself, and therefore resulting in politics at all levels, but particularly at the level of the grassroots, turning into a matter of guesswork to “coordinate futures”. Below, I try to flesh out how disruption in the ordinary calendar of politics and the ensuing guesswork brought into light the differences in future projections, thus leading to the disintegration of the local assembly.

There were a number of explanations for the disintegration of the assembly. Most centred around waning participation by unaffiliated members combined with political organizations’ insistence on their own agenda. When I asked M., a core organizer who left the assembly in the summer of 2017, why she left, her reply summarized the most common arguments for the break-up. I am reproducing here a lengthy part from our interview to give her the stage:

After the referendum, a lot of people left the assembly. We were left alone with political organizations. I was never allergic to political organizations, really, but their dynamics are so different. This is how: You are an organization; you have an agenda you have set for yourself. Even if you say you do not, you do. The

independents [the unaffiliated participants] were the people who diluted the assembly. They were the ones who made it “softer”, who made our language more understandable for the person on the street. Political organizations do not work this way [...] The referendum was over, and until May, June [2017] the independents were still with us. We held a big meeting to discuss what to do next, our roadmap. 100-odd people attended. We spoke, we discussed, we took notes. Summer arrived. These people are from [a middle-class neighborhood], they have summer houses in Bodrum, in Didim. They marched off to their summer houses. Or they just quit. But they always said this: If something happens, we are here. But they should have been here then. When we were left with organizations the situation got harsher. *Because each organization had a different idea for after the referendum.* We started talking about our roadmap, about what to do, every week and we entered into a process where we could not make decisions. We talked and talked. We held big meetings, made big decisions, but did not stick to them. I am an independent, what can I do in a situation like this?

M. explains the coming apart of the assembly by the contrast in the operational logics of political organizations (such as political parties and other institutions) and grassroots organizations (such as the assemblies). The unaffiliated members in this explanation function as the buffer zone between organizations that push for their own agendas, or as people who ensure a balance in the group’s choices and actions. When they withdrew from the assembly⁶¹, organizations commenced to fight over the trajectory of the assembly, and the few unaffiliated members like M. herself felt powerless against the organized rhetoric of organizations who outnumbered them. In a way, this is both a story of a protest cycle (Tarrow, 1993; 1998) with a peak in mobilization during the referendum campaign followed by a decline in participation; and a classic case of movement co-optation by institutional actors (e.g., Piven &

⁶¹ M. makes another temporal argument here to explain the withdrawal of unaffiliated participants: “Summer arrived [...] They marched off to their summer houses”. This was not the first time that I heard this argument; activists were already anticipating a (hopefully temporary) diminishment in participation after the referendum, caused by the holiday season (of the upper classes). The arrival of winter was thought to be a significant factor in why the park forums could not sustain themselves after Gezi. As interesting as it is, I cannot go further into the seasonality of participation in this chapter.

Cloward, 1979). Two very plausible explanations backed up by the literature on social movements as well.

When I arrived in Istanbul in December 2017, I was aware of the process of decline from friends with whom I kept in touch. This is why, when I attended the weekly coordination meeting of the assembly, I was surprised by the number of participants (there were about 30 people at the meeting, which was not that different from the campaign period), and also by the number of new faces around the table. The smaller neighborhood assemblies had been inactive for some time, which I thought was expected in a period of demobilization, but the fact that the coordination group still met regularly with 30 participants, old and new, was a pleasant surprise. The discussion at that meeting revolved around the “roadmap”: Whether to campaign for a possible election or to organize a boycott; who we would campaign for in case the far-right candidate of the Good Party (Iyi Parti, Turkish acronym IYIP), Meral Akşener, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan of the AKP competed in the second round of the elections; and whether we should campaign against the state of emergency instead. It was a heated debate, verging on a fight from time to time. Lively discussions were characteristic of the assemblies, even though fights were rare but not unheard of. It did not seem to me like this was an unsurmountable problem. I started questioning the declining participation and co-optation explanations.

A closer reading of the quotation from M. gave me a lead as to what could be happening. “Each organization had a different idea for after the referendum”. What were these ideas and what were they based on? Where exactly lay the differences? Did each have a different plan or different interests? Were they simply trying to take over the assembly? The answer to the last question seemed the easiest to answer; at a stage

where the assembly had been narrowed down to the coordination group, this was the least plausible explanation. The meetings that followed helped me find an answer.

Before moving on to my analysis of the meetings that marked the disintegration of the assembly, let us listen to K., an unaffiliated assembly participant with a background in socialist politics. When I asked him for his interpretation of how the assembly came apart, he retrospectively reflected on it:

It was because of the *dissimilar future imaginations* [*benzeşmeyen gelecek tahayyülleri*] of the organizations, groups, and individuals that were involved [...] I can't say how each differed on behalf of them, but each had a different reading of politics in Turkey, according to which they positioned themselves [...] Organizations that did not insist on the assemblies as a tool for the struggle were on the lookout for what the other two actors [the CHP and the HDP] were doing to determine their own *future "projections"* [*gelecek projeksiyonları*].

K.'s observations do not contradict the previous explanations but specify how they work. His focus is on the future and how not only organizations, but also individuals were trying to position themselves with regards to other powerful actors in politics. As we will see, my analysis of the series of meetings that culminated in the disintegration of the assembly in its specific form is much more in line with K.'s interpretation. He even uses the phrases "future imaginations" and "future projections" (even using the English word "projections") the way I use them, even though I borrow the latter from Ann Mische (2009). In the rest of this section, I will delve deeper into the intricacies of the two competing future projections that are representative of the conflict that resulted in the disintegration of the assembly. As we will see, foretalk is the mode of communication that comes to the fore in these debates.

In late December 2017, a group of participants, mostly people who were not affiliated with a political party or organization, organized a meeting of about 35 people from different local assemblies, political parties, and organizations. The topic was the next elections, originally scheduled for November 2019.⁶² This meeting lasted for more than three hours, mostly because of the confusion and disappointment caused by the fact that the meeting had been scheduled on the same day and at the same time as the local assembly meeting normally took place. The organizers said the time conflict was only an accident, but essentially, this meeting pointed to a split in the local assembly. The reason why one group within the assembly held a separate meeting was because they had been discussing how to proceed for months, the discussion was deadlocked, and some people felt like they had to “move” (take action) fast. The issue in question was whether to continue by working towards the coming elections originally scheduled to take place in 2019, or to campaign against the state of emergency and the laws by decree. Those that advocated for the elections argued that there could anytime be snap elections, pointing out the discretionary nature of Erdogan's rule and the uncertainty of the near future. In other words, the problem was organizing for an anticipated but not yet officially scheduled political event that would be on the public agenda once it was scheduled, but was not yet. Those who opposed the former view claimed that elections were not on people's agenda and that to campaign for an election during the state of emergency would be inconsistent with the assembly's earlier stance on the illegitimacy of the current regime. Erdogan and his government were illegitimate after all, and to campaign for an election under undemocratic circumstances would legitimize the elections and the government. The dilemma here was the perceived contradiction between past and future actions.

⁶² On 20 April 2018, officials announced that the general elections would be held on 24 June of the same year, giving only a two-month notice.

Outsiders were confused about why both could not be done together, as they fed into each other, but the two sides of this conversation had been insistent on their respective positions for two to three months. The original local assembly meeting could not be carried out that week because there were only a handful of people, most of which were from the same organization (the ones that opposed working towards elections).

The week after the splinter meeting, the assembly gathered as usual. It was a tense meeting where the political group that was left out of the splinter meeting was questioning the ethics and principles of the assembly, its decision-making structure (i.e. “what do we do when we can’t make a decision? Splinter off?”), as well as voicing the disappointment and distrust that it had caused. The splinter group had a variety of responses, clustering around “You can’t question which meeting I prefer to go to”, “you (referring to the two political organizations that were left out of the splinter meeting) have been imposing your own views on the assembly and have caused an impasse”, and “we are not being cooperative and agreeable when we should be moving together”. The last remark struck a chord and the meeting ended with the decision to hold another meeting next week, with anyone who had formulated a way to go forward to make a 30-minute presentation. Doing presentations was a last resort to fix what was thought to be the problem: People did not listen to one another to *understand* but to *object* to the other side's ideas.

If we take a step back, the “not listening” interpretation also implies that some political groups were breaching the individual participation principle and attending the meetings with their own political group’s interests/agenda in mind, without being open to persuasion by others. It is also very likely that different groups were pushing forward their own agenda through the various conversational mechanisms that Gibson (2012) uncovers. According to Gibson, one way in which decisions can still be made

even when all options are risky is suppression; “the systematic and largely consensual nonsaying of something that could have been said” (p. 102). In my field site, there was a deadlock because no one (neither groups nor individuals) was willing to suppress and sacrifice their own version of how events would unfold in the near future. They did not, because the stakes were very high, and our chances of having another opportunity very low. Therefore, a closer analysis of the meeting reveals that this was not entirely about not listening or political parties’ insistence on imposing their own views. Instead, it was a mismatch between disparate temporal frameworks that resulted in the dissolution of the assembly. Doing presentations was a way of sidestepping the narrative and conversational complications that arose from interlacing and competing stories about the future, by compartmentalizing each speaker (the “no interruptions” rule) and formalizing the delivery of foretalk (the problem first, the demand later, and lastly, concrete suggestions for what to do). This method, as we shall see, did not work because the problem was deeper and much less negotiable than activists thought; the difficulty, I argue, lied in the disparity between anticipations, a matter of the more intricate qualities of future projections.

The next meeting was held on the second week of January 2018. Out of the five presenters, one had no formal political affiliation, one was a member of the HDP, one was from a party that was a part of the HDP, and the remaining two were from two different political associations. The presenters were asked to communicate how they interpreted the political situation and to offer a solution or a “roadmap” for the assembly’s next steps. At the end of each presentation, there was time for questions, but it was emphasized by the facilitator and the person who suggested doing presentations that the questions should be genuine ones to understand more clearly what the presenter had in mind. I will concentrate on two presentations here that I

think get at the core points of the two sides of the conflict. These presenters were then involved in two different campaigns – in the way each saw fit – for the 2018 general and presidential elections.

The first two presenters were from political associations. It should be noted that these associations were the ones that have been accused, by the splinter group, of hindering the decision-making process. The first presenter started with an assessment, and I paraphrase: “democracy has been stolen from us via the shady referendum, and now we are going through a process of a transition to ‘open fascism’ (associated with military coups and junta regimes). We are dealing with a ‘stolen government’, a ‘stolen referendum’, and ‘stolen rights’. ‘We have an uncertain, colourless, grey process ahead of us.’ In a situation like this, our most important demand is democracy.” Everyone agreed on this point. Even her use of the term “open fascism”, although I knew that some people did not agree with it, did not seem to bother anyone. She went on: “There can be no election without democracy.” People started to get fidgety in their seats, checking their phones, taking notes, whispering to the person sitting next to them. But no one interrupted: “The referendum was held during the state of emergency and we lost. Then, we declared the results illegitimate. We were unsuccessful at the referendum because it took place under undemocratic conditions.”⁶³ What we should do now is to ensure that the coming elections, *if we have elections at all*, take place under democratic circumstances. We should mould the path to the elections so that if we have elections, they will be carried out in a democracy.” She ended her presentation by offering three suggestions for campaigns/demands: “The state of emergency should be lifted; laws by decree should be nullified; and we should

⁶³ The parliament under the control of AKP changed a law on the day of the referendum, allowing unstamped ballots to be counted. This gave way to millions of invalid votes to be counted as valid.

pay more attention to local problems, because this would bring in more participants and help to fight the everyday fascist discourse of the regime”.

In this presentation, there are three main points: The first is that the future is dark and uncertain. Everyone agrees at this stage; this is “open fascism” and the demand is democracy against this regime. We observe the uncertainty in her passing remark, “if we have elections at all”. The scheduled political plan says November 2019, but the presenter considers the possibility of the elections being called off. Secondly, she puts forth an argument: “There can be no election without democracy”. Here, the assumption is that elections will be cancelled altogether, or that people will boycott them. This assumption considerably lessens the possibility of an election taking place in the near future. And thirdly, she concentrates on the process leading to the elections in 2019, putting democratization chronologically first, and the elections second. When she was asked, “I agree that we might find ourselves living under open fascism any time now. Do we have duties that are particular to today? I mean, what are we going to do in case of an election?”, her answer captured these three points perfectly. She replied point-blank, “the election is not of any interest to me today, we have a year and a half to go. As long as we can shape the conditions that lead to the elections, we won’t need to do much afterwards”.

The second group felt otherwise. The fourth presentation was by a man who was a member of one of the socialist parties within the HDP. He started with two interrelated questions that he thought we should ask ourselves: “How do we stop fascism from being institutionalized?” and “over which common denominator can we build a united front for the struggle against fascism?”. He then expanded the first presenter’s formulation: “Demanding democracy against the one-man regime, we must unify the democratic forces”. According to this view, it did not matter so much

whether the elections were going to happen. The issue was not an either-or between campaigning for the elections versus the state of emergency. “Dictatorship and civil war await us either way. To prepare for the new order, we should have a united front. The two opposition parties in the parliament, CHP and HDP, should cooperate for such a front, but they will not unless their support bases put pressure on them from below. This coming together from the bottom up can only be accomplished through the assemblies, since they are not associated with any political party. Being prepared for what is to come can only be possible if we are able to implement a democratic culture in these spaces”. He ended his presentation by commenting on the use of the elections: “There might be snap elections, so we have to be ready for it. But more importantly, we must use the elections as a way to mobilize and organize people into local assemblies so that we can become political actors and have an effect on the CHP and the HDP.” Except for a few who rarely attended the meetings, the room seemed to be in agreement throughout this presentation, nodding, and occasionally expressing verbal approval (e.g. “exactly!”). That is probably why there were not many questions, except for an older socialist who expressed his scepticism by saying, “to ask for a revolution is easier than doing this”.

If we compare this presentation with the previous one, we see that they are similar in their views about the temporal landscape: The situation is getting worse, it is a dictatorship, and there might even be a civil war. All options seem bad. They also agree on uncertainty: The presenter does not know if and when we should expect elections. However, we get the sense that he expects a snap election, first because he suggests using it for larger political goals, but also because he was a participant in the splinter meeting. Both sides view democracy or democratization as the ultimate goal,

but the second presenter, considering the elections as a tool, places the elections chronologically before the attainment of democracy.

Bringing back Ann Mische's dimensions, activists' dystopian imaginary had a long-term reach in the sense that it covered an extensive future, even though *when* that future would begin was unclear. It was a near-future that extended into the further timescape and defined the whole, ranging from individual biographies and everyday experiences to possibilities of collective action to the shaping of political history. The dystopian future was rushing towards us, but its realization was contingent on our ability or inability to make use of political opportunities, at a time when they were perceived to be contracting. In terms of breadth, actors imagined the future to be heading in a dystopian direction, but there were multiple possibilities for action in the short and medium term.

A shared dystopian imaginary was not enough to unite activists under a common agenda. Although the struggle was framed as a struggle for democracy against fascism, the disruption of the political schedule meant that different persons and groups anticipated disparate opportunities for action. Although the disparity in anticipations was not necessarily conflicting, they were competing interpretations that led to the dissolution – or transformation – of the assembly.

