

Hope and time work in dystopian contexts: Future-oriented temporalities of activism in post-referendum Scotland and Turkey

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Abstract

This article examines the temporal underpinnings of hope as a key element of political action under dystopian circumstances. It is based on a comparative study of the authors' long-term ethnographic studies: First, an ethnography of the activists for national independence of the Scottish National Party following the 2016 Brexit referendum and second, the anti-authoritarian activists of the local "no" assemblies in Istanbul around the 2017 constitutional referendum in Turkey. Approaching hope as a political resource of transformative action that is created for and within political struggles, this article finds that the generation and maintenance of hope require an agentic orientation to time and more specifically, to the future. It further shows how dystopian imaginations, when taken as critical evaluations of the present, may enable political action through opening up the indeterminate future to possibilities of political transformation. Drawing on and contributing to the scholarship on emotions, utopia and dystopia, and time, we argue that hope among activists against dystopian futures necessitates not only "emotion work" but also "time work". Grounded in our empirical findings, we reconceptualize time work as the collective effort to shape orientations to the imagined past, lived present, and anticipated future, for and within political struggle. We thus conclude by expanding the concept of "time work" to cover its particularly collective and explicitly political uses, offering two modes of time work: narratives of time and collective acts of hope. We believe that this expanded concept will be a useful analytical tool for scholars working on social movements, political action, time, and emotions.

Keywords: Emotions; time and temporality; utopia and dystopia; social movements; prefiguration; future; local assemblies; Brexit

Introduction

Hope's role as an emotion is well-established in studies about political action and social change. It is recognized as a necessary component of collective action by the emotional turn of the 1990s and 2000s (Barbalet, 1998; Jasper, 1998; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta, 2001; Emirbayer and Goldberg, 2005), as an emotion that helps recruit new participants (Klandermans, 1984; McAdam, 1986), and that mobilizes and sustains social movements (Aminzade and McAdam, 2001; Ahmed, 2004; Eyerman, 2007; Henderson, 2008). Hope is acknowledged as an emotion that social movements strive for in their "emotion culture" (Gordon, 1989) or as part of their "feeling rules" (Hochschild, 1979), where "emotion work" (Hochschild, 1979) or "emotional pedagogy" (Gould, 2009) is undertaken to transform feelings that are seen as debilitating, like shame and despair, into more enabling ones, like anger and hope (Lorde, 1981; Taylor and Whittier, 1995; Reger, 2004; Castells, 2015; Ahmed, 2017). Although hope's relation to political action is widely recognized, it has largely been studied as

an emotion whereas its temporal underpinnings remain understudied (for exceptions, see: Cook and Cuervo, 2019).

Hope is not an individualised, passive emotional state. 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), we follow Miyazaki in taking hope as generative of and generated by political struggle. In other words, we understand hope *as method* (Miyazaki, 2004; Levitas, 2013), as “a temporal reorientation of knowledge practices to the emergent and the prospective (what has not-yet become)” (Anderson, 2017: 594). As Bryant and Knight (2019: 119) suggest, hope is a form of futural momentum, a way of “pressing into the future that attempts to pull certain potentialities into actuality... the *pursuit* of materialising the otherwise than actual”. It is in this pursuit of materialising the other-than-actual that future oriented political movement occurs, inciting political actors to change the present in an attempt to either approximate or reject the imagined or anticipated, future. This imagination, however, does not happen automatically or in the individual mind, but is intentionally co-produced by activists in their narratives and actions; in other words, it happens through an agentic orientation to time itself. In this article, we analyse this agentic orientation to time through the concept of “time work,” on which we elaborate later in this section.

Hope’s role in political action coincides with what Jameson (2005) identified as “a revitalization of utopia as a ‘politically energising perspective’” (Cook, 2018: 381), born as a response to the stasis of the universality of late capitalism. Indeed, hope and utopia have often been illustrated as intrinsically linked, not least thanks to Bloch’s (1986) seminal work on utopian theory in *The Principle of Hope*. Levitas (2007: 53), for instance, follows Bloch in linking hope and utopia, defining a utopian state as “the expression of desire for a better way of living”. Desroche takes this idea a step further by describing both concepts as “twin sisters” (1979) and understanding utopia itself as manifestation of hope. Dinerstein (2015) regards the creation of a concrete utopia as one of several interlinked modes that constitute the “organisation of hope”. Similarly, Anderson (2006) articulates the relationship between utopianism and hope by defining the former as “a means of transformative intervention in immanent utopic processes that strives to give and find hope through anticipation of alternative possibilities or potentialities” (p. 703). Indeed, hope is often conceptualized as “the anticipation that struggle will produce positive results” (Summers-Effler, 2002: 53). What remains largely understudied, however, is the relationship between hope and *dystopia*, and the generative possibilities that dystopia might grant towards the creation of a forwards-looking hope.

