Organizing Protest in Eventful Times

Secessionist Mobilization and the Contentious 1-O Referendum in Catalonia

PhD Dissertation

submitted by

Hans Jonas Gunzelmann

Supervisor: Prof. Donatella della Porta

Faculty of Political and Social Sciences
Scuola Normale Superiore
Palazzo Strozzi, Piazza Strozzi – 50123 Firenze

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1-O	October 1, 2017
3-O	October 3, 2017
8-N	November 8, 2017
9-N	November 9, 2014
10-J	July 10, 2010
20-S	September 20, 2017
21-D	December 21, 2017
AMI	Associació de Municipis per la Independència
AMPA	Associació de Mares i Pares d'Alumnes
ANC	Assemblea Nacional Catalana
CCO	Communication-as-constitutive
CDR	Comitè de Defensa del Referèndum/Comitè de Defensa de la República
CiU	Convergència i Unió
CUP	Candidatura d'Unitat Popular
ERC	Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICV	Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds
JERC	Joventuts d'Esquerra Republicana
JxC	Junts per Catalunya
IMA	Instant Messenger Application
PDD	Plataforma pel Dret de Decidir
PP	Partido Popular
PSC	Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya
RA	Responsable de l'Administració
RM	Resource Mobilization
SEPC	Sindicat d'Estudiants dels Països Catalans
SMO	Social Movement Organization
UxR	Universitats per la República

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The aerial view of Catalonia on September 11, 2013 must have been spectacular. More than 1.5 million independence supporters formed a 400-kilometer human chain spanning the entire region. The chain was called the Via Catalana ("Catalan Way"), because it followed the stretch of the ancient Via Augusta from the French border to the Valencian Community. The Via Catalana was planned and prepared by the Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC), a social movement organization fighting for Catalan independence.

> Tens of thousands of t-shirts were printed with the logo "My place in history. Catalan Via towards Independence." The participants registered online to take a specific slot in their locality. The event was hugely successful, and it demonstrated the immense organisational capacity of the pro independence Catalan movement. (Della Porta et al. 2017, 90)

The Via Catalana was only one protest in a series of mass mobilizations that took place in the streets of Barcelona and other towns of the region between 2010 and 2017 (Agustín and Raftopoulos 2021; Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019). Protests in this period were meticulously organized by the ANC and Òmnium Cultural, another large professionalized social movement organization (Crameri 2015b; Della Porta et al. 2017). The Catalan independence movement came to be known for preparing protests through "an impressively thorough organisation" (Crameri 2015b, 52).

Four years after the Via Catalana, the Catalan struggle for independence intensified dramatically. In early June 2017, Carles Puigdemont, the president of the Catalan Generalitat (the autonomous institutions), stepped in front of the media to make a public declaration. He announced his intention to hold a referendum on Catalonia's independence on October 1 of the same year. Puigdemont's push for a binding referendum on independence was met with severe opposition by the Spanish state. When it became unclear whether the referendum could go ahead, pro-independence activists and voters and occupied voting stations to ensure that the vote could take place. Over two million Catalans cast their votes on October 1, 2017 (called 1-O), defying a

police intervention deployed by the Spanish state to close voting stations and confiscate ballot boxes.

Protests such as the Via Catalana were organized in long and detailed preparatory processes by large and professionalized social movement organizations. However, these organizing processes took place in periods of relative tranquility when protests were met with little opposition from the Spanish state. When Puigdemont announced the referendum, the conflict between secessionists and the Spanish host state became much more contentious. This dissertation asks how the 1-O referendum changed the ways in which the Catalan independence