The competing anticipations were multi-layered, and it was in these layers that lay the source of the divergence. The first group, which objected to campaigning for the elections at the time, saw the elections as fixed in 2019. The second, pro-campaign group accounted for a wider range of scenarios, not only about the date of the elections, but also about how different political actors (parties, leaders, organizations, the state, etc.) might act. In this sense, the second project was both wider in breadth (range of scenarios) and higher in its degree of sociality (relationships between different actors'

actions). In terms of volition, while the first group perceived the next elections as moving away from us, as something that might not happen at all, the second group thought it was running towards us, as something that could happen any time. Accordingly, the reach of each imaginary differed. Whereas the first group focused more on what to do until the elections, the second group offered a project with a long-term reach: Elections had to be used as a political tool for the development of the local assemblies, which would be the basis of organizing and mobilizing people against the fascist regime of the future.

I add two more to Mische's dimensions that were arguably more prominent in the discussions: Pace and sequence. Pace refers to the tempo or rhythm at which future occurrences are imagined to happen. Sequencing refers to the chronological order of the anticipated events. The two groups diverged regarding these dimensions. The first expected a slower pace, and a chronological order where the elections came last. The second awaited the continuation of the fast pace of politics and put the possibility of a snap election earlier in their imagined chronology. These differences produced different orientations: Shaping the process until 2019 versus being prepared and organizing for the snap elections and beyond, respectively.

The second project turned out to be more ambitious than the first one. The meeting ended on a friendly note, but the assembly drew less and less activists and eventually disintegrated, also since the splinter group grew into a different, elections-oriented assembly and attracted more people. This new assembly, however, was far from the vision of the second presentation, and they remained focused solely on the elections (on ballot safety, to be precise). One of their main organizers was imprisoned right after the assembly was established, and a small group splintered off from that group as well. Interestingly, the head of the association whose members fiercely

objected to campaigning for the elections was elected as an HDP MP in the snap elections of June 2018.

Conclusion

If I were to analyse this data in terms of structures of opportunity and threat, like social movement theorists often do, I would expect to find continuing alliance between diverse political groups that agreed, at least, on how to move forward. I would expect everyone involved to cooperate because they all agreed that they were in the same struggle against the same threat; namely, the struggle for democracy against fascism. In other words, the frame by which they constructed the situation was the same. Moreover, the stakes were so high for activists that I would assume they could not afford to dismantle an assembly that had become a model for all the others; that proved itself, during the referendum campaign, to be an efficient structure capable of attracting participants and mobilizing them. Instead, what happened was the bifurcation of the assembly, where different collectivities adopted divergent tactics and orientations towards the 2018 elections. Explaining this divergence through differing interests or goals would not be plausible as both sides of the conflict framed them in the same way. An explanation involving sectarianism or factionalism would entail a circular logic where factionalism-as-outcome would be explained by factionalism-as-cause, conflating the *explanandum* with the *explanan*. The data presented here would not sit squarely within a long- versus short-term goals/outcomes framework either, because the core of the disagreement was not short-term goals *per se*; once the 2018 elections were announced, both sides campaigned for them in one form or another. That is, the importance of the elections as a short-term goal was not

the source of contention. Instead, it was the mismatch between the different dimensions of anticipations about the near-future in a high-stakes political environment.

In this chapter, I argued that the disintegration of the assembly was best explained by the activists' competing interpretations and anticipations about the future. I tried to show how the divergence in orientations and trajectories was the result of;

1. A shifting temporal landscape (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013): Regime change led to the disruption of the rhythm of politics in general and of the regular calendar of politics in particular. This disruption prompted uncertainty, anxiety, and an urge to act to reverse the awaited course of events. Foretalk (Gibson, 2012) became the dominant conversational mode, where activists attempted to orient themselves with regards to the anticipated political situation, and to “coordinate futures” (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013) with one another.
2. A shared dystopian imaginary concerning the extended future and a specific experience of time: The transition to authoritarianism and the disruption of the political schedule affected activists' future imaginings and brought about a dystopian imaginary. However, this common vision was not sufficient to coordinate action. The stakes were high, and a fascist future was moving towards us; in this sense, there was no time. Simultaneously, there was a multiplicity of possibilities and routes from which to choose; in this sense, time slowed down. Actors in the political field had to reorient themselves with regards to the various scenarios they anticipated. These scenarios constituted the content of foretalk.

3. Scenarios about what would happen next that differed in their reach, breadth, clarity, volition, and sociality (Mische, 2009), as well as in pace and sequencing: Choices made during this period were particularly critical, as they were perceived as a last chance to prevent a dreadful scenario from coming true. Events held historical, political, and personal stakes. In this context, the assembly was unable to agree on a scenario even though they were not conflicting ones.

What activists attempted to develop in these meetings was a “feel for the game”, a way to predict the political schedule and orient themselves, and one another, with respect to that plan. When their projected futures did not match, the group came apart. We know that in times of drastic historic change, prediction and orientation involve making calculations and miscalculations (Ermakoff, 2008) and trying to re-establish a shared sense of what the story is (Wagner-Pacifici, 2010). In this paper, I tried to show how even though both sides of the conflict imagined the future to be fascistic, they came up with different tactics and followed distinct trajectories based on their differing expectations. I argue that this has significant implications for the theory of social movements.

As I have mentioned, social movement theory is not oblivious to temporality. It has been taken into consideration in theories of participation (e.g. McAdam, 1986) and movement outcomes (e.g. Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Su, 2010). The political process model (McAdam, 1999) theorizes the role of opportunity - and to a lesser extent the role of threat (Goldstone & Tilly, 2001) - in movement politics. Although these theories imply time as a factor in movement participation, trajectories, and

outcomes, temporality in general and future projections in particular have not been systematically mobilized as a necessary explanatory dimension of activism.

The debates analysed in this chapter are fundamentally debates about strategy and framing, which bring us to “collective action frames” (Gamson, 1992) and “frame alignment” (Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986) in social movement studies. The former is composed of three elements: An emotionally appealing definition of injustice, a clearly defined identity that delineates “us” from “them, and a consideration of agency (Gamson, 1992, p. 7-8). The frame alignment process involves bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation (Snow et al., 1986). Both concepts are anchored in the assumption that movement actors have to take into consideration how their decisions, actions, or frames will be received by a broader public. In other words, they construct frames expecting a positive reaction from the public or their target audience, hence their strategic character. The element of expectation is inherent in the framing literature.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this conclusion, both sides of the conflict that split up the assembly framed the threat in the same way: They anticipated a dystopian temporal landscape in the distant future. This agreement can be viewed as serving as a collective action frame where all of the actors involved agree, in this case at both the individual and the collective levels, on the threat of a fascistic regime. It is a specific “reading of Turkish politics” as K., quoted above, put it in his interview. But this collective action frame did not lead to action as the literature on frames would expect. Can we explain this puzzle as the frame alignment process gone wrong?

Throughout the chapter, I have tried to show that the knot that could not be untied was indeed caused by a misalignment, although it was not the misalignment of the frames of different groups or groupings within the assembly. The discussions

involved some degree of the frame alignment process in the sense that activists considered how their choices would resonate with the general public, which took the form of talking about what is or is not on the public's agenda. However, the fit between activists' framing (of the problem, the solution, and the motivation) was only part of the discussion and not the central issue. As I have argued, the misalignment, or the mismatch as I phrased it in the chapter, was between each side's envisioning of the near future. More precisely, the conflict was over the political schedule, caused by the guesswork that had to go into predicting when the next elections would take place, if at all. That is why foretalk was the dominant mode of the conversations during this period.⁶⁴

To the extent that the conflict can be described as a temporal mismatch, the concept of "temporal blindspots" put forth by Robin Wagner-Pacifici and Colin Ruggero (2018) is closer to what I describe in this chapter. The term refers to "coordinative disjunctures" within and across different levels – whether they be individual, interactional, organizational, or movement – that have a stymieing effect on social movements (p. 2). Wagner-Pacifici and Ruggero argue that individual temporalities and how they intersect with each other or with the temporality of the movement constitute the movement's temporalities. They introduce the notion of "temporal ideologies", defined simply as systematic "ideologies about time itself" (p. 2-3), as constitutive of temporal blindspots. Temporal ideologies and experiences of time include "the relative importance of history, specific historical experiences, and the precedents of prior social and political movements; the prioritizing of temporal commitments that vary over the stages of the life-course (work time, family time, civic

⁶⁴ Perhaps a "master frame" (Snow & Benford, 1992), an agreed-upon set of cultural values proven to be resonant by earlier movements which could then be used in other contexts, would solve these issues but that is a different level of analysis than what I have in this chapter.

time); explicit commitments to temporal refigurations (e.g. prefigurational politics); the inter-relations of time, fatigue, and commitments to egalitarianism (e.g. participatory democracy's 'endless meetings' in Polletta's [2002] framing)" (p. 3). In this list, the broad category of temporal ideologies does not include orientations to the future, even though they are attentive to questions regarding the future throughout the article.⁶⁵ I therefore believe that the process that I have described in this chapter speaks to this concept even though it is about anticipatory action rather than the elements listed above.

Based on the above definition of temporal blindspots, we can view the conflict between different visions of the near future (i.e., scheduling of the elections) as a blindspot in the discussions we have witnessed in this chapter. As much as what I have described was a "coordinative disjuncture" whose point of contention was temporality, I used the word "mismatch" followed by "in anticipations", "in expectations", or "in different temporal frameworks" throughout the chapter as I think phrasing it this way captures more precisely the process that I describe, in which competing anticipations are co-present, acknowledged, and fought over. Moreover, the word "blindspot" suggests an obstructed point of view, a point that is out of sight. At the assembly, the two different approaches to the future that were being debated was not out of sight, they were not ignored either; quite the opposite, the conflict was very openly about what would happen next. And this was so important a factor in terms of the stakes involved in making strategic decisions, as well as for trajectory of the movement, that finding the middle ground to make way for coordinating action was perceived as

⁶⁵ For example, the future appears to be quite decisive in a tense situation, when a participant asks at a meeting "what happens after occupation?" (p. 8), or in the section where the authors discuss endurance and duration (p. 9-13).

impossible, even though the threat of fascism dictated an alliance on the part of the opposition, of which the assemblies were a part.

In light of the discussions in this conclusion, I hope the findings of this chapter to contribute to a temporal approach to social movement studies. As I have argued, framing, which might have seemed at the outset to be the most likely explanation of the case at hand, falls short of taking into consideration the temporal intricacies of internal strategic discussions of activist groups. Temporal blindspots, a concept that is based on an approach that explicitly takes temporality as its explanatory tool, is much closer to the process described here, although I use temporal mismatch (whether it be in the form of a mismatch in anticipations, or a mismatch in expectations, etc.) to capture the workings of that process.

To conclude: Around the time of the referendum and especially in its aftermath, the assembly was concerned with predictions about the volatile and uncertain political schedule that lay ahead of us. The timescale with which we were dealing varied from the near future to the distant future. More precisely, the near future was so volatile and unpredictable, as well as so critical for the shape that the distant future would take that it tended to contract into the present or stretch out into the future according to the different scenarios that were sketched out. At the most basic level, activists were trying to overturn a dreaded future by positioning themselves according to their anticipations of the near future – in this case, the possibility of an election and the steps other actors would take. In the next chapter, we will see how activists' temporal orientation changes yet again. As the 2018 presidential and general elections first appear on the horizon as a fixed date, then end up being lost, the eventful temporality of the landscape is replaced with an uneventful one where expectations of

substantial political change are allocated to a far away, distant future, without a clear referent or object.

Chapter 5

Defeat, Hope, and Historical Embeddedness: The 2018 Elections

In the previous chapter, we have seen how the assembly split up in January 2018, in spite of its participants' shared understanding of the threat and their shared conviction that the only viable strategy moving forward was to continue working together. Even though the period with which that chapter was concerned was a particularly eventful one that presented a variety of opportunities to act on (e.g., laws by decree, the state of emergency, hunger strikes), as well as a multiplicity of political directions to take (from doing local politics to pressuring the opposition parties in the parliament to form an alliance), the assembly could not coordinate their actions as a group. I have argued, by examining a series of meetings that marked the dissolution of the assembly, that the main reason behind the split was the temporal mismatch between different future imaginings. Activists' future imaginings were about the political schedule in the near future. To be more precise, they were debating whether the next elections would be held at all; whether they would be held in 2019 as scheduled; and if not, when they would be held.

The elections were indeed held, albeit earlier than expected, as I will explain shortly. In this chapter, I look at the period immediately before and after the elections that were held in 2018. The elections were regarded as a defeat by the activists, unlike the ambiguous results of the 2017 referendum which had been rigged and in which the difference between the "yes" and "no" votes was marginal.⁶⁶ The conjuncture of this

⁶⁶ The "yes" vote won by 51.41% of the overall votes, against 48.59% of "no" votes. Independent institutions, international institutions, and opposition parties alike have reported fraud both during and before the elections. See the previous chapter for more details.

period led to the waning of political and temporal agency on the part of the activists. The eventfulness of the previous period gave way to a flattened temporal landscape where expectations of new political opportunities were scant. In this context, I seek to understand how activists regained their sense of agency after defeat. I focus on the talk of hope that became dominant among activists in this period.

I find that activists placed themselves within a broader time frame of ongoing struggle – a narrative of historical embeddedness that is oriented towards the future – which enabled hope and action. By differentiating between two types of hope and pessimism and the temporal orientations of each, I argue that hope emerges as a political resource to be created, maintained, and mobilized in the context of defeat. I suggest that social movement theory's conceptualization of hope as anticipation of success is insufficient in the case of defeat and shrinking opportunities. In the conclusion, I attempt at a reconceptualization of hope as a political resource that encompasses not only the emotion of hope, but also the cognitive consideration of possibilities, a future-oriented historical embeddedness, a concurrent relationship with pessimism, and the imperative of action.

In the context of a suffering economy and a boosted nationalist sentiment followed by the military occupation of Afrin, the westernmost canton of Rojava in northern Syria, the presidential and general elections ended up being held on 24 June 2018, instead of November 2019 as previously scheduled. This was a particularly significant election as it was the first presidential and general elections after the 2017 constitutional referendum, in which sweeping executive powers were handed over to the office of the president. The post of the prime minister was abolished; the neutrality of the president was no longer an obligation, which enabled Erdogan to continue his affiliation with his party, the Justice and Development Party (Turkish abbreviation

AKP); the President appointed members of the cabinet; and the ministers' power to initiate a vote of no confidence was removed.

There were two main alliances running for parliament: The People's Alliance (*Cumhur İttifakı*) and the Nation Alliance (*Millet İttifakı*). The former was made up of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). The second consisted of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), the splinter nationalists of Good Party (İYİP), and the Islamist Felicity Party (SP). The pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) ran by itself. If the Nation Alliance performed well and the HDP got over the 10% electoral threshold, the AKP would lose its majority of the parliament. The HDP did get over the threshold, but the parliament remained under the control of the AKP-MHP alliance.