Thus, in this article, we will examine the intersection of two understudied phenomena: the specifically *temporal* underpinnings of hope in times of political *dystopia*. We take dystopian imaginations to be critical accounts of a present expected to extend into the foreseeable future, which then act as drivers of action through opening up the future to possibilities and potentialities. Critical dystopia “offers not only astute critiques of the order of things but also explorations of the oppositional spaces and possibilities from which the next round of political activism can derive imaginative sustenance and inspiration” (Moylan, 2000: xv). As such, dystopia “portrays the darkness of the lived moment” (Levitas, 2013: 110) without foreclosing oppositional alternatives. Hence, in this paper, we talk of dystopia with “a utopian impulse” (Baccolini and Moylan, 2003) where the ambiguous, open-ended quality of the future is mobilized to organize hope among activists.

To study how hope is generated for political action in unlikely settings, we draw on Hochschild's concept of "emotion work" and extend the concept of "time work." Taking inspiration from ethnomethodology and American pragmatism, Flaherty (2002: 387) describes time work as the "agentic practices designed to control or manipulate aspects of temporality", or more specifically, "one's effort to promote or suppress a particular temporal experience" (2003: 19). Examples include altering one's perception of duration to make it feel like it takes less time to wait; manipulating the frequency of certain experiences or activities, such as when we decide on when to go to the gym; and controlling the timing and allocation of events, like when we make time for personal schedules and loved ones. Based firmly in everyday life, Flaherty's conceptualisation of time work consists of *individual* "customizations" (2003) of personal temporal experiences.

Hochschild's well-known concept of "emotion work" (1979), however, is a multi-layered conceptualisation that considers the relationship between social structures, social norms, and the inter-personal and personal "management" (Hochschild, 2012 [1983]) of emotions. "Emotion work" encapsulates how emotions are regulated by society (through feeling rules) and how they are managed accordingly by individuals (through emotion work). As such, emotion work indicates how different social groups, divided along gender or class lines for example, experience and manage emotions, bringing to attention the *social*, and not only the individual, nature of feeling. Hochschild's focus on the relation between social structures and individuals leaves more room for the collective and political implications of emotion work. Therefore, time work and emotion work, in their original conceptualisations, are alike to the extent that they both refer to the intentional and purposeful "management," "manipulation," or "customization" of time and emotions as people experience them. Where they differ is the level of the analytic situatedness of each concept within broader socio-political structures: Flaherty's "time work" is conceptualised as individuals' customization of subjective experiences of time in everyday life, whereas Hochschild's "emotion work" makes more overt connections between individual feelings and how certain social groups are expected or allowed to feel, as well as how they manage those emotions.

In this article, we follow Hochschild's "emotion work" to extend "time work" to cover explicitly collective and political orientations to time. We take time work as the collective effort to shape narrative and prefigurative orientations to the imagined past, lived present, and anticipated future, for and within political struggle. In our ethnographies, time work was the process through which the collective "organisation of hope" (Dinerstein, 2015) was realized as an explicit means of political action, under dystopian circumstances where the immediate materialization of better futures was unfeasible. Time work manifested itself in two ways in our respective fields: In activists' narratives of time, and in their collective acts of hope. Below, we structure the presentation of each of our cases according to these two manifestations of time work.

Here, we compare ethnographies carried out in Scotland and Turkey in the context of two critical referenda, namely, the United Kingdom's European membership referendum of 2016 and the Turkish constitutional referendum of 2017. We find that within these 'dystopian times' lived by our informants, hope emerges as a resource for sustaining political action, as a tool for reconfiguring the present through its evocative imaginations of the future, and through the indeterminate (Miyazaki, 2004: 84), not-yet nature of hope's future orientation. We argue that time work, and not only emotion work, is required on the part of political activists to create hope in dire political situations.

In Scotland, pro-independence political action amongst Scottish National Party activists is driven by hopeful imaginations of the future within a ‘dystopic’ post-Brexit Britain, offering alternative ‘wishful images’ of an independent future that incite activists to political action. For SNP activists, the new dystopic landscape of a ‘Brexit Britain’ opened up the future not only as a space for critiques of the present, but as a space of exploration for alternative ways of being from which we can derive inspiration, in this case Scottish independence. Scottish activists engaged in time work through their performances, imaginations, and actions, where they sought to escape what they considered to be Britain’s dystopia by *pursuing* this hopeful future, approximating it into the present, folding present-future temporalities. In Istanbul, there was no expectation of a hopeful scenario in the foreseeable future after the referendum and the 2018 elections were lost. What drove activists to action in the immediate aftermath of electoral defeat was instead the push of a dystopian present that was anticipated to stretch into the near future, rather than the pull of utopia. In the absence of the expectation of a positive outcome in the foreseeable horizon, activists engaged in time work through a narrative of historical embeddedness that incorporated a distant past and a distant future when political activism could bring about positive change. Such an orientation to time kept despair at bay while generating and justifying hope and continuous political action, thus helping activists sustain a sense of agency.