As for the presidential race, Erdogan of the AKP, Muharrem Ince of the CHP, the imprisoned Selahattin Demirtas of the HDP, and Meral Aksener of the İYİP were running. If, on June 24th, none of the candidates won more than 50% of the votes, there would be a second round in July, in which the two candidates who got the most votes would run. Erdogan won in the first round with 52% of the votes. He was followed by CHP's Ince with 30% and HDP's Demirtas with 8% of the votes.

Finding Patterns: Why Study Hope?

The first time I was made aware of the political significance of hope was the night of the referendum in 2017, as a result of a social "mistake". I had been at the ballots the whole day; involved in quarrels with the head of the voting observation committee – a woman from the AKP – as well as the police forces to get on the bus with my sack

of votes⁶⁷ to ensure its safe and unadulterated travel to the collection centre. By the time I was done with elbowing my way through, hostility, fights, signatures, and documentation, the results had already taken shape. When I arrived at the bar that was our planned meeting point, we had lost. I was slipped a glass once I got there; the sale of alcohol was prohibited on election day, but people shared. I spotted two close friends outside the bar and asked, “did we really lose?” They replied at the same time, with slightly different takes on the situation, in a way that was to become emblematic of the period that followed: “let’s see” and “yes, my dear”.⁶⁸ Three months of campaigning and a day spent at the ballots – all gone to waste. I was devastated. Like many others, I was surprised at my reaction: had I really believed that we could win, that they would let us win? I kept asking people, looking for a real answer, “what do we do now?”. My “now” was often taken literally, perhaps because it lent itself to easier answers: “we drink now”, “let’s wait for the official results”, “we take to the streets”, or a desperate shrug of the shoulders. I was looking for a more programmatic answer, however, or for someone who knew what to do in the long term.

There was one person, a friend and an assembly participant, whose usual upbeat demeanour remained shockingly and bewilderingly unchanged that night. His response to my question of what to do not only explained his attitude, but also revealed a specific outlook on political action which I was going to encounter – and observe as a pattern – many more times after the 2018 elections. He replied in a calm and matter-

⁶⁷ Turkey uses paper ballots. Setting up the ballot box and the voting booths, sorting and recording of the ballots before the voting starts, and counting and transporting the ballots to the official collection centre are all done by citizens who have volunteered, through a political party, to be a polling clerk on the day of the elections. At the end of the day, the votes, envelopes, pens, and everything provided by the government, that comes in a sack in the morning, is put back into the same sack, and sealed. These sacks are then transported to the main collection centre via a police bus, accompanied by the head of the polling committee and up to two other clerks, along with the official report.

⁶⁸ The previous chapter explored this period, in which an urge to act was accompanied by the inability to act together. In the same vein, the referendum was officially lost, but the high “yes” rate was also a win. This in-betweenness of the activist situation in that period is what I mean in this sentence. It changed when the elections were lost and perceived as a defeat.

of-fact fashion, as if my question was a no-brainer: “we’ll do what we’ve always done. The struggle continues. Nothing ends here”. As reassuring as it was to be around people who did not simply despair and give up, I could not help but feel devastated, completely destroyed. I sat on the sidewalk across the bar for a while, trying to make sense of it.

My devastation was picked up by a close friend (and assembly participant) and it came up whenever we talked about that night. He half-jokingly, half-seriously scolded me and a couple of others: “you were in shambles, you were devastated, totally hopeless. You guys were a disgrace!” I defended myself by saying that I was devastated only until we took the decision to protest the results, but the point was taken. To be hopeless was a faux pas, a breaking of the norm.

The fact that I was reproached and admonished for being hopeless meant that I had made a social “mistake”. I had failed to follow the “feeling rules” of the specific social context I was in, and to “manage” my emotions in response to them (Hochschild, 1979). This situation sensitized me to the role of hope in activism, and the particular temporal orientations generated by defeat that buttressed hope’s political function. So, the seeds of this chapter, even though it takes as its main focus the 2018 elections, were planted at an earlier moment of defeat.

Hope in Social Movement Theory, Sociology, and Anthropology

The literature on the role of emotions in social movements has established that emotions are an important factor in the emergence, sustainability, organizational choices, frames, and tactical logics of movements. Movement organizers use emotions strategically to motivate or sustain action and movement organizations (Gould, 2002),

to build and maintain networks (Taylor & Rupp, 2002), to attract supporters (Perry, 2002), and to specify strategies and audiences (Gould, 2002; Kim, 2002). Emotions are especially important for the internal solidarity and informal networks of groups that rely on friendship and consensus in their activism (Polletta, 2002). Feminist – and other – movements work to transform feelings that inhibit collective action such as shame and guilt into active and politicized emotions (Reger, 2004; Ahmed, 2017). One such politicized emotion is anger, which figures prominently as a precondition for action (Collins, 1990; Castells, 2015). Hope is another.

Hope has been conceptualized in social movement theory as the expectation of positive impact or success (e.g., Jasper, 1998; Kemper, 2001; Summers-Effler, 2002; Gupta, 2009), and therefore, a driver of action (Jasper, 2011) and recruitment (Klandermans, 1984; McAdam, 1986). James M. Jasper (2011) places hope on the positive pole of what he calls “moral batteries” which have a negative and a positive pole, where the tension or conflict between opposing emotions spark action. Similarly, Erika Summers-Effler (2002) includes hope in what she calls “emotional energy”⁶⁹. She states that a high level of emotional energy, defined as “a feeling of positive expectations for future interactions, or a feeling of hope” (p. 53-54), is needed when the risk of participation is high, and the prospects of positive outcomes are low. More precisely, she states that “hope is required to inspire subversive action. Hope is the anticipation that struggle will produce positive results ... It is based in both emotional circumstances and the cognitive assessment of the risk involved in participation” (p. 53, emphasis added). Her formulation, along with other scholars of emotions working within the field of social movement studies, evokes what McAdam (1982) termed “cognitive liberation” as one of the three necessary conditions for social insurgency:

⁶⁹ See also Collins (2001) in Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta (2001).

“While important, expanding political opportunities and indigenous organizations do not, in any simple sense, produce a social movement” (p. 48). “Before collective protest can get under way, people must collectively define their situations as unjust and *subject to change* through group action” (p. 51, emphasis added). The term *cognitive* liberation is closer to the Marxist conception of consciousness and McAdam does not go into a discussion of emotions in the cited book. Its temporal consideration, i.e. the necessary conviction that collective action *can and/or will* bring about change, is what converges here with the current discussion about the relationship between futurity and hope, in the form of assessing the risks and the possibility of positive outcomes.

Three points emerge out of this literature that are important for the discussion in this chapter: first, that emotions, including hope, are used *strategically* by movement actors; and second, closely tied to the strategic use of emotions, hope can be a *resource* for political action, both in the initial mobilisation stage and in its sustainment. The third point to be emphasized is the conceptualisation of *hope as the expectation of positive impact*. Although this conceptualisation applies to certain contexts, my field work and the specificities of its political context require that we expand this conceptualisation to include conjunctures where the expectation of success or a positive outcome is unrealistic, at least in the foreseeable future. A further limitation of hope as conceptualised by social movement scholars is the under-theorisation of temporality inherent in the concept. Even though the temporal dimension of hope is acknowledged, as is evident in the use of words like “anticipation” or “expectation”, no further elaboration in terms of the temporalities of hope has been made. In this literature, hope is not theorized in relation to specific conceptualisations or experiences of time – to temporality – and not in the context of

defeat and shrinking opportunities. Furthermore, the question of hope in a context of defeat requires an understanding of hope's relationship to agency. In contrast to the way hope has been conceptualized in the literature, the main question for the opposition around the time of the 2018 elections in Turkey was to find – more precisely, to *purposefully create*, as we will see – hope in a seemingly hopeless future.

For a more complex formulation of hope, I will briefly turn to the broader sociological literature on the concept and recent work in anthropology. I believe an overview of the work done on hope in these two disciplines is useful to understand how it has been conceptualised in relation to temporality and agency, specifically. In sociology, hope and temporality have been a topic of interest in studies of youth, in medical sociology, and in the sociology of work (Cook & Cuervo, 2019). In a recent attempt at bringing together different conceptualisations of hope in sociological work, Cook and Cuervo (2019) discuss the relationship between hope, futurity, and agency. Reviewing this literature, they identify two different treatments of hope. The first is “a hoped-for outcome situated in the future” and the second is “the role of hope in coping with the present” (p. 2). Self-evident in these characterizations are two temporal orientations: a future-oriented hope and a present-centred one. Underlying both is the question of agency. Some, like Kuehn and Corrigan (2013), take hoping as an indication of the lack of agency, while others like Alacovska (2018) find that it is constitutive of agency and a way of coping with the present, as an informal labour practice. The “work of hope”, as Pedersen (2012) has phrased it, is generative of agency in this line of thought.

Cook and Cuervo (2019) do not offer a definitive answer to the question of the relationship between hope, futurity, and agency, but argue that the two approaches to hope, one that takes hope as future-oriented and the other that takes it as present-

centred, correspond to two modes of hoping. They characterize the two modes as representational hope and non-representational hope, respectively. The former seeks to achieve a goal, or to obtain something in the future; it has a referent, an object. The latter does not have a clear object or objective to be attained. They find that modes of hoping change over time, that a change in one's sense of agency does not necessarily indicate a loss of hope but a switch to a different mode of hoping, and that social position is a determinant of the work that goes into maintaining hope (p. 6).

In my field site, I find it extremely difficult to distinguish between a future-oriented hope and a present-centred one. As I will demonstrate in the coming sections, hope is already recognized as a political resource by activists, a resource that has to be created in the present and mobilized in the future when an opportunity arises. The collective creation of hope, then, becomes a long-term project that should be built starting from the present day. Acts of hope, as I call it, or the "work of hope" (Pedersen, 2012), do not only require a sense of agency but it is also generative of it. So, the hope that activists in my field site were trying to generate was the non-representational type where there was no immediate object to be attained. However, generating hope was an objective in itself *in the present*. The longer-term objective was to strategically use hope to be able to mobilize more people *in the future*. I will argue that the switch to a particular sense of temporality enabled hoping in a situation where hope did not have a referent.

The anthropological literature on hope offers some helpful insights into the concept as I develop it here. I build on anthropologist Hiro Miyazaki's work on hope where, following Ernst Bloch, he develops the notion of hope as a method of self-knowledge and as a psychosocial resource. According to Miyazaki (2004), the legal struggle of the Suvavou in Fiji to reclaim their ancestral land from the government

was a way of confirming their identity, of self-knowing. In the face of repeated rejections from the government, Miyazaki asks how the Suvavou could insist on hoping. He finds that the indeterminacy of their hope, stemming from the “not-yet” nature of hope’s future-orientation, also helped to sustain it. “Indeterminacy is not, therefore, a given condition, but a condition to be achieved...the indeterminate character of self-knowledge is strategically created” (ibid., p. 84). Indeterminacy is indeed a condition to be achieved in my field site during the period under scrutiny in this chapter. I will demonstrate below how the dystopian imaginations of the previous period in Chapter 4 are toned down in this chapter, in a bid to dissipate the determinism of the earlier dystopia; hence, making way for a horizon of possibilities, albeit in an undefinable, distant future.

Miyazaki further argues that the struggle itself sustained hope. In this sense, the struggle generates hope, as much as hope enables the struggle (2004, Chapter 4). This last point is evident in the section where I discuss acts of hope, when activists from the assembly start getting involved in alternative activist networks with very different politics; the assemblies aiming at national institutional politics, and the others concentrating on building everyday life and maintaining relations. So, the struggle itself serves to generate hope as Miyazaki suggests, just as much as hope is needed to sustain the struggle. Contrary to Vincent Crapanzano who states, “one hopes – one waits – passively for hope’s object to occur, knowing realistically that its occurrence is unlikely, even more so because one does nothing to bring it about” (2003, p. 18), following Miyazaki, I find that this type of hope necessitates the deployment of an active notion of hope rather than a passive one where hoping is synonymous with waiting or paralysis. Quite the opposite; hope is used as a strategic resource to be produced and mobilized for future action.

The main concern of this chapter is *how* hope is created and maintained by activists, but the context in which hope is engendered is an important factor that is implicit in the analysis. In this regard, I take another anthropologist, Ghassan Hage's formulation of the "distribution of hope" across society as a helpful model to think about the state's role in this process, and activists' position within it. Hage (2003) argues that "societies are mechanisms for the distribution of hope, and that the kind of affective attachment (worrying or caring) that a society creates among its citizens is intimately connected to its capacity to distribute hope" (p. 3). Looking at questions of migration and hope in the context of neoliberal capitalism, he makes the connection between the unequal distribution of hope across society and the dominant social and political phenomena that a specific society adheres to, such as nationalism or racism. In my case, the Turkish state, in its attempts at establishing a new political order, can be said to distribute hope unequally: while promising a hopeful future, stability, and welfare to some citizens (i.e. its constituency), it closes down avenues for a hopeful future by laws by decree, criminalization, or imprisonment for others in the opposition. The unequal distribution of hope makes reclaiming hope for the purpose of future action a resource and a strategy for change. In this chapter, I will argue that activists work to reclaim hope through a specific temporal framework.

Introducing terms: hopes and pessimisms

The day before the presidential and general elections, on 23 June 2018, when asked about his predictions, one of the organizers of the local assemblies, F., replied that he had calculated the amount of votes that the government would need to rig to win the majority in the first round. It was a considerable amount, but not an impossible task

for the government. He thought that we would vote for a second round, but then he added: “I’ll go for revolutionary pessimism and say that they will win. If not in the first round, in the second one”.

The second time I heard the phrase “revolutionary pessimism” was during an interview with an activist historian and translator.⁷⁰ When I asked him about a time or an event when he felt hopeful, he only cited Gezi. Intrigued, I asked him about the 2015 elections (I knew he was involved in the campaign for the HDP) and the 2017 referendum. He said he took elections seriously, but that they did not bring about the same sense of empowerment (*muktedirleşme*) as a mass protest. Then, about the referendum, he said: “I more or less anticipated the results, I was not surprised. I always believed in revolutionary pessimism [he smiles]. Actually, I was happy. The results were good, I mean, we won Istanbul and Ankara... We were ahead of the AKP in Uskudar [a conservative neighborhood that traditionally votes AKP], and so on, it was a success”. He listed the facts to be happy about, but his voice was flat, growing faint towards the end of his sentence. His revolutionary pessimism kept him from getting his hopes up by the results, however positive they might be.

I interpret revolutionary pessimism to mean something similar to a phrase associated with Antonio Gramsci: “pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will”.⁷¹ Being pessimistic in this sense is to understand historical continuity, referring to an acknowledgment of structure and how it shapes possibilities. It is not a coincidence that F. often called for “a concrete analysis of a concrete situation”, quoting Lenin, during meetings when strategy was at stake. For those who want to make a break with the existing system, however, analysis simultaneously calls for a collective will that

⁷⁰ The two people who used this phrase come from different political traditions. Roughly, one comes from a Marxist-Leninist tradition and the other from a Trotskyist one.

⁷¹ See *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (eds. Hoare and Smith, 1992) page 175, footnote 75.

challenges the limits of possibilities and strives for change. This is why “optimism of the will” is such a crucial resource that needs to be produced, maintained, and searched for (especially) when faced with defeat. Pessimism of the intellect, therefore, implies structure, continuity, history; optimism of the will implies agency, change, and the future. Political action requires both.

I draw on Terry Eagleton’s (2015) term “hope without optimism” to distinguish between hope and optimism. According to Eagleton, hope assumes the feasibility and possibility of attaining what one does not have in the present. It differs from optimism because hope requires working towards the desired outcome, whereas optimism essentially functions as a belief where the optimist thinks that things will work out because they always have, or because the world tends to work in favourable ways in general. In short, what distinguishes hope is the imperative of *working* to achieve the desired outcome. I use hope instead of optimism as my analytical category because in hope, there is effort and a forward motion.

I separate what I call “cautionary pessimism” from “debilitating pessimism”. The former is what appeared above as revolutionary pessimism or pessimism of the intellect. As I have already discussed, this type of pessimism refers to the acknowledgment of the power of the past, continuity, and structure to shape present and future circumstances. It is a matter of understanding the situation, of being able to analyse it well in order to strategize. It can also be used as a cautionary reminder of the past at times of hopefulness. The latter, debilitating pessimism, is the dictionary definition of the word: “a tendency to see the worst aspect of things or believe that the worst will happen; a lack of hope or confidence in the future” (Oxford Dictionary). This type of pessimism is frowned upon in my field site, just as hopelessness is

frowned upon. In this chapter, I will use the term pessimism to mean cautionary pessimism, unless otherwise stated.

I also distinguish between hope as anticipation of success and hope as a political resource. The first type is dominant in explorations of hope in social movement theory and is found in political environments where positive impact is feasible and a realistic possibility. Temporally, it usually refers to a consideration of possibilities in the near future, such as the next elections or whether or not to join a protest event. The emphasis here is on a short-term vision and the emotion of hope. The second type, what I call hope as a political resource, does not necessarily have an object or an immediately recognizable goal. It refers to the strategic use of hope where the political function of the emotion is recognized as a driver of action and is intentionally produced. Temporally, this type of hope is enabled by a political imagination that is embedded within a long-term vision of struggle. Hope thus made possible is produced by acting in the present (i.e. by joining alternative activist networks) to build movement capacity for later. Therefore, hope as a political resource is not only a driver of action, but is driven by action as well. Although I observed both types of hope in my field site during the period under scrutiny in this chapter, my contribution will be the reconceptualization of the second type. I will arrive at a fuller reconceptualization in the conclusion of this chapter, after having analysed the data.

I opened this section with a vignette about "revolutionary pessimism" and used Gramsci's famous quote to open up the concept. Inspired by this quotation and in line with Jasper's (2011) idea of the tension between oppositional emotions, I find that pessimism and hope are concurrent; they are often found together. This is doubly so in a situation where the prospect for change or the amelioration of the political situation is not a realistic expectation in the foreseeable future. Studying hope in an

"objectively" hopeless situation requires a conceptualization of hope that does not approach it only as an individual emotion. It is also not a type of "atmosphere" that we "sense" when we go into a room, or a co-constructed feeling or sensation that is pre-discursive or unspoken, as affect theorists would approach it (Massumi, 2015; Brennan, 2004; Ahmed, 2004). In fact, I do not know whether my interviewees were, indeed, *feeling* hopeful when they *said* they were hopeful. As we will see in the coming sections, the question of hope was often brought up by my interviewees when the conversation was getting darker and more debilitatingly pessimistic.

Temporal Agency and the Political Environment Before the 2018 Elections

The debates and discussions, meetings and protests, negotiations and conflicts, the analyses and the strategizing, and the efforts at coordination did not alter the status of the 2018 presidential and general elections as snap elections, referred to as the “*baskın seçim*” by the opposition at large. The word *baskın* in Turkish means a raid or a sudden attack. Much like the adjective “snap”, it denotes an act or a decision made on the spur of the moment, unexpectedly, or without prior notice. Even though the scheduling of the elections to an earlier time was not entirely unexpected, it nevertheless caught activists off guard, unprepared, despite the extensive talks after the referendum about the volatile political timetable, as detailed in the previous chapter. We were “busted”, to follow the raid analogy.

When I arrived in Istanbul a month before the elections, daily conversations revolved around predictions. Yet, I soon noticed how different the political atmosphere was than the period around the referendum; the grassroots liveliness of the

referendum campaign had disappeared. In stark contrast to the period before, I did not receive invitations to join meetings, protests, or gatherings to distribute flyers and posters. This translated into the materiality of the neighbourhood in the form of leftover scraps of posters and stickers from earlier campaigns on the walls and in cafes and bars. The streets were not littered on a regular basis with confettied flyers (*kuşlama*). Instead, there were party flags and banners on the billboards and hung between streetlamps. Political parties also had campaign tents by the docks – a transportation hub – where each cranked up the volume of their campaign jingles and handed out flyers or talked to those who showed interest. But even their campaigns, including the usual provocations of Erdogan, were dull, lifeless, unimpassioned.

Two main reasons account for this change of scenery: First, unlike the referendum that cut across party lines, presidential and parliamentary elections were ostentatiously the business of political parties. But even parties were “busted”, and it took some time for them to decide on their election strategy and candidates. Second, the local “no”/democracy assembly in the neighbourhood had disintegrated already because of reasons discussed in the previous chapter. There was no space in which the usual “grassroots” (i.e., non-partisan locals) could organize themselves. The “election assemblies” that splintered off from the local “no”/democracy assemblies only concentrated on ballot safety and registering volunteers to observe the voting process (*müşahit* and *sandık görevlisi*). This meant that they were not conducting a political campaign per se. Furthermore, they concentrated on districts that were more questionable in terms of ballot safety and did not hold local meetings in the neighborhood that I was in, which presumably had enough volunteers already. Neither was there the time or the consensus necessary among grassroots actors to mobilize an

independent election initiative like the one in 2015.⁷² In short, the ball was in the political parties' court this time.

At a meeting after the 2018 elections in July 2018, a participant that I did not know contrasted the political situation with the aftermath of the referendum: “We had the assemblies during the referendum; we could protest in spite of the CHP”. These two factors, the dissolution of the local assembly and national elections being in the sphere of party politics, led to a loss of political and temporal agency. The “if ...then” statements of the previous chapter assumed agency in that activists still saw avenues for political intervention: “a dystopian future awaits us *if* we don’t do something”. In this chapter, the “if...then” formulation gives way to the “what if...” where possibilities are considered without envisioning intervention. Thus, I define temporal agency as the sense of having control over one’s time, the ability to use time to further one’s own purposes, or to repurpose the time that is imposed for one’s own goals. One of the underlying themes in this dissertation is that the struggle over temporal agency is part of a larger power struggle. The state, and the authoritarian state in particular, has hegemony over time: it not only imposes a different political order through regime change, but also constantly disrupts the political schedule by referenda or snap elections, to get the upper hand in the political contest. If the hegemony over time is one way of exercising power (Auyero, 2012; Schwartz, 1974), repurposing time becomes part of the oppositional political struggle. The political atmosphere that I described above – from the material to the discursive, to the organizational – hints at the beginnings of a loss of, or a decrease in, temporal agency that will become accentuated with the defeat of the 2018 elections. This loss, in turn, will lead to a

⁷² E.g. There were independent election initiatives that campaigned for the HDP in the 2015 general elections from outside of the political party itself. I have described aspects of these initiatives in Chapter 3.

different understanding of time in the form of a narrative of historical embeddedness, which will then be used to justify and generate hope.

In keeping with the political atmosphere, scenarios about the 2018 elections oscillated between hope as anticipation of success in the short term and cautionary pessimism (also referred to above as revolutionary pessimism as pessimism of the intellect). A few days after I arrived in Istanbul, I was having drinks with friends at a bar in the buzzing centre of the neighborhood. They were all non-party-affiliated activists, S. being from the assemblies, O. a union organizer, and B. a feminist whose politics was closely aligned with the Kurdish Movement. As we were sipping our drinks, two “neighborhood guards”⁷³, a recent invention of the government, passed by that attracted our attention. Even though we were not entirely sure of their legal capacities, we all agreed that they were the government’s additional tool for more social control and criminalization. Then, B. started telling us what happened to a friend of hers who was a member of a party that was under attack by the government: the motorcycled police (*yunus*) did a stop-and-search to her friend, and looked through his texts and social media messages, before threatening him and letting him go. B. was worried because the police had seen her conversations with her friend. We asked her if she mentioned any names or places, to which she replied with a firm no, so we concluded that she should be safe.

After a brief silence, we started talking about the coming elections. Would Erdogan flee the country if he lost? This was a possibility, as he would be tried and found guilty of a number of crimes in the case where he and the AKP lost the elections. Would he give up that easily? And what about the professor who threatened the

⁷³ These are local armed officials that operate under the general security forces: https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/KANUNLAR_KARARLAR/kanuntbmmc049/kanuntbmmc049/kanuntbmmc04900772.pdf Accessed on 20 March 2019.

opposition on national television that they (AKP voters) would dig up the weapons they had buried under the Belgrade Forest in Istanbul if they lost?⁷⁴ What if Erdogan could not get more than half of the votes in the first round; would he do what he had done three years ago in 2015, or would he mobilize his supporters to use these mysterious weapons? He probably would, in one form or another; we agreed that he was not the type of person who would hesitate to use coercion and brute force. Would there be civil war? This was also a possibility, although we were not sure who the battling sides would be. Would the Kurdish Movement take part in this? Would “we”, the non-partisan activists participate in a civil war? Was “the opposition” a homogenous entity that could be a side in the conflict? Probably not. Would the military intervene? Most of us were sceptical about that possibility. We were all excited about the thought of Erdogan losing, even if only in the first round, because such a result would raise the opposition’s spirits and it would also be daunting for the government, but the possibilities of what would follow forced us to reconsider our excitement. This could, indeed, very quickly turn into another 7 June 2015 (i.e., a victory crushed by war and loss).

This snippet is a good illustration of the everyday life and concerns of activists at the time as well as a rundown on the possibilities that were being discussed on a national level. Question marks and “probably”s dominate the excerpt because we simply did not know. I kept hearing the phrase “anything can happen” which summarizes the situation well: when people talked about predictions about the

⁷⁴ Days before the elections, a university professor declared, on a television programme known for its strong adherence to Erdogan and the AKP, that they would unearth the guns they had buried in the Belgrade Forest for training, in case the results of the elections are not as they prefer. This declaration on television was taken by some in the opposition as evidence of the AKP’s losing, and by some as an open threat and a snapshot of what was to come in case Erdogan did not win. See the link for further information in Turkish: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/353271/belgrada-gomduklerimizi-cikaririz-diyen-ahmet-marankiye-sorusturma> Accessed on 20 March 2019.

elections, they frequently ended with a pensive “anything can happen...” This is the “what if...” formulation that I mentioned above at work, where the consideration of an outcome elicits a reaction, but no real possibility of intervention. Still, even though it was out of our control, the lifelessness of the election campaign combined with the threats of AKP supporters made it “feel” like it was a real possibility that Erdogan and the AKP would lose this time. Furthermore, the AKP needed the MHP to get the majority of the votes, and the MHP seemed like it was losing voters. Formerly a staunch critique of the AKP, the MHP’s sudden turn to this alliance was thought to be met with loss of constituency. Also, it had a new rival, the far-right nationalist IYIP. When the economic crisis was added to this picture, the ruling party looked like it was losing power.

Discussions about the possible outcomes of the elections dominated everyday conversation in the period leading to the elections. Most people were “hopeful” about the coming elections. This hopefulness was limited to the near future, however. This type of hope had more affinity with the act of prediction and possibilities in the short term. Although we thought that Erdogan and the AKP could lose, at least in the first round, given the dynamics of politics at the time, we were still being cautious. We were quick to remind ourselves that the elections could be rigged, and that Erdogan could use coercive measures like he had done in the past. In this case, cautionary pessimism can be viewed as guarding the activists against “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011), in which the hoped-for object or goal becomes an obstacle in the way of achieving the desired outcome. In other words, hopefulness about the near future was almost immediately combined with cautionary pessimism.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ Cautionary pessimism also guards against the “complicity of hope” (Parla, 2017), in which hope obscures more than it enables transformative politics. For Ayse Parla’s brilliant blog post on the complicity of hope during the political campaign for the referendum in 2017, visit:

Indeterminacy and hope as a political resource

My interviews contain the same cautiousness. E.A., a socialist historian who has been involved in the socialist struggle since the 1970s, although hopeful about the chance of Erdogan losing the first round, gave me a much longer and a more detailed account of what would happen if Erdogan won again. After stating his predictions for the economy and international relations, he said:

“it would mean *the continuation of the extant injustice that is even heavier today than it was in 12 September* [the military coup of 1980], and a government that cannot rule without the state of emergency. Therefore, rather than the possibility of a civil war, the period before us would be that of *continued injustice, social tension, arbitrary power, and lawlessness that makes one choose a death among deaths* [ölümlerden ölüm beğendiren].”

E.A.’s description of the time-to-come, of the not-so-distant future, is as vivid as descriptions about the future get in my field site. It is important that he uses the 1980 coup as a reference point that informs his experience in the present and expectations concerning the future. C.A. from the same generation of socialists as E.A. also compared the present to the violence of the 1980 coup:

“After July 15th [the 2016 military coup attempt], the difference between 1980 and today becomes clearer. There’s a saying; ‘to plant a fig tree in someone’s home’ [*ocağına incir ağacı dikmek*]⁷⁶, they attack with that determination. *The 1980 coup attacked only you, only the revolutionaries, leftists, and so on. They*

<https://politicalandlegalanthro.org/2017/05/03/the-complicity-of-hope/>. Accessed on 3 September 2019.

⁷⁶ This saying means to ruin someone’s livelihood and family.

didn't attack the Parliament and didn't meddle in people's lifestyle. But the present day is darker than that. The government attacks your friends, your relatives, your extended family."

The past makes an appearance as a comparative reference point that helps describe the present and informs future imaginings. The fact that my interviewees chose the 1980 coup as a comparable event is itself significant, as this period is associated with long-term imprisonment, torture, hunger strikes, deaths, and disappearances in collective memory. My interviewees from this generation have personal memories of these atrocities. Therefore, although the dystopian future (of the last chapter, Chapter 4) that is now "forthcoming" (i.e. much closer now) is never explicitly described in its gory details, this particular reference demonstrates the experience and anticipation of the state as an extremely repressive, all-encompassing, and violent one. Also, notice how this possible future is kept indeterminate. Indeterminacy is intended to keep people from debilitating pessimism, from despair.