What emerges from both these ethnographic explorations is hope as a collective reorientation to time that opens up the relationship between past, present and future through time work. Perhaps unintuitively, dystopia sparks the creation of hope, and therefore the mobilisation of future-oriented political action, by both critiquing the present and opening up alternative possible futures. Present-future linear timelines are disrupted through this futural imagination, inciting political activists into actions that approximate these imagined hopeful futures. In what follows, we first present how the Scottish National Party generated temporal imaginaries of hope to approximate a future utopia. We then turn to activists of the local “no” assemblies in Istanbul, after the defeat of the political opposition both at the 2017 referendum and the 2018 elections, when the assemblies disintegrated, to present how they engaged in a future-oriented historical vision of political action to sustain hope, keep the future open, and get out of the dystopian present. Each case will be presented first as a temporal description of the dystopian context and the time work that went into activist self-sustenance in the form of narratives, and secondly as acts of hope where time work manifested itself in prefigurative action (Monticelli, 2022) or “embodied and embedded futures” (Paju, 2020), where the future is actualized in the present (Bryant and Knight, 2019).

Approximating future utopias: Hope in the SNP

Living in dystopia: Scotland post-Brexit

For many Scottish National Party (SNP) activists, living in a post-Brexit Britain is as close to dystopia as one can get, often described in outraged tones as a ‘dystopian nightmare’ and ‘the last straw’ that would inevitably bring Scotland’s demise. SNP activists have long-since felt that the Scotland’s place within the rest of the UK represents a broken partnership (at best) or a colonial invasion (at worst), often pointing towards Westminster and the UK government to explain Scotland’s economic, social, and cultural troubles. For over three decades, the argument presented by the SNP and their activists has been as follows: Scotland wishes to be a left-wing, liberal nation, yet it is shackled by the right-wing UK Parliament and must therefore become independent, to be the nation it wishes to be (Manley 2021). Within the current political landscape of the UK these claims are not entirely unfounded, as Scotland as a

nation has voted for a centre-left party every general election since 1964, a voting pattern that puts them greatly at odds with the more conservative England¹ (Torrance 2017, Keating 2009).

This argument underpinned the 2014 independence referendum (where Scotland narrowly voted *not* to separate from the UK, 44.7% to 55.3%) where the European Union debate took centre stage. A large part of the debate on whether Scotland should become independent or not hinged on Scotland's potential right to remain part of the EU. The SNP has been strongly pro-European since the late 1980s, taking a strong 'independence in Europe' stance that matched Scotland's strong pro-EU sentiment during its pro-independence campaigning in 2014. The British anti-independence campaign also argued strongly in favour of remaining within the EU, however, they argued that the only way to remain within the EU was to remain a part of the British union, as Scotland would not be allowed to re-join the EU as an independent nation. As Scotland voted to remain in the Union its place within the UK and the EU seemed settled at long last.

Two years later the SNP activists I worked with watched in horror as Britain voted to leave the EU in 2016. Whilst Scotland had voted once again strongly in favour of staying with the EU (62%), the overall UK vote was heavily skewed by the larger English vote to leave (53.4%). This was a traumatic event for many activists, who lamented seeing their greatest political fears materialise within a system they had repeatedly attempted to escape; not only was Scotland still a part of the UK, but the political imbalance they had been campaigning against for decades had torn them away from the EU, which many considered to be the 'last good thing about the union' (Manley 2021). As SNP activists often told me, Scotland had entered its most dystopian future.

Many SNP activists I interviewed in the years that followed the Brexit referendum described living in a post-Brexit Britain as 'a living nightmare', 'but a real nightmare, one you don't wake up from'. For SNP activists old and new the nightmare seems protracted, turning into the dystopian future they always feared. During my most recent campaigning runs in Edinburgh with local SNP activists those new to the party post-Brexit describe the current state of the UK as a dystopian landscape:

'It's everything, from the lorries in Calais to the lack of staff... there's no one to work! Everyone's left, back to Europe, or escaping to Europe... and now our human rights are under attack and they're letting GMOs and American pork in [to the country], every time I think "oh it can't get worse" and I read the news and its worse!'

When I asked activists to describe a future within the current union they often became visibly upset. 'I don't want to think about it actually' Ann, an elderly activist chastised me once when I asked following a monthly activist meeting, 'it's so upsetting I can't think about it, the idea that I will die in this union... hell can't be much worse'. Young activist in particular were vocal about 'living in dystopia', blending Brexit, the current UK government and climate change into vivid descriptions of dystopian presents and futures.

¹ Of course, it is yet to be seen whether they could sustain such a narrative approach if opposing a left-wing government or in a post-independence Scotland. More recently, the 2022 SNP leadership election surprised many activists who did not expect a socially conservative candidate to come second in the leadership race to replace Nicola Sturgeon. Some talk of a right-wing change brewing within the party, fuelled by growing 'culture wars' across the UK.

Brexit has compounded the problems that SNP activists had rallied against in previous decades, accelerating and exacerbating the problems they believed would inevitably come from the union between Scotland and the UK. Much like the Turkish activists in the ethnography below, SNP activists found themselves living in a dystopian British future they once imagined, longer confined to the far future of the Union but here in the present. However, within this ‘dystopian’ post-Brexit landscape SNP activists have found a renewed spark of hope for the future. Brexit was a substantial change in the British political landscape, which coupled with the SNP’s continued electoral success in Scotland is set to lead to a new independence referendum sometime between 2023 and 2024². In this way, Brexit has re-opened the possibility of Scottish independence, now seen by SNP activists as the only hopeful future left.

Temporally, the ‘living nightmare’ of Brexit did not symbolise an end for SNP activists, but the *continuation* of a decades-long struggle, and the opening-up of new futures. Brexit re-opened the independence horizon, sparking alongside the feelings of living through dystopia a distinct sense of hope and futural momentum, created through activist’s hopeful wishful images (Bryant and Knight 2019). Through their careful imagination of the future, as well as performances of said imagined futures, SNP activists are approximating the future into the present harnessing it to galvanize the movement.

Acts of hope: Harnessing hope in dystopia

Since the Brexit vote, the SNP has been harnessing a message of hope both implicitly in their rhetoric and explicitly in their messaging. In 2016, during the immediate aftermath of the referendum they unveiled their new slogans: “Hope” and “We can”, three words deeply reminiscent of Obama’s historic 2008 campaign. At their party conferences large banners now hang from every available surface reading ‘HOPE’, and official SNP campaigning t-shirts feature large “We can” slogans on the front and back. Badges, leaflets, and pins followed suit, with the latest campaigning material reading: “HOPE: Another Scotland is Possible”, encouraging activists and others to imagine an alternative hopeful future beyond what they call ‘Brexit Britain’. Crucially, as we will see, for the SNP this “other Scotland” is not only imagined, it is not simply confined to the fancy of immaterial ‘what-ifs’, and transcends empty political rhetoric. The hope that they imagine, harness, and perform is made concrete through the introduction of “wishful images” (Bloch 1986) of Scotland’s not-yets, tying this hope to specific political outcomes that are performatively enacted in the present, collapsing present-future linear timelines by approximating said imagined future, creating political momentum within the movement.

In *The Principle of Hope* (1986), Bloch provides an exploration of hopeful futures through what he calls “wishful images” which form the building blocks of future-orientated anticipatory consciousness that bring about hope, pulling us into the indeterminate “not yet” of hopeful futures. These wishful images, created and consumed in the everyday imagination, populate the empty space beyond the horizon aiming to provide some certainty to the indeterminacy of the future. In this way, they invite people to not only imagine the future, but to populate the realms of the not-yets and the could-haves born from present conditions, “providing momentum towards the actuation of aspiration” (Bryant and Knight 2019: 134). At the same time, the kind of hope that is essential to Bloch’s critical project, “educated hope” (Levitass 1990), involves knowledge and understanding of the present; as such, it is “a moral orientation, not simply a wish or spontaneous impulse” (Eagleton 2017, p. 61). Hope of this kind is central

² Or so are the SNP’s current plans at the time of writing (July 2022)

to Bloch's critical utopia, which is not a constellation of unattainable goals but a political imperative (Levitas 1990, p. 24; Anderson 2006). Such is the hope that the SNP seeks to harness; a hopeful independence future that is not entirely fanciful, but a political imperative, carefully rooted in Scotland's present conditions, such as re-joining the EU or the creation of Scotland's future currency, as was the case during my fieldwork in 2018.