For example, a soon-to-be HDP MP from the Turkish left, when I asked him what his predictions were for the 2018 elections, painted a fairly hopeful picture in which he was "excited" about "the multiplicity of steps that can be taken": "what they [the AKP and the MHP] plan and plot at the desk can suddenly be overturned by the opposition. After June 24th [the 2018 elections] that will be our starting point, I think. If not, we have nothing to lose. But we have the possibility of winning and changing [politics]. And that is sufficiently hope-inducing". I ask him about other scenarios, and he responds:

"Disastrous scenarios are to instil fear into us. I think some are quite consciously done and some are not, but they are caused by hate, anxiety, and fear [...] The struggle continues, even under the worst circumstances. If we lose, we will be

sad and demoralized but we have no choice but to continue with the struggle. What is essential is this: *they [the current government] will be defeated once and for all*. So, I think the left should represent this line of hope. *Defeats are of course important. They make it more difficult for us to get back on our feet the next time*. But let's not assign a bigger meaning to it than the continuation of the darkness of the past 16 years, nothing more. *One day, the darkness will be over and then the real struggle will begin.*"

Even though disastrous scenarios are not less likely to occur than positive scenarios, they should be suppressed – at least in conversation – because they lead to fear and, we can safely assume, to inaction. And this is exactly what my interviewee does in this interview. He talks about all the ways in which the opposition might come out stronger from the elections, and all the possibilities a positive outcome would entail, but he brushes over what a defeat would bring, except for sadness and demoralization, and some more difficulty in “getting back on our feet the next time”. But he quickly reverts to the end of darkness, which he places somewhere in the future. Only after this vague “one day” of the future when the reign of the AKP is over will the “real struggle” begin. The “one day” formulation does not only serve to make indeterminate the process between the present day and the future day of change. It also extends the horizon, the timescale in which change will take place, further into the future, instead of remaining within the timescale of electoral cycles.⁷⁷ I will come back to this point about the extension of the horizon of change in the next sections.

Indeterminacy here works like the ambiguity in the narratives of the 1960 student sit-ins, in which the students claimed that the protests were spontaneous (Polletta, 1999). Polletta finds that the spontaneity narrative was marked by the ambiguity of the process, which built the collective identity on which students took

⁷⁷ “Electoral cycle” might not be the right phrase to use in this case. Electoral shocks are more appropriate as they do not follow a neat cycle or a predetermined schedule.

action: “Sit-in stories – and their narrative form was crucial – also motivated action by their *failure* to specify the mechanics of mobilization. Their *ambiguity* about agents and agency, not their clarity, successfully engaged listeners” (1998, p. 138, italics in the original). What activists in my field site did, when they had to consider defeat, was similar to what the students in 1960 did in the sense that they, too, made the “mechanics” of the process ahead ambiguous to allow for action. Detailed scenarios about defeat would have the opposite effect.

Indeed, the debilitating type of pessimism came up as a possible, dreaded but anticipated result of the elections, both before and after the 2018 elections⁷⁸: “I don’t see the middle ground; the future before us will be a matter of either life or death [*ya herro, ya merro*]. Imagine! June 24th is already a defeat, and pessimism prevails. The pessimism of a lost local elections on top of that will be very difficult...” I asked him to clarify the difficulty: “I don’t know how long it would take for the opposition to recuperate”. Here, the dreaded defeat takes the form of an anticipated debilitating pessimism on the part of the opposition. More than the structural, institutional, and political effects of the defeat, this type of paralyzing pessimism was regarded as the outcome against which we should fight.

In this context where debilitating pessimism is defeat itself, hope emerges as a political resource:

“I read some of my generation’s writings in astonishment, the ones that say things like ‘do not get too hopeful, nothing is going to change, nothing will change even if the others come to power’. It’s as if people like me, whether they be from the Turkish Left or the Kurdish Movement, who try hard at the elections are under the illusion that we will have achieved the Revolution if we win the elections. *It’s true that none of the structural issues will change. But one thing will change*

⁷⁸ Local elections were coming up in March 2019.

and that is very important; the hope that structural issues can be changed, the possibility of staying side by side will be created.”

In this quotation, hope is explicitly connected to possibilities and to the future: winning the elections will bring about the possibility that some of the structural problems to be changed *can*, in the future, be changed. Hope in this sense is more than a state of feeling or emotion. It is not only an emotional reaction that emerges after the fact, or an offshoot of a political outcome, but a goal to be attained. I do not mean to say that hope does not feature as an emotion. I am, however, highlighting the temporal dimension of hope, and where it is situated in activists’ temporal orientation towards the future. Hope as a type of imaginary where the possibility of change is considered to be attainable in the future is treated here as a political resource. It is a political resource in that it can create the conditions, the favourable future orientation that perceives change as a possibility, which can be used to mobilize and organize the opposition, or at least to maintain it by “staying side by side”. It is a resource to build movement capacity.

One of the main issues this chapter and the activists that I study grapple with is where to find hope when the situation seems hopeless, and the past offers no meaningful openings for change in the foreseeable future. Like Miyazaki (2004), I find that indeterminacy is intentionally maintained to uphold hope, as a way of keeping the future open to opportunities so that action, or intervention into politics more generally, can logically still be perceived as possible. We see this intentional indeterminacy in activists’ projections of the future, in which a clear image of the future is not drawn, alluding instead to a past event – the military coup of 1980. In the same vein, activists’ reluctance to voice “disastrous scenarios” comes up as a resistance against debilitating pessimism, as a safeguard against pacification. Toning

down dystopian imaginations, in this case, indicates that activists affiliate certain emotions, like hope, with action.

When hope is recognized as a necessary driver of action, it becomes a resource – in my case, a political resource – to be created and mobilized in times of contracting possibilities. As we have seen in the discussion above, debilitating pessimism figures as an outcome of the elections that is dreaded, or at least verbalized, more than its structural effects. To counter this possible effect, and as preparation for a time when action will be possible, activists did not only resort to a discursive indeterminacy, but also a specific temporal narrative and practices to generate hope for future possibilities. I will come back to the latter two points in the sections that follow.

Defeat: the night of the elections

I had a long day at the ballots as an attendant from the HDP. It was a day spent sorting, counting, stamping, recording; as well as dealing with the attendants from the AKP, the IYIP and the CHP. By the time the votes were counted, disputes settled, and all the official reports were signed, the ballots had already started to be opened in the rest of the country. By the time I could leave the school I was assigned to, people had turned off the television in the common room in anger and frustration: there we were, in a room with a television in an elementary school, with our huge sacks of votes, waiting for the police to arrive so that we could transfer the sacks to the main collection point. Reports on TV, however, claimed that more than 60% of the ballots were already opened. Erdogan and the AKP were winning.

I hopped on a car with the other HDP attendants from my school and we drove back to our neighbourhood. On our way back, we passed by the AKP district

headquarters. In the streets that led to the headquarters, AKP supporters were honking their cars' horns, waving Turkish flags and flags with Erdogan's face on them, shouting their love for Erdogan in celebration of their electoral victory. It was loud and the traffic was not helping. When we parked our car near the HDP headquarters to hand in our official reports, it was a completely different scene. People were standing outside the building, some of whom I knew from the assemblies or other activist circles, smoking, chatting, and in general, looking sad. There was a sense of disbelief mixed with defeat and disappointment.

I started walking towards the café where I knew the election assemblies were gathered – if we win, to celebrate together; if we lose, to not be alone in difficult times. I was walking around in the centre of the neighbourhood – densely populated, lively, and noisy under normal circumstances – and there was almost no one on the streets. The silence was visceral. I had been trying to stay level-headed, as I had been reproached after the referendum for being devastated by the results, but this silence was unbearable. I could physically feel the defeat.

When I arrived at the café, which was packed, I thought it looked as if an important football match was on – an attempt to keep my spirits up by making jokes to myself. Outside in the terrace, people were chatting, hugging, and supporting one another. Inside, where the TV was, there was the same silence. All eyes were on the television on the wall. No one spoke. I glanced at the screen in vain before saying “hi” to a couple of people I knew from my field site: the head of a socialist party, and a few other assembly participants. No one had the energy to be polite, to ask “how are you?” or even to smile. I mumbled a few words about the struggle going on, smiling. An activist I knew from the feminist movement praised my composure. The truth is, I was

only overcompensating. I wanted to get out of there as soon as possible. I wanted to be at home with my friends.

Throughout the night, our silence was broken by speculations about how they could win and discussions about what we could do. Every now and then, we would hear someone shout or scream and we would prick up our ears to understand whether it was an attack or someone celebrating. This was perhaps the manifestation of our concern that our safe and progressive neighbourhood was now open to attacks from AKP supporters. We were afraid of our bubble bursting, in a way. In the meanwhile, the presidential candidate of the main opposition party CHP, Muharrem Ince, had texted a journalist “the man [Erdogan] has won”, which quickly went viral.

Such readiness to accept defeat closed avenues for action, as it meant that political parties had accepted the elections as fair and the results legitimate. Unlike the night of the referendum where we, grassroots organizers, could make the decision to take to the streets, political parties were responsible for calling for protest this time, as opposition parties had promised to call for mass protest in case of fraud. This pacified the politically non-engaged opposition and led to a loss of agency on the part of activists. All we could do that night was wait, in vain, for a party to call for protest.

Historical embeddedness

The response to the defeat was a flattening out of the temporal landscape where time was stretched out: “Now, we are defeated. Now, what we need to do is to start from scratch and slowly, step by step, build a movement from below”, as one of my interviewees told me. The pressing events of the previous period where we had to make critical decisions every week, where we woke up every day to check the news

to see if anything had happened overnight, the dystopia that was rushing towards us, the ambiguous near-future full of possibilities, good and bad, were gone. We had time; we did not have an opportunity to seize in the foreseeable future. The distant dystopian future had become what Bourdieu (1963) terms “forthcoming”: “the experience of ‘forthcoming’, understood as the horizon of the perceived present, is essentially different from the future as an abstract series of interchangeable, mutually exclusive possibilities” (p. 225). We were, in other words, within the dystopian world that we had imagined would be awaiting us in the distant future.

In response, activists turned to historical time where they placed themselves within a much broader time frame of struggle. Anthropologist Sian Lazar, in her 2014 article where she discusses temporalities in social movements, defines historical time as “a sense of emplacement within a historical narrative of political action that looks back to the past and to illustrious ancestors and forwards to an imagined set of possibilities for the future” (p. 93). She focuses on historical narrative and “mediating practices” that “make the past present” (p. 98), such as commemorations or the narrative periodization of epochal time through past political events. Even though Lazar contributes to the long-standing scholarship on narratives (e.g. Polletta, 1998), memory (e.g. Armstrong & Cragg, 2006), and myth-making (e.g. Meyer & Rohlinger, 2012) in social movements, she only scratches the surface of the role of the future in creating the “sense of emplacement within a historical narrative of political action”. I suggest that the future figures heavily in such historical emplacement in my field site. Indeed, hope can only be turned into a political resource as long as there is the process of placing political action within a broader historical vision of struggle that will persist in the future as much as it existed in the past. In a political context where the expectation of success is unrealistic, historical emplacement makes hoping for the

future possible, which is seen as a political resource against the stifling effect of debilitating pessimism.

Historical embeddedness, the switch to historical time, explains the stigmatization of hopelessness with which I opened this chapter. I was reproached not because I was *feeling* hopeless, but because of what that feeling implied; namely, that I was not placing myself within a historical struggle. I was prone to inaction, or retreating from the struggle, in other words⁷⁹. This became much clearer after the 2018 elections, which were recognized as a defeat, unlike the ambiguity of the referendum before.

When I asked an interviewee, a former militant in his late 50s, what he expected of the future, he said, “there will be a revolution in Turkey, socialism will be established. We will live happily as a society”. He laughed: “jokes aside, this is my personal belief, my ideal. I strive for this and fight for this. This is not a subjective belief; it is the necessary conclusion of the historical process. The question is how to shorten this process”. Then, without any prompts from me, he continued: “I am hopeful about the future. Even if we lose. Provided that democracy forces and leftist forces and socialists produce more sensible politics, this painful period can be shortened”. I ask him how he can be so hopeful: “I am hopeful because I am a communist”. He laughs again. He is only half serious.⁸⁰ Indeed, in these words, we hear a hint of cautionary pessimism in an ostensibly hopeful narrative. He avoids substantiating his hopefulness and gives me a generic response instead. Gloomy

⁷⁹ This speaks to the “emotion culture” (Taylor & Rupp, 2002) of the groups that I study, that are either socialist or leftist more broadly. If I were studying a feminist organization, I would probably not be reproached for feeling hopeless.

⁸⁰ The hope that arises from an orthodox Marxist understanding of history does not seem sustainable to my interviewee; hence the jokes and laughs. It would be interesting to compare this type of hope to Gramsci’s approach to hope and temporality, Badiou’s (2008) approach to defeat, or Benjamin’s complex understanding of the past and the present. Such a comparison merits a separate article.

scenarios about the future are kept at bay. The thought of defeat almost automatically triggers a historical imagination, not with a nostalgia for a glorious past, but an historical embeddedness that is future-oriented.

A socialist in his mid-40s, when I asked him if he remembers a particularly hopeful time, responded:

I belong to a time of defeat. I became politicized and the Soviets dissolved. We had also been defeated on September 12th [the 1980 military coup] and I kept reading and listening to the great tortures that they had been through. But I never thought they [the left] were over. I admired their horizon/vision [ufuk]. Their defeat never concerned me. I admired their ideals. I still do. And that is what's important. I mean, to get defeated for the sake of great causes.

The idea of defeat triggers historical time in the form of horizons, visions, and ideals, all of which refer to the “not-yet” of the future. Defeat is not the end:

The fight goes on in tidal waves; we work on it at every stage [uğraşıyoruz]. We can never say “we’re dead now, it’s over, we are completely defeated”. [...] So, we should not talk about disastrous scenarios, the middle classes will get a sense of disappointment if we do. There is no historical reality that dictates that we will win at a battle within a big war. [...] You can even lose the war. But it is unnecessary to say, “let’s quit if we lose this battle”.

The struggle is always ongoing. So, the elections are a defeat at one of the battles within a bigger war – a war that extends far into the future. There is no guarantee that we will attain our goals but talking about disastrous scenarios is unnecessary as it will only lead to disappointment. He uses the word disappointment, but we can safely read it as debilitating despair, the kind that leads to inaction and paralysis, a dreaded outcome of the elections as an earlier quotation in the previous section indicated.

It is not only communists and socialists who think like this. In this new context of defeat, phrases like “life goes on”, “a society never dies”, “they will eventually fall”, or “this is not a sustainable regime” became more and more frequent. The defeat was not the end. Instead, constant struggle came to the fore, putting the emphasis on the attempt to change things in the long term. An unaffiliated activist phrased it by saying, “let’s fail bigger if we are to fail again” when she was talking about defeat, putting the emphasis on making the effort, on the attempt itself. Another interviewee succinctly expressed the shift in temporal vision: “we know historically that periods of repression will come to an end. Even if we can’t succeed in our time, we know that those who will struggle after us will succeed”. We will see more of the same political imagination at work in the next section, where building networks and garnering hope are framed as part of a long-term vision.

It is worth reiterating that the idea and the talk of defeat were usually accompanied by historical emplacement. Activists switched to historical time and a narrative of ongoing struggle, denying an end-of-time rhetoric which sees the defeat as final. This kind of political imagination that is historically embedded and oriented towards the future does not only enable hope and action, but it also justifies them. When a defeat is not the end of the struggle, debilitating pessimism becomes untenable and hence, discredited as a viable emotion (and future orientation) to be held. When considered together with the blurring of dystopian imageries of the forthcoming – where debilitatingly pessimistic scenarios are toned down – historical embeddedness can be thought of as an intentional choice to reclaim temporal agency.

Acts of hope: Taking action to hope

Activists channelled their political activity to less ostensibly political organizations such as food cooperatives, alternative football leagues, and the like, where the focus was more on everyday activity on a local scale. This is not to say that there was a shift in the dominant types of activism, say, from assembly-type organizing to prefigurative politics. Rather, people who were involved in and advocated for the struggle for democracy at a national level, which took as its adversary macro-political institutions, started getting involved in – and inviting me to – alternative activist spaces that did local work in ways that were not directly political in the conventional sense of the term. Playing football, discussing veganism, doing permaculture, being part of an organic food cooperative, or rallying for animal rights did not fit squarely into the logic of the assemblies and the type of politics that they did (see Chapter 3). These spaces had proliferated after the Gezi protests of 2013, in keeping with the activist scene of the time. What was new after the defeat of 2018 was the re-channelling of political energies into these already existing alternative spaces.

Having clarified this, I claim that these were not only “prefigurative” acts or individualized activities disguised as lifestyle activism, at least not for the activists from the assembly.⁸¹ Rather, they were concrete examples of organizations – or more precisely, networks – that embodied long-term projects, with an emphasis on generating hope through maintaining relationships and doing something. For example, my interviewees who got involved in these spaces did not claim, verbally or in practice, that “the medium is the message”. They were not repeating the

⁸¹ Based on this research, I cannot make a claim about the nature of these spaces, as I have not based my research on them. Hence, the claim I make here is limited only to assembly participants who got involved in these spaces.

“prefigurative” chorus of “being the change you want to see”. Although these motivations are not absent from their reasons of participation, they put the emphasis on maintaining or creating hope. An interviewee, immediately after mentioning that repressive periods eventually come to an end, remarked, “to build our own small everyday lives, tirelessly, and to be able to get out of our own circle: yes, this is difficult, but we have to do this. This is what gives me hope. *Networks, when established well, create hope*”.

This is a dense quotation, taken from an interview with an activist in her 40s, an assembly participant and a part of the local food cooperative. Even though I only italicized her last sentence, the quotation is filled with words that are charged with meaning. The word “build” (*inşa etmek*), for example, conveys the idea of taking action to construct something; in this case, “our everyday lives”. The added “tirelessly”, especially when we consider what comes after it, implies that this is a strenuous process. It also encourages effort, attempt, and struggle. Building the everyday is not an individual effort; it is a collective one and a matter of getting “out of our own circle”, which gets us to building connections, networks, or relations.

Placing themselves within historical time and in preparation for the time when they can intervene into politics in a substantial way, activists from the assembly joined these groups to establish and/or maintain relations. Joining these groups was an action that was taken explicitly to create hope. They did not participate in a queer football league because they were feeling hopeful. They participated because they wanted to generate hope, to sustain their sense of (political) self, and to maintain their relations. Continuing to be politically engaged, even if in a different form, was preparation, rather than waiting for, the opportunity to arise. Opportunities, after all, can be created; they are not always given.

In fact, this kind of activism was framed as a way of being together and doing things together. In an interview with a 26-year-old activist who was one of the first organizers of the local assembly, she said about these alternative spaces, “*being together is invaluable from now on*. Any kind: you can meet with 20 people every week to have dinner at someone’s place, or hang out at the cooperative, or be a percussionist in a women’s rhythm collective. All kinds of togetherness are invaluable as of today”. Togetherness and being involved in these activities are a way of maintaining ties and building new ones, of “getting out of our own circle”.

Another interviewee who joined the local assembly after the referendum, who does not identify as a socialist like most of the other participants, but as “someone who is against injustice”, was enthusiastic about her involvement in an alternative football group that also engaged in activism around queer politics and veganism, among other issues. In our interview conducted after the elections, she brought up the football group early on in our conversation. When I asked her why she joined them, she spoke about it as an attempt to organize and build networks:

People there are not hopeless, they don’t think that nothing will happen anymore. *They help me survive [beni ayakta tutuyorlar]*. They are still discussing things, it’s something else! This is not only being in the streets⁸² [*bu sadece alanda mücadele etmek değil*]. *This is also a way of organizing*. I was introduced to the [food] cooperative there. *There is a network there*. I am not yet involved in the cooperative. But it gives me...I mean, *people don’t stop*. It is not like political organizations [she means parties and other organizations]. People do things among themselves. I mean, *the struggle is not over*. There isn’t one right way of being in the struggle. Also, people who hear about us come and join us. Some come for the women’s question, others for gender, yet others for animal rights.

⁸² This sentence can also be translated as “this isn’t only doing politics in public spaces/in the public domain”. The Turkish word “alan”, in leftist jargon, denotes doing politics with “the masses”, in the streets, squares, or public spaces that are politicized.

In a nutshell, her answer to why she chose to be a part of this group is because they give her hope in the absence of any other grassroots alternatives, since the assemblies were disbanded. They give her hope not only because “they are not hopeless”, but also because she sees this as a form of organizing, of building networks that open up to new networks, like the cooperative. They give her hope because they “don’t stop”, they keep on doing things, “they are still discussing things”, which seems to be quite surprising to her. This “*still* doing things” convinces her that the struggle is not over.

She then said, “this is a space where I can breathe” and continued to talk about the diversity of interests people had in the group, highlighting the growing number of participants. Then, she repeated her earlier point, with an important addition: “it seems to me that the struggle is not over. *I am certain that other things will emerge out of this*”. She sees these spaces as tools for organizing for when the time comes when these ties can be mobilized for other, perhaps larger-scale, purposes. In social movement terminology, this is a process of building movement capacity. It is not optimism, as less than ten minutes after this conversation, she said, “I don’t know how these ruins [of the current government] can be recuperated but I think they [the government] will fall. As pessimistic as I am, this is what I think”. So, hers is not optimism but a hope that incorporates the given situation into account. The combination of cautionary pessimism and a long-term hope as a political resource that is enabled by historical embeddedness is typical in my field site.

The same anticipation of a possible repurposing of these alternative spaces is brought up by another interviewee as well. When I asked her what she thinks of cooperatives, she replied:

Makes sense, good. It is very important to stay in contact [...] *There is no way of knowing what a cooperative in this neighborhood will evolve into tomorrow. A cooperative here can sell a pack of rice for 10 Turkish liras tomorrow when it becomes 35 liras in the market. To organize people. And it can persuade people to get involved in something like the cooperative, something much “softer” and bureaucratic and stable. There is no way of knowing what that would bring, if we act smart.*

It is important that the owner of the last quote was not involved in the cooperative, but she was friends with people who were involved, and occasionally went to their meetings. Her not being a member of the cooperative, however, did not keep her from referring to them in the first-person plural, as “we”. This goes back to the point about the importance of networks, of togetherness, or organizing for when the time comes. In my interpretation, the vision of repurposing, of maintaining relations and generating hope are very much future-oriented and strategic. It involves cautionary pessimism to the extent that it takes into account the past, or “the ruins” of the current regime, the damage that has already been done; the present, or building our everyday lives, creating networks, organizing, and sustaining hope; and the future, where our attempts in the present come to fruition one way or another.

Even though ideological tendencies and partisan identities played a significant role in the framing of the struggle as a long-term one that extended into the past as well as the future, with a goal the attainment of which was deferred to an unknown future, this specific temporal orientation was not only adopted by socialists and communists. As this has shown, former participants of the assembly with no partisan affiliations and who did not identify as socialists also subscribed to the same understanding of an ongoing struggle. While those with partisan identities were clearer

and much more confident sounding in their wording, those without a partisan identity adopted the same narrative of historical embeddedness but in slightly different words.

Reconceptualizing Hope

I started this chapter with the observation that instances of defeat brought up the question of hope. After the 2017 constitutional referendum which the opposition officially lost, grassroots activists still had a sense of agency; we took to the streets to protest the rigged results, to be joined by thousands within minutes. The night of the 2018 elections was starkly different than the previous defeat. Not only had we lost the elections, but they were deemed legitimate by the opposition parties. Election campaigns were organized by political parties, the local assembly that previously allowed for grassroots organizing had already disintegrated by the time the elections were announced, and the elections put a long pause on grassroots political action at the national level in the foreseeable future. “The man” had won, in Ince’s terms; Turkey had chosen its dictator. The new regime was firmly treading on towards its consolidation. Even before the elections were lost, the two months’ notice of the government that the elections, normally scheduled for 2019, were going to be held in June 2018 was itself a loss of agency on the opposition’s part – we were “busted”. In the context of defeat and hopelessness⁸³ of 2018 and beyond, hope regained its importance in activist circles.

I observed two types of hope: Hope as the expectation of success or positive impact and hope as a political resource to be created and mobilized. These two hopes

⁸³ I am defining the context as hopeless to mean that opportunities for change in the foreseeable future were scant. Chances for another political opportunity were extremely slim.

have different temporalities: the former usually concerns short-term expectations and features in this text in the form of predictions about the coming elections; the latter is part of a long-term project, when the attainment of goals, or the object of hope, is not immediately in sight. The two are not mutually exclusive, and I am not claiming that there was a rupture or break that led to a change from one type to the other. I am claiming, however, that I observe a pattern in the conditions in which they emerge. Hope as a political resource as I conceptualize it in this chapter became prominent at times of defeat, when there was a sense of loss of political and temporal agency. I will elaborate on the point about agency after I make my point about hope as a political resource clearer.

When faced with defeat, hope emerged as a political resource to build movement capacity in a period of “abeyance” (Taylor, 1989) or decline, in preparation for when it could be usefully mobilized. Although social movement scholars have studied the first type of hope, or hope as expectation of success, the political function of hope in times of defeat has been understudied in the literature. Therefore, in this chapter, I suggest that social movement scholars need to reconceptualize hope in relation to actors’ temporal experiences, paying special attention to the political function of hope⁸⁴ in times of contracting opportunities, when future imaginings do not involve many political openings amenable to desirable social and political change.

Hope as I conceptualize it in this chapter is the manifestation of an historical understanding of process, of embeddedness within a shared – if not universal – and ongoing struggle, and of a forward-looking vision. It is an inter-subjective temporal orientation and a collective endeavour; not a purely individual emotion. It is closely

⁸⁴ Although I use the word “function”, I am not making a functionalist argument here. My concept of hope as a political resource is not derived from the function of hope. Rather, I derive the function that it serves from empirically grounded research.

connected to the construction of a collective will, of spaces and relations, and to a temporal vision of embeddedness in the past as well as the future. Hope, in the context of defeat and a flattened temporal landscape, is as much an end in itself as it is a precondition for action. In fact, the awareness that hope is needed to act at the next political opportunity is what drives activists to intentionally attempt to create hope by creating or engaging in alternative political spaces as I have shown in the last section of this chapter. In this conceptualization, hope harbours five factors: the emotion itself, the cognitive consideration of possibilities, a concurrent relationship with cautionary pessimism, a future-oriented historical embeddedness, and the imperative of action. Let me unpack each:

1. The emotion: While I recognize the fact that hope is an emotion with a specific temporal orientation, my data are not conducive to analysing hope as an emotion or affect. Even though hope is created inter-subjectively and is a collective effort, my data are overwhelmingly discursive in this chapter. Hence, I do not know whether my interviewees *felt* hopeful when they were *talking* about hope or being hopeful. What I do know is that activists recognize this particular emotion's role as a driver of action, as opposed to other, negative (Jasper, 2011), emotions such as despair, pessimism, hopelessness, etc. Part of the struggle was to retain the emotion of hope. However, the hopelessness of the political situation requires that we look beyond hope as an emotion and try to uncover *how* people continue to act (or hope) when the expectation of large-scale positive change or success is unrealistic.
2. As in hope as expectation of success, hope as a political resource also involves the consideration of possibilities. I find that when success is out of reach in the immediate future, gloomy but realistic possibilities are toned down, as these

would be more likely to lead to debilitating pessimism when there is no other political opportunity to look forward to in sight. So, talk about possibilities were kept indeterminate, but without optimism.

3. Closely related to the previous point about possibilities and an important contribution I wish to make to the literature on hope is that both types of hope carry within them a level of cautionary pessimism. I distinguished between debilitating pessimism and cautionary pessimism: the first figures as an obstacle to action, while the second kind of pessimism is related to an understanding of how structural forces and historical dynamics shape possibilities. Cautionary pessimism cautions against optimism, recognizing the imperative of action as necessary for hope in this context. The point about action is the fifth element of my conceptualization.
4. The most important finding of this chapter is that activists switched to a narrative of historical time (Lazar, 2014) when faced with defeat. “Arguably the most important”, because the switch in temporal visions is the key to answer the question of how grassroots activists continue to act in the absence of grassroots organizations, in the context of contracting political opportunities. Contrary to the eventful temporality of the previous period, the defeat of the 2018 elections brought about the narrative of embeddedness within a broader, and ongoing, historical struggle. Rather than reverting to a nostalgic past with martyrs, heroic figures, or triumphal events, their historical embeddedness was much more oriented to the future. The idea that “the struggle did not end” implied that the time of abeyance could be used to build networks, organize, discuss, and create hope that can later be mobilized. This

switch in temporality was what made hope possible in the first place; it was an attempt at reclaiming temporal agency.

5. Finally, I find that there is a reciprocal relationship between hope and action, in that activists act to generate hope and hope in order to be able to act. We already know that action requires some hope and that participation bolsters positive feelings. What I would like to emphasize with this finding is that this intentionality is part of what makes hope a political resource to be created and mobilized in my field site.

The big picture in this chapter is one in which activists reclaim agency by taking control over their use of time in a seemingly hopeless political situation with contracting possibilities for change. I define temporal agency as the sense of having control over one's time, the ability to use time to further one's own purposes, or to repurpose the time that is imposed for one's own goals. In my field site after the 2018 elections, activists placed themselves in historical time so that hope could be possible. Hope had to be made possible – and logical – because its force to drive action was recognized. In other words, it was recognized as a political resource. Raymond Williams' impelling insight, "to be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing" (1989, p. 118) fits perfectly here. Faced with defeat and dictatorship, debilitating pessimism had to be avoided if action was to be retained. I also tried to show how activists in my field site were creating their own "resources of hope" (1989), to use another one of Williams' powerful phrases. By building networks and engaging different kinds of activism when the local assembly was disintegrated, activists created hope so that intervention into politics could become possible in the future, so that they would be ready for it instead of being disbanded altogether, or of

convincing one another to despair. I think at a time when there are no opportunities to seize, in a flattened temporal landscape, the endeavour to organize becomes an attempt to repurpose time, so that the “abeyance” (Taylor 1989) period is just that: abeyance but not defeat. Through action, the abeyance period is saved from being empty time where nothing happens, and instead it is put to use for maintaining the collective and possibly, expanding it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I looked at the period around the 2018 elections. Even though activists had been discussing the possibility of an early election at length, as we have seen in Chapter 4, the snap elections still caught them off-guard. The local assembly had already disintegrated when the elections were announced, and the elections being presidential and general meant that the political campaign was carried out by political parties. As these were snap elections, grassroots activists had no time to put together an independent election initiative like they did in 2015 either. These factors culminated in a decrease in the sense of agency that activists had during and immediately after the elections. In this case, political and temporal agency were intertwined. The decrease in agency meant that activists did not conceive themselves as having the capacity and the structural position to intervene into politics in a way that would have a desirable effect. It also meant that they could not make use of the two months before the elections to devise a way to shape the process in their favour. The elections were a temporal shock, and without the grassroots infrastructure and the time needed for mobilization, activists were largely left out of the process.