Following the publication of the Growth Commission³ in 2016 a heated debate raged amongst SNP grassroots movements on the currency Scotland should adopt should it become independent. The Growth Commission recommended Scotland adopts the Pound Sterling until certain economic tests and checks had been met. The vague nature of these tests coupled with the indefinite time-period it could take to meet them was extremely off-putting to the grassroots movement, who vehemently continued to argue in favour of a Scottish currency. Soon after the Growth Commission was published, pro-independence economists began developing their own plans for a new Scottish currency, attempting to demonstrate the simplicity and ease of the process. Videos started popping up across all pro-independence online platforms detailing exactly how a central bank, a new currency and a legitimate stock exchange could be set up. As these ideas began to gather momentum these economists were invited to local grassroots meetings across Scotland in an attempt to galvanize SNP members to rebel against the Growth Commission and force the SNP to adopt a Scottish Currency plan.

At one such meeting in Edinburgh, not only were these wishful images of a future Scotland explored, they were performed and embodied, approximating the actuation of aspiration to such an extent that for a brief moment in time the 'not-yet' had materialised. Such 'prefiguration' served activists to divine the future, presenting it as a hopeful 'realizable' timeline that none the less has not truly been actualised, inciting a call to action. As Bergson states, the present pre-figures the future, but hope itself exists within the affect of potentiality (i.e. what *could* be, given activist action) (see Jaster 2020; Bergson 2001).

"I want to play a game" the economist announced after he had finished his PowerPoint presentation on the process of setting up a Scottish currency. "I want us all to pretend that we are in the early days of independence, and we are about to implement the new Scottish currency". He approached a few people and handed each of them a piece of paper with the name of a bank written on it, "you will be the banks", he told them "and everyone else will be the citizens". He then reached into his bag and proceeded to hand each 'bank manager' a stack of 'Scottish currency' notes he had printed himself. The notes were colourful and intricately designed, with portraits of famous Scottish figures printed on each one. "I've called it Alba" he said "and the symbol is the old Groat⁴". The task of the participants was to cosplay as "citizens" and to approach the "bank manager" to buy Alba from them with our own Pound Sterling.

As the exercise got underway and the Alba notes started getting handed out the SNP members became increasingly enthusiastic, marvelling not only at the apparent simplicity of switching from one currency to another but at the tangibility of this utopian future. The Scottish note they now held in their hands symbolised much more than economic independence. It was a symbol

³ The Growth Commission is the second 'white paper' on independence, commissioned and presented by the SNP government. It details the economic viability of an independent Scotland and presents a plan and recommendations to follow in case of independence.

⁴ in honour of David II King of Scotland, the last male of the House of Bruce who repeatedly fought off the English. He introduced the Groat as official Scottish currency in 1357.

of prosperity, of financial equality, of fair pensions, and high taxes for the rich, embodying all the financial hopes and dreams they had for Scotland's monetary future. For one activist, Sarah, this event was a powerful experience that left her feeling a deep sense of hope for the future she had not been able to previously grasp. As a working-class woman born and bred in Leith, one of the most deprived areas of Scotland made famous by the film *Trainspotting*, the Scottish notes spoke to her beyond abstract economics. They symbolised the possibility of breaking free from her working-class background, the end of poverty and suffering she had grown up surrounded by and the birth of a new economic system based on equality and sustainability: "It was very emotional for me aye", she reflected on the currency issue after the meeting:

"I didn't grow up with much, I'm a working-class woman, and I grew up with Thatcher of all things. Leith looks hip now but believe me it was no place to be as a young lass, and my maw, she worked hard but we often lacked... I always felt it was such an injustice, that people did not have to live like this, without dignity. They will tell you it's necessary, that capitalism demands it and that if you're poor it's your fault but it's lies, all lies to keep you in line. So aye, holding that note was powerful, I can still feel it, the joy of paying with our own currency...freedom from debt and corporations, I felt free...for a kinder nation you know? ... No little girl will have to suffer like I did after indy[independence]"

Sarah's story is one that resonated with many other middle-aged and older voters within the SNP, most of saw a Scottish currency as a way to break away from the poverty and injustices they had suffered "at the hands of Westminster". The currency was a highly affective symbol, representing much more than the separation from the UK. The fake Scottish note was charged with hope of a fairer, poverty-free Scotland, and the act of using it solidified the materialisation of the otherwise-than-actual.

Michael Flaherty (2013: 237) describes 'time work' as "one's effort to promote or suppress a particular form of temporal experience", an agency-driven action that resists the external (or linear) sources of temporal constraint in order to shape the contours of our lives. It is this form of agency which Flaherty terms 'time work' and Bryant and Knight (2019) term 'orientations' that drive SNP activists towards the manipulation of present-future timelines. Yet for the SNP, this 'time work' went beyond everyday individual customizations, rather, it extended into collective 'emotion work' (Hochschild 2012 [1983]) that shaped the narrative and prefigurative orientations to the imagined future and lived present. The futural orientations of hope that present dystopias incited amongst activists transcended individual manipulation of time, connecting individual histories and emotions, such as Sarah's, to the explicitly collective and political effort of Scottish independence. Here, time work was the process by which hope was collectively organised, imagined, and approximated, through both their narratives of time and their collective acts of hope. Hope's ability to create and approximate the imagined future emerged as a resource through which political action was sustained, enhanced and fomented within an otherwise 'dystopian' present.