Opposition parties had promised to take to the streets in case of fraudulent results, so the call for protest had to come from them on the night of the elections. Furthermore, when the CHP candidate's text message to a journalist, "the man has won", was broadcasted, election results were legitimated by the opposition. Therefore, unlike the night of the referendum, activists could not take the initiative to call for a protest this time, which perpetuated the loss of agency. The defeat placed Turkey in the dystopian future that activists were anticipating in the previous chapter. As what used to be the distant future collapsed into the present, the eventful temporal landscape of the previous period gave way to a flattened one in which the possibility of having another political opening that could effectively reverse the descent into fascism, or the consolidation of authoritarianism, was unlikely.

In this context, hope emerged as a narrative response to defeat. I will not go over how I have conceptualized hope here but briefly reiterate the main contributions of this chapter. Confirming the existing literature on the role of emotions in social movements, hope did come up as an emotion that was recognized by the activists as potentially having a strategic use, and also as a resource. However, contrary to the existing literature's association of hope with the expectation of success or a positive outcome, the context in which the talk/narrative of hope emerged was one of contracting opportunities and defeat. To keep the horizon of possibilities open and make (future) action possible, activists resorted to a narrative of historical embeddedness, from which the struggle was conceived as consisting of the past, the present, and the future. This narrative is consistent with Polletta's (1998, p. 139) argument that narrative's "temporally configurative capacity equips it to integrate past, present, and future events".

Toning down of the dystopian rhetoric and keeping the future indeterminate helped to keep the debilitating kind of pessimism and despair at bay, thus allowing for the possibility of action and sustainment. The narrative work of keeping the future indeterminate follows Miyazaki's (2004) observation about indeterminacy being a condition to be achieved. It also confirms Polletta's (1998) argument on ambiguity as a tool for motivating action. However, the cautionary type of pessimism was interlinked with this type of hope. Finally, action and hope had a reciprocal relationship during this period, in which one generated the other and vice versa. Sustaining hope meant sustaining the networks and relations among activists in place, so that action would be possible at the next political opportunity.

To conclude, I will end with a brief anecdote that I think fits well with the themes in this chapter. After the referendum, that is, the "no" campaign, we had made a huge banner, the length of a three-floor building, and we unrolled it from a political party's headquarters on the fourth floor of a building on a major avenue, as the protesters were flowing by. It read, in capital letters:

no
the fight is not over it continues
and it will
until the surface of the earth becomes the surface of love!

We had added the "no" to the last three lines of the poem below, the last part of a longer poem by Adnan Yucel:

oh, those who say everything is over
who eat despair at the table of fear.
neither the flowers that resist in the fields
nor the angers that billow in the cities

have yet said farewell.
the fight is not over it continues
and it will
until the surface of the earth becomes the surface of love!⁸⁵

⁸⁵ My translation from the original Turkish:
“ey herşey bitti diyenler
korkunun sofrasında yılgınlık yiyenler.
ne kırlarda direnen çiçekler
ne kentlerde devleşen öfkeler
henüz elveda demediler.
bitmedi daha sürüyor o kavga
ve sürececek
yeryüzü aşkın yüzü oluncaya dek!”

Chapter 6

Conclusion

I started this dissertation by characterizing the period that I study as an intense time (della Porta, 2016) in which macro-political institutions, from the state to the parliament to political parties to the military and jurisdiction, were undergoing immense changes. I described the current political regime in Turkey as an authoritarian one that had yet to consolidate itself. In the Introduction, I thus identified the period as a transition into a constitutionally authoritarian regime. Against this political context, I asked a broad question which guided this thesis' exploration: How has Turkey's authoritarian turn affected activism on the ground?

The first and most general finding of my research answered the question above with the observation that activists' temporal orientations changed, quite quickly over the span of a few years, from an orientation towards the past at the initial phase of organizing to a future orientation that enabled or constrained political action and movement sustainment. The frequency of transformative events (Sewell, 1996) accounted for the changes in temporal orientations, as activists sought to accommodate themselves to recent developments as well as a future that was constantly in the making. In this sense, it was a "restless" time (Wagner-Pacifici, 2010) where the meanings and the political significance of events were in constant flux. For example, when we tease out the analytical nuances in chapters three and four, the referendum that was regarded as a victory for the opposition ended up losing its victorious

connotations in only a few months. Throughout the dissertation, I sought to reflect the changes in activists' temporal orientations in the structure of my chapters.

This broad finding led to two more specific questions: How has the intensification of authoritarianism in Turkey affected grassroots activism during intense times? And how has temporality factored into the different stages of political action? Acting within a rapidly changing temporal landscape (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013) was intertwined with acting within an authoritarian regime. It was not only that activists' orientations changed from the past to the future; there were minute temporal framings and future imaginations that had to be matched in order for the group to continue to do politics together. The goals of the group changed from one chapter to the other, from one episode to the next, as marked by the transformative events of the referendum and the elections. From a single-issue "no" assembly, the name of the assembly changed to a "democracy assembly", reflecting clearly how the group's shared goals transformed from an object attainable in the near future to an overarching, broad, and vague democracy attainable in the distant future. Moreover, "democracy" was never substantiated; it was a contentious subject that was deferred to a later stage in the struggle, perhaps because the point at which this goal could be attained appeared too far away.

The disruption of the political calendar and the electoral cycle generated instability, ambiguity, and the feeling of being caught off-guard. At the same time, however, it led to an accumulation of experience of the kind that yielded itself to rapid political learning: The chain of events that lent themselves to causal inferences (which are so important in political learning) were so tightly linked in Turkey during this period that it was difficult to forget what had gone wrong before – either cognitively or discursively. Learning lessons from the past and gaining political experience were

not achieved through the act of voting itself, but via the episodes of mobilization and contention that the ballot box made available.

This had another effect on activists' perception of time: Gezi seemed so far away in the past, even though at the time, it had been only three to four years after the mass protests that had gripped the whole country had taken place. The reason for this perception was not only that so much had happened since then, but also that so much had changed. The issues at stake were different, more immanent. Gezi might have been the result of authoritarian measures already well underway in 2013, but the global wave of uprisings, the cancellation of the project that would destroy the park to erect a military barrack in its place, together with the HDP's electoral victory in 2015 all created the vision that perceived of positive change as feasible. Soon after the HDP's victory, however, with a four-month period of state-led or state-sanctioned terrorization of the population and the criminalization of the opposition, followed by the AKP's regaining the majority in the parliament, followed then by the military coup attempt in 2016, the political scene changed considerably for the activists. Regime change had been accelerated. This is why Gezi seemed so long ago; it belonged to another time, so to speak.

The acceleration of authoritarianism, in the form of changes to the constitution to make a *de facto* regime into a *de jure* one, demanded a re-reading of the Gezi protests, or more precisely, a re-evaluation of the repertoire of action that Gezi had popularized, in expectation of an increase in repression. By campaigning for the "no" vote through grassroots mobilization, while at the same time trying to build the infrastructure that would allow for long-term, permanent, organizing (i.e. in the form of the local assemblies), activists tried to reverse the authoritarian momentum in their favour. This attempt at reversion never took the form of "turning back time", or

nostalgia. There was no glorious past that could be longed for. The campaign was rather an effort to make use of contingency, of the multiplicity of possibilities, of the various paths that the event of the referendum opened up. As a result, the organizational structure of the assemblies took shape to cater for quick and participatory decision making via a decentralized structure and mechanisms for democratic control.

Immediately after the referendum, in May and June 2017, the assembly was still making use of past experiences to repurpose the assembly and to solve some of the strategic and organizational problems that participants encountered. The main reference point was in the past, from Gezi to the other local initiatives that experimented with different kinds of organizing, but activists' (re-)reading of the past involved a view towards the future. There were hints of the expectation of a more repressive political order from the very beginning of the assembly, when it was first established. However, as the possibility of early elections appeared on the horizon, the reference point for making decisions shifted towards the near future. From then on, talk about the past receded and eventually gave way to foretalk (Gibson, 2012): by January 2018, talk of the future, or talk about events that have not yet occurred and that might never occur, had become the dominant mode of conversation among activists.

Foretalk involved future imaginings, imaginings of both the near and the distant future. Activists shared a dystopian imaginary when it came to the distant future; darkness, increasing repression, and a fascistic regime were some of the ways in which this anxiety-inducing future was expressed. The dystopian imaginary was supported by evidence from the recent past – the bombings in Suruc and Ankara, and the war on Kurdish cities between the two elections in 2015 – and the present which

was experienced on a daily basis through arrests, police raids, and other instances of state violence. A dystopian future was imagined as a shared social and political landscape (“fascism does not discriminate”, as we heard a participant remark in Chapter four), and the assembly had already decided on their common goal as a more democratic order. However, these shared interests and a shared threat were not enough to coordinate action among the different groupings that had formed within the assembly. The point of contention rested deep in the scenarios about the near future.

Scenarios were not full-blown narratives but fragmentary and partial formulations about the near future. They were part of the guesswork that was the result of the unpredictable and arbitrary electoral shocks that were imposed from above by the AKP government. Questions of whether elections would take place, when, and the constellation of political forces and actors that would shape the conditions under which an election would take place made up the content of scenarios. Different scenarios harboured different levels of complexity; more precisely, they differed in terms of their reach, breadth, clarity, volition, and sociality (Mische, 2009), as well as in their pace and sequencing. The group disbanded when these different layers of future imaginings did not match, even at a time when uniting the opposition was regarded as the only viable strategy. In other words, the usual suspects of framing, collective identity, grievances, internal problems, and the like were left behind (or, perhaps, suspended), and the assembly had united under the broad umbrella of the struggle for democracy. However, the temporal mismatch between different scenarios led to the dissipation of the assembly when a common trajectory could not be agreed upon by those involved.

The June 2018 presidential and general elections came as a surprise even though the possibility of an early election was the subject of the scenarios mentioned

above. The government announced in April 2018 that the elections were going to take place the same year in June, giving the opposition a short two months to campaign. In the face of a dissipated local assembly and a political campaign that was carried out mostly by political parties, grassroots activists suffered a loss of – or a decrease in – political agency. There was no grassroots organization that could mobilize participants, appeal to a broader public, and take critical decisions such as taking to the streets at critical moments. Instead, with the election's delineation of the campaign to political parties meant that parties held more agency. Hence, activists were left dependent on a call for protest on the night of the elections. The fact that none came from political parties further legitimated the elections as free and fair, consolidated the sense of defeat, and left activists even less powerful in terms of the possible avenues of action available to them.

Political agency, in this case, was inextricably linked to temporal agency defined as a sense of control over time whereby actors assume the power to manage time according to their needs and wishes. Shaping temporality, from the perception of it to narratives about it to the uses and repurposing of it, was fundamental to how activists handled the perceived decrease in their agency to shape political processes; in this case, the reversal of the authoritarian turn. The narrative tool with which they reclaimed their temporal and political agency was talk of hope. Hope, understood as a temporal orientation more than an emotional state of being, emerged as a narrative device after the defeat of 2018. This was a hope that was mostly directed towards the distant future. It consisted of a certain type of pessimism, what I called cautionary pessimism, that functioned as a break against an overly optimistic belief that things would eventually sort themselves out for the better. Cautionary pessimism warned against “cruel optimism”, in Berlant’s (2011) terms, whereby the wished-for goal

becomes itself an obstacle in its attainment. Hope also involved the consideration of possibilities, the acknowledgment of the open-endedness of political action. Hence, acting in the present generated hope for the distant future; but this was not the whole story. After the defeat, activists toned down their earlier dystopian imaginaries in favour of a long-term narrative of historical embeddedness. Indeterminacy in opposition to the determinacy of a dystopian future in case of failure, was intertwined with a historical view of political struggle. Importantly, this historical view covered the distant future, and not only the past. Awaiting another political opening in the future, a considerable number of the participants of the dissipated local assembly turned to self-organization, even though the type of politics espoused by these alternative organizations was not exactly the type of politics that assembly participants subscribed to.

My dissertation ends after the 2018 elections, but in March 2019, municipal elections were held. The strongest candidate of the opposition in Istanbul was the CHP's Ekrem Imamoglu, who won the majority of the votes and became the next mayor. However, backed by the president, the High Election Board (Turkish acronym, YSK), scrapped the results of the Istanbul election, and ordered a rerun to be held in June. Imamoglu won once again and is currently the mayor of Istanbul. What is more striking for my purposes in this dissertation is, first of all, that once again a state institution, the YSK, refused to accept the AKP's electoral failure and complied to Erdogan's call for a rerun. The votes could not be manipulated on the day, but that does not obscure the fact that the rerun itself was an attempt to manipulate the results. Thus, the electoral cycle continues to be disrupted, unpredictable, and arbitrary. We can, then, expect further changes in activist's temporal orientations and consequently, their organizations, tactics, and strategies.

Secondly, Imamoglu's election campaign used an exclusively and overtly hopeful language. Some of his election slogans were: "Everything will be beautiful"; "if there is Imamoglu, there is hope" (hope written inside the shape of a heart); and "if there is Imamoglu, there is a solution". His advisor, after the repeat elections, interpreted their victory by saying, "there has been a huge crisis of hope in Turkey and Imamoglu rekindled hope" (T24, 2019). Even though I do not study hope as an emotion or as a tool for mobilization, Imamoglu's campaign has reinforced the salience of my observations about hope being a crucial element in politics in Turkey today. In my reconceptualization of hope in Chapter five, I have included pessimism, a sense of the multiplicity of possibilities, a reciprocity between action and hope, and a temporal orientation that perceived of political action as embedded in an extended view of history. However, my findings only apply to activists at a specific moment in time and do not include politically unengaged populations, party politics, and electoral campaign strategies. Therefore, further research on the role of hope in politics should consider this crisis of hope, how political campaigns make use of it, and the different manifestations, conceptualisations, and uses of hope in different contexts and for different people.