[An expanding temporal horizon: Generating hope after defeat in Istanbul](#)

[Living in dystopia: The aftermath of the 2017 referendum](#)

The 2017 constitutional referendum in Turkey put to vote 18 amendments to the constitution that would institutionalize the authoritarian regime. The “yes” vote to institute regime change won by a margin as a result of what has been shown, by independent initiatives and opposition political parties, to be a rigged voting process. The referendum took place under a nation-wide state of emergency that lasted for two years, under conditions of suspended civil rights and liberties, and a bill was passed on the day of the referendum to allow for unstamped ballots to be counted as valid, thus enabling fraud. In 2018, presidential and general elections were held, which resulted in the re-election of Erdoğan as President and his party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) winning the majority of seats together with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). While the referendum constitutionalized the authoritarian regime, the 2018 elections further legitimized Erdoğan’s rule.

The referendum prompted mass mobilization in the form of election campaigns both by independent grassroots organizations and political parties. In this article, I focus on the local “no” assemblies which were established by community organisers to campaign for the “no” vote against regime change. The assemblies brought together activists and participants with different political leanings in a structure that was decentralized and inclusive. Although the “no” assemblies were initially established as a grassroots electoral campaign, they soon came to be thought of as the local units of a long-term political project that aimed to safeguard against an increasingly repressive and authoritarian regime. However, the assemblies disintegrated soon after the 2018 elections due to the volatile electoral schedule (Gokmenoglu, 2022) and the lack of a coherent campaign. In this section, I follow the activists of the disintegrated “no” assemblies after the defeats of 2017 and 2018 to analyse how hope was generated in a dystopian present.

The period leading up to the referendum was eventful and revolved around avoiding dystopian scenarios from coming true. The content of the dystopia was never fully narrated, and although they never explicitly named it as such, dystopian imaginations marked the everyday lives of activists, offering “astute critiques of the order of things” whilst simultaneously opening up spaces for political hope (see Moylan, 2000: xv). The referendum, if lost to the “yes” vote, was imagined as “the last nail in the coffin”. Dystopian futures were based on past and present experiences of repression, curtailed political freedoms and civil rights, and the criminalization of the opposition. However, once defeated (both at the 2017 referendum and the 2018 elections), activists suppressed dystopian narratives that perceived the future in apocalyptic terms and reverted to a temporal narrative of hope. This narrative allowed for and justified political action.

The response to the defeat was a flattening out of the temporal horizon 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”, one of my interviewees told me. The eventfulness of the previous period marked by an ambiguous near-future full of possibilities was replaced by a post-apocalyptic present (Berger, 1999; Williams, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2013; Cassegard and Thorn, 2018). Activists were living in the dystopian future that they had imagined would be awaiting them if they could not overturn the awaited course of events.

In response, activists turned to a narrative of historical embeddedness that encompassed the distant past and the distant future, a historical time where they placed themselves within a much broader timeframe of struggle. Sian Lazar, in her 2014 article where she discusses temporalities of 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. Yet, in Istanbul, as in Scotland, the future figured much more heavily than the past in the temporal orientations of activists. In a political context where the expectation of success in the short term was unrealistic, historical embeddedness made hoping for the future possible, which was a political resource against the stifling effect of dystopian scenarios.

When I asked an interviewee, a former militant in his late 50s, what he expected of the future, he replied: “I am hopeful about the future. Even if we lose. Provided that democratic forces and leftist forces and socialists produce more sensible politics, this painful period can be shortened”. He avoids substantiating a wishful image but keeps gloomy scenarios at bay. The thought of defeat triggers a historical imagination, not with a nostalgia for a glorious past, but an historical embeddedness that is future-oriented, one that is concerned with shortening the dystopian prolongation of the present. The certainties of the current dystopia are not imagined as continuing into the future; instead, indeterminacy is actively sought and found in the not-yet (Miyazaki, 2004). The suspension of dystopian future scenarios was a “politics of postponement” (Özkaya, 2023) in the sense that the conflicts, tensions, and the unwanted affective structures of the present were suppressed to be dealt with at a later time.