Contributions

My dissertation bears witness to the emergence and decline of one of the first and largest local "no" assemblies in Istanbul. The local assemblies were only one type of grassroots organization and surely do not represent the whole scene of political activism in contemporary Turkey; there are numerous political organizations, non-governmental organizations, consumer cooperatives, solidarity groups, political

parties, and more. However, through the local “no” assemblies, I could trace the changes and continuities in grassroots organizing over the last five years, from 2013 to 2018, since the organizers and participants of the assembly that I studied have also been involved in the Gezi protests in 2013 and the various other local grassroots initiatives that were inspired by them since then. The rapid process of political learning that grassroots actors have been going through (that is still ongoing), and the changes in organizational structure and strategy that accompanied this learning process, as well as what was adopted and adapted from Gezi were all embodied in the local assembly. Therefore, my research documents the continuities and changes in grassroots organizing in Istanbul during the two-year-long state of emergency, at a politically and historically crucial juncture where Turkey’s authoritarian turn took its constitutional form. Although only a fraction of the whole picture, I hope my dissertation can provide useful historical and analytical information for further research on grassroots activism in Istanbul and elsewhere.

At the theoretical level, my work contributes a temporally sensitive approach to the study of social movements, and thus can be considered a part of the emerging scholarship on time and social movements that I have reviewed in the Introduction (e.g., Gillan, 2018; Mische, 2014; Wagner-Pacifici & Ruggero, 2018). This approach brings the imaginary, the future, the experience of time, and hope as a specific future-orientation into the analysis as explanatory factors. My research shows that from the initial stages of creating spaces of contention to the peak of mobilization and then to the dissipation of an activist organization, several temporal factors affect internal dynamics, strategy, and sustainment of social movements: Time constraints imposed on activists by regime change and electoral cycles; a dystopian future that is perceived to be rushing towards the inhabitants of Turkey; political opportunities that expose

possibilities; the differences in how activists imagine the near future; and lastly, how they view history and their place in it. I have relied on talk and practices based on ethnographically gathered data, but textual analysis, comparative case studies, and historical work can expand this approach and advance our knowledge of how temporality works within and outside of movements, and the effects it has on different aspects of contention.

Another field of research to which my study contributes is social movements in authoritarian regimes; more specifically, contention during authoritarian transitions. As I have reviewed in the Introduction, the role of social movements has been studied in democratic transitions, in democratic regimes, and in authoritarian regimes. However, contention during transitions into authoritarianism has been understudied. My work adds to the transitions literature by providing an ethnographic view of one type of grassroots contention against an increasingly repressive regime; the considerations and decisions that its constituents had to engage in; and the forms that it took during this period. I have also sought to demonstrate activists' relationship to the past, to the near and distant future, and to their own position in history; why, how, and when their temporal orientations changed; and the consequences of the specific temporality of a rapidly changing regime. Repression, the anticipated increase in repression, and an impending threat of fascism were the contextual factors that affected activists, but the transitional nature of the regime also accentuated a sense of agency, as well as the acknowledgment of living through historical times, of making history, and of making the future. In other words, the uncertainty, anxiety, and urgency that the political events of the period brought about was not only an effect of authoritarianism but of the authoritarian transition. As such, the findings of this study

can shed light on activism under other regimes in transition, as well as contention during politically volatile times in general.

Taking a step back from the immediate contributions of this research, I suggest that scholars of social movements and contentious politics should pay more attention to the aspect of futurity involved in politics. If, as I have argued in this thesis, coordinating action, and therefore collective action, requires the coordination of futures, then the study of politics should always be, in part, a politics of anticipation. I propose the term “politics of anticipation” to capture the future-orientation inherent in political action. Especially under conditions of uncertainty and volatility, when historical, political, and personal stakes are high, the work of sense making and decision making revolves around foretalk, and anticipations of events-to-come take centre stage. Anticipations involve the imagined constellation of events and actors, and the relations among them. Politics, then, turns into a matter of “coordinating futures” (Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013) in order to coordinate action. Coordinating futures might mean to agree on a wished-for society or a hoped-for outcome (as in prefigurative politics, for example), but as we have seen in this dissertation, it might also mean coordinating shorter-term predictions even when there are differences among groups about what the ideal, or desired, long-term outcome would be.

A fully theorized “politics of anticipation” would account for contingency and individual and collective agency while recognizing the constraints on the way. Both autonomy and interdependence would be weaved into the analysis. Institutional and structural constraints, along with threats and opportunities, should include temporal constraints and disruptions as well. The state’s hegemony over time would be countered by temporal agency, tentatively defined as the ability to use time to further one’s own purposes or to repurpose the time that is imposed for one’s own goals. The

intentional and purposeful work that goes into shaping aspects of temporality, or “time work” (Flaherty & Meer, 1994, p. 717), is a part of the political struggle and should therefore be a part of our analyses of these struggles as well.

Future research into the intersubjective construction and configuration of temporalities will lead to a fuller theorization of the politics of anticipation. If “power is at its most effective when least observable”, as Lukes (1974, p. 1) has argued, our understanding of contention and political change would benefit immensely from an active notion of temporality. As I sought to demonstrate in this dissertation, social movements do not only exist *in* time but have a relationship *with* time that operates on a collective level and shapes action. It is analytically necessary to define the temporal context, or the timescape (Gillan, 2018), in which movements operate; it is also necessary to uncover the variety of temporalities with which movements organize themselves, mobilize others, and imagine future possibilities. When and how these different temporalities – both within and outside of movements – accommodate one another, clash, compete, subside, or cooperate might hold the key for understanding politics today. Both the micro-foundations of group work and the macro-politics of alliances, rivalry, and conflict involve temporal dynamics that have been understudied in the literature. Therefore, both the most basic and the most overarching contribution of my research is that temporality itself is a point of contention, and that it can help us understand and explain the underlying dynamics of contentious politics.

Theoretical Implications and Further Research

One of the theoretical prompts that emerge from the findings of my research is the relationship between dystopia and political action. I have shown that the shared

anticipation of a dystopian future did not, in itself, lead to inaction when the prospects of overturning the process of the consolidation of authoritarianism were perceived as possible. When the electoral chance to materialize that goal was lost in the 2018 elections, activists found themselves in the dystopian future they imagined would await Turkey if the opposition could not come out triumphant from the elections. Defeat and the loss of temporal and political agency led activists to considerably tone down their dystopian rhetoric. In other words, defeat was the point at which dystopia ceased to be compatible with, or yielding to, either political action (including mobilization) or the internal cohesion of the group.

My primary finding about the relationship between dystopia and action can be further elaborated and developed. The historical precedents from which this narrative of descent into fascism (or a dystopian political order) takes its cues – whether they be mythological projections of history, heroic idols of the past, or comparative cases in other times and places – can inform us of the specificities of the dystopian imagination at work in this case. Another avenue for further inquiry is to identify the particular ways in which certain aspects of the dystopian imagination affects action. In which contexts and under which conditions does dystopia figure as a driver of action? In which contexts does it lead to inaction and paralysis? How does it affect internal movement dynamics, movement discourse, strategies, and collective identity? Who is more likely to resort to dystopian imaginaries, and who are its targets? These and other questions can help scholars and activists alike to better understand the link between dystopia and political action. It would also be interesting to compare the political uses of dystopia with those of utopia, which is a subject that has garnered more scholarly attention (e.g., Jameson, 2007; Wright, 2010). Given that we are living in dark times

(e.g., climate change, the rise of right-wing politics, the crisis of democracy, etc.), this is a topic worth pursuing academically, that has a strong political significance.

Connected to the above point, a substantive hermeneutics of the future can also be beneficial for political sociologists and scholars of social movements. I have used Ann Mische's dimensions of future projections (2009; 2014) to decipher the formal anatomy of future imaginings. A hermeneutic approach can further substantiate the more intricate properties of future projections and uncover a range of different topics such as the memory politics of activism (of the left or right in Turkey or elsewhere), or the question of matching metanarratives (for example, of ideological positions) with narratives (for example, of issue-based activist groups) for movement success. My work suggests that this last point is especially important for sustaining movements in which diverse groups work together; even when all those involved agreed on the necessity of a project of democracy against fascism, the unification that was called for could not be realized when there was a mismatch in future projections. A similar mechanism might be at work between different levels of narratives. Further research into cases in which movement trajectories are matched through the process of politics, thus allowing shared imaginations to manifest themselves in strategy and action, could shed light on the findings of my project as well as on broader questions of temporal orientations and strategy.

Even though I take regime change as the political context in which the processes that I have sought to understand unfold, the state and other macro-political institutions such as the government, as important as they are for a wider perspective on the period, do not appear centrally in this work. However, they are a constant presence throughout the analysis. The state makes an appearance in ways that range from subtle to brutal manifestations of itself from the beginning to the end of the

dissertation: It is what forces activists to re-read the Gezi protests and learn new lessons from them; it figures in the memory of the 1980 coup; it shows itself as the sound of a helicopter and the flashing lights of a police car; we hear it in an assembly participant's outcry when he spills out, "we have no time – we are dying!", or when another participant protests against the use of the word "authoritarianism" for Turkey and asks, "what authoritarianism, are we in the EU?"; we can even hear it in the phrase, "there is no need to bake cookies" if we know the context; we witness it pass us by in the street, in the form of neighborhood guards; we see it in the number of people who died, the number of people who were purged, the number of people who were imprisoned; we sense it in the urgency, the anxiety, and the drive for action; it is there when activists are assessing possibilities, imagining futures, or when they are competing over scenarios; it imposes itself as a two-year-long state of emergency; it is implicated in the feeling of being "busted" by the snap elections; it comes in the shape of months in jail with no indictment and no trial; and more instances can be lifted from the previous chapters. The state, in short, is an integral part of the story that remains in the background but is always present in my research.

Benjamin's "angel of history", with which I opened this dissertation, that turned around its own axis from the first substantial chapter to the last, did so not by the winds from Paradise as Benjamin imagined it but by the winds of a changing regime. Activists' temporal orientations – including how they interpreted and used past experiences, how they strategized, and how they imagined their position within history – were formed in relation to much broader political processes and structures; whether those structures be ossified or changing, historical fact or future imagination. This point speaks to another issue that has exceeded the scope of this dissertation: the

temporalities, and the temporal agency, of different political regimes and their effects on contention.

Temporalities of capitalism (e.g., Thompson, 1967; Sennett, 1998; Bauman, 2013; Wajcman, 2015), modernity (e.g., Giddens, 1990; Adam, 1992; Osborne, 2011; Rosa, 2013; Jasanoff & Kim, 2015), and post-modernity (e.g., Harvey, 1989) have been studied. Tomba (2012) has argued that to fully grasp capitalism today, we need to understand how multiple layers of plural temporalities in modernity come into conflict with one another. Clark (2019) has studied how different conceptions of temporality and history affect the way those who wield power govern. More broadly, in sociology, Durkheim (1912) laid the foundations for studies of time that take the concept as socially constructed and collectively experienced; and the Durkheimian approach was followed critically in anthropology (e.g., Munn, 1992). Zerubavel has studied the structure of collective memory (2003) and the role of calendars in social life (1985). Hall (2000) wrote about religious movements and their conceptualisation of time. These examples show that there is a broad literature that spans different disciplines that is interested in temporal approaches to macro processes. Therefore, political sociology and social movement studies have the theoretical tools to engage in temporal studies of specific political regimes.

In this dissertation, the disruption of the electoral cycle had significant consequences on how activists took or did not take action, as well as on the internal dynamics of the group. While democratic regimes can also hold early elections or repeat elections, a quick look at the frequency with which Turkey went to the ballot box from the 2013 Gezi protests to the 2018 elections, and the reasons behind them, make clear the authoritarian tendencies encapsulated within the disruption of the normal calendar of politics. This empirical observation raises several questions: What

is the relationship between disruptions in political routines and contention? How do those in power use temporal agency to impose their own political agenda onto activists? Is there a difference between democratic and non-democratic regimes in terms of their conceptualisations of time, history, and the future? If so, what are these differences and how do they change over time? What are the characteristics and consequences of the authoritarian timescape (following Gillan's (2018) neoliberal timescape)? How does it affect activism temporally?

Even though the findings of my research provide some answers, a more developed account that takes into consideration different parts of the equation – such as political parties, the parliament, voters, the economy, the state, and so forth – can lead to a fuller theorization of the temporal logics of authoritarian regimes. Ways to overturn authoritarianism, reclaiming temporal agency, and the political uses of different conceptualisations of temporality on the part of grassroots actors will then be easier to understand and develop.

An even bigger topic emerges out of the above discussion; namely, the relationship between temporality and power. For example, we know that calendars have been used as a tool of political power (Zerubavel, 1985); that unreliability and unpredictability can have the effect of binding people to the state as well as a proliferation of the sense of agency (Auyero, 2012; Parla, 2019); that making people wait is an instrument of domination (Schwartz, 1974; Auyero, 2012). In addition to this literature, further questions can be asked: How does the state or the regime construct itself temporally in the eyes of both cooperating and contending actors? Is it a timelessly permanent entity, one that is under construction, a future-oriented one or one that takes its power from tradition and the past? How accommodating are these temporal frames for political action? When and how do ruptures, crises, or instability

steer future imaginations in a direction that opens up avenues for action in the present?
When do they close down possibilities for action?

The questions above trigger a set of questions regarding contention. For example, how does contenders' perception of the temporality of power (e.g., permanence, tradition, temporal orientation) affect repertoires of contention? When does the past override the future in claims-making, decision-making, collective identity, and vice versa? How does a movement's conceptualisation of history affect their actions? A comparison between religious movements that subscribe to prophetic time or messianic time (Hall, 2000) and Marxist movements that have a variety of approaches to history (here, I have in mind Marx, but also Lenin, Gramsci, Benjamin, and others with different approaches to history, acceleration, and revolution) would give us invaluable insights into how temporal conceptions of power are linked to ideology, strategy, organizational structure, and other crucial aspects of political contention.

Concluding Remarks

Neither a dystopian future nor a descent into authoritarianism or de-democratisation are far-fetched concerns in today's politics. Trump in the United States, Orbán in Hungary, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Boris Johnson and Brexit in the United Kingdom, and many other developments all over the world towards right-wing politics, anti-immigration policies, sexist and racist tendencies, international and civil wars, and climate change converge upon urgency and anxiety. The broader question which my study seeks to answer, the question of how contention is affected by these intense and volatile times, involves an assumption: The assumption that challenging

these regimes is possible and that challengers exist. How it exists and the difficulties that challengers encounter, along with how they attempt to overcome these difficulties lie at the core of this study.

Some of the findings of this research cannot be limited to the case of Turkey only. My overarching argument that futurity and future imaginations play a role at every stage of organisation and mobilisation can be extended to other contexts as well. The role of hope, whether it be conceptualised as an emotion or a future-oriented temporal disposition, can provide insights into the political uses (and misuses) of hope. The relationship between a dystopian future and political action, or the relationship between hope and action or movement sustainment can be useful for scholars and activists alike when thinking about strategy and mobilisation. Movements' relationship with the past and how the past can be re-read, re-framed, and re-presented to reconstruct the present and the future are, and I would assume will continue to be, crucial for movements against austerity, against extinction, against capitalism, and more.

In addition to the findings of my research, the workings of temporality and the question of temporal agency – at a time when we are running out of time to escape extinction, or when time is such a crucial part of everyday life for millions who are running from war-ridden countries, political execution, or a inhumane life – are useful analytic tools to study contention and to think about possibilities for action. As I have claimed before, temporality is a major question in political struggles, and it therefore should be a question for social movement scholars as well.

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