In this rhetoric, defeat was constructed as part of an ongoing process of political struggle, rather than an absolute end. The time work involved in this construction entailed frequent references to horizons, visions, ideals, and cycles. The dissolution of the Soviets and the 1980 military coup in Turkey were two historical events that came up in my field site as the collective memory of defeat. Another interviewee, a socialist in his mid-40s, when I asked him if he remembers a particularly hopeful time, responded by evoking these two historical events to say “I belong to a time of defeat [...] But I never thought they [the left] were over. I admired their vision [...] I admired their ideals”. In this quote, the time of defeat immediately triggers a futural orientation to time, through visions of the future.

The cyclical and ongoing temporality of history was brought to the fore in the new context of defeat. Phrases like “the fight goes on in tidal waves”, “life goes on”, “a society never dies”, “they will eventually fall”, or “this is not a sustainable regime” became increasingly frequent. The defeat was not the end. Instead, activists opened up the future by referring to the ongoing nature of political struggle, with an emphasis on the attempt to effect change in the long term. The unsustainability of repression allowed for vague but wishful images of a future when transformation would become possible, engendering a future-oriented temporality of historical embeddedness and hence, hope.

The talk of defeat was usually accompanied by a temporal narrative of historical embeddedness. Activists switched to historical time and a narrative of ongoing struggle, denying an end-of-time rhetoric which saw the defeat as final. This kind of political imagination that is historically embedded and oriented towards the future did not only enable hope and action, but also justified 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. Alongside the blurring of dystopian imageries where disastrous scenarios were toned down, historical embeddedness was a strategic time work that shaped activist narratives for them to reclaim temporal agency (Flaherty, 2013) with regards to how socio-political transformation will come about.

The temporal narrative of hope, in the form of a historical understanding of one's situatedness in a history of struggle with an open past and open future, went alongside acts of hope, where activists joined and repurposed already existing local organizations in a bid to generate hope for future political action.

Acts of hope: time work in action

As in Scotland, activists in Istanbul did not only imagine and narrate wishful images of a future when political action would become possible, but also performed them by engaging in actions that embodied and materialized those hopeful not-yets. In the absence of the local “no” assemblies that explicitly dealt with national politics, activists joined more locally-oriented organizations to create hope in order to reproduce themselves as activists and to sustain their networks (Yates, 2021). These organizations were food cooperatives, alternative football leagues, urban gardening groups and the like, where the focus was on building solidarity through everyday activity on a local scale. These spaces had proliferated after the Gezi protests of 2013, in keeping with the prefigurative and horizontalist focus of the time. What was new after the defeat of 2017-18 was the re-channelling of political energies into these already existing alternative spaces. These spaces were concrete examples of organizations – or more precisely, networks – that embodied long-term projects, with an emphasis on generating hope through maintaining relationships and prefiguring or materializing the not-yet (Bryant and Knight, 2019). As one of my interviewees, who was an activist in her 40s, an assembly participant and a part of the local food cooperative, put it, “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, will create hope”. A 26-year-old activist who was one of the first organizers of the local assembly, confirms the importance of alternative political networks after the defeat: “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”.

Placing themselves within historical time and in preparation for a future when they will be able to intervene into politics in a transformative 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, to sustain their sense of (political) self, and to maintain their relations with fellow activists. Continuing to be politically engaged, even if in a different form, was preparation, rather than waiting for, an opportunity to arise where a better, more hopeful, future would become imaginable.

Another interviewee who joined the local assembly after the referendum, who identifies as “someone who is against injustice”, was enthusiastic about her involvement in an alternative football league 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, emphasizing their function as generators of hope: “People there are not hopeless, they don't think that nothing will happen anymore [...] There is a network there [...] I mean, the struggle is not over”.

My interviewee's 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, and because they pursue the not-yet, convincing her that the struggle is not over. Activists who joined these alternative political spaces saw them as tools for organizing for when the time comes when these ties can be mobilized for other, perhaps larger-scale, purposes: “I am certain that other things will emerge out of this” said another interviewee about everyday politics, to affirm her hopeful but cautious stance on the future: “I don’t know how these ruins [of the current government] can be recuperated but I think they [the government] will fall”. The possibility of repurposing these networks at a time that is more amenable to political transformation was brought up by others, too, even those who chose not to join alternative spaces: “It is very important to stay in contact [...] There is no way of knowing what a cooperative in this neighbourhood will evolve into tomorrow”. Hope here is not “cruel optimism” (Berlant, 2011) but a strategy for sustenance that is enabled by historical embeddedness that was typical in my field site.

Repurposing networks, maintaining relations, and generating hope bring together the past, or “the ruins” of the current regime, the damage that has already been done; the present, through building everyday lives, creating networks, organising, and sustaining hope; and the future, where attempts in the present come to fruition one way or another in the distant horizon.

The time work that engendered and sustained wishful images of better futures involved a narrative that situated activists within an expanded historical timeframe which encompassed not only the past but also, and more prominently, the future. Time work also involved engaging in prefigurative action that sought to produce and reproduce hope in the form of solidarity, organizing, and building networks. Approximating the future in both words and deeds required suspending disastrous scenarios and turning the certainties of the dystopian present into indeterminate and uncertain possibilities of the not-yet. Dystopia and hope, interlinked in this way, were a driver of political action for anti-authoritarian activists in Istanbul as well as SNP activists in Scotland.

Conclusion: Hoping as time work

In this article, we approached hope as an overtly political resource of transformative action that is created for and within political struggles, particularly under dystopian circumstances. Bridging the scholarship on emotions, time, and utopia/dystopia, we sought to uncover the temporal dynamics that are involved in the creation and maintenance of hope to make political action possible. We found that activists’ political imaginations reached further into the future when the present seemed to lack avenues of social transformation. Reaching into the future to collectively create hope required both “emotion work” and a particular form of “time work”. Thus, the article makes both empirical and conceptual contributions to the literatures it draws on.

Empirically, in the Scottish case, the dystopia of Brexit opened up a renewed wishful image of Scottish independence, while in Istanbul, the wishful image of a better future was vaguer and revolved around a distant future (or a distant possibility) of transformative political action. In the Scottish case, wishful images worked through the pull of the utopian future of independence, while in Istanbul it was escaping from an extended dystopian present that pushed activists into wishful images of a better future where transformative action would become possible. Despite their differences, activists in both contexts experienced their present as dystopic and created a rhetoric of hope to sustain political action. Based on this observation,

this article demonstrated how dystopian imaginations, when taken as critical evaluations of the present, may enable the collective creation of hope through opening up the indeterminate future to possibilities of political transformation.

Activists collectively “managed” (in the way Hochschild uses the term) their temporal orientations, suspending disastrous future scenarios while popularizing futures that opened up possibilities for change. “Coordinating futures” (Tavory and Eliasoph, 2013) in this way, activists were able to sustain their networks, build solidarity, and nurture a utopian impulse as a driver of action. We called this process by which activists collectively organized the futural impetus of hope, “time work”, expanding Flaherty’s (2002; 2003) original conceptualisation.

Conceptually, therefore, we took inspiration from Hochschild’s “emotion work” (1979) to reconceptualise “time work”. Although alternative terminology to think about the intersection of emotions and time exists, such as “temporal emotion work” (Lois, 2010) and “emoting time” (Mullaney and Shope, 2015), we believe “time work” is a flexible concept that can be analytically useful in contexts that were not intended in the original conception of the term. In this article, we expanded time work to refer to the process whereby temporal orientations are *collectively* produced for explicitly *political* purposes. In our ethnographies, the political purpose was the creation and maintenance of a particular emotion. However, time work, reconceptualised to cover its collective and political uses, can be exercised for a range of different political purposes, from building utopian communities to devising revolutionary strategy, from maintaining activist networks to creating new political alliances.

Flaherty (2003) examined the “customization” of different dimensions of time (e.g. duration, frequency, sequence, timing, allocation) as one way in which individuals exercised time work. Based on our findings, we add two new forms that time work can take: narratives and collective action. Both modes of time work harboured an agentic engagement with time, and especially with the future (Mandich, 2020), where the future was made, unmade, and remade as the political situation unfolded. As imaginations and narratives helped activists make sense of the political situation, orient themselves to potential futures, and approximate the desired future into the present, acts of hope, or prefigurative action, materialized the not-yet with a view to building and sustaining activist imaginations and networks, in preparation for a future where these imaginations and networks could be re-mobilised for transformative politics.

The two modes in which time work manifested itself in our fieldwork, narratives of time and collective acts of hope, were observable in:

1. Imaginations of utopia: Particularly in the way SNP activists narrated utopian futures of Scottish independence
2. Narratives of historical embeddedness: Anti-authoritarian grassroots activists in Istanbul situated themselves within an extended historical timeframe of social transformation that included the distant past and the distant future
3. Prefigurative action: In the Scottish case, collective action that brought the future into the present included experimentation with Scottish currency, while in Istanbul, activists repurposed already existing local networks as an act of hope.

Our findings bring to the fore an active kind of hope where both the emotion and its object (i.e. better futures) are co-created in and through political struggle. Activists in both our field sites narrated, imagined, and performed time and situated themselves within a temporal narrative of hope, whether it be the utopian impulse towards national independence or the extended historical time of transformative possibilities. The creation of hope required time work, in its

collective and political sense, to situate activists within a constantly re-configured understanding of what the future held and to approximate, or prefigure, better futures, folding them into the present, driving and sustaining action towards emancipatory political ends.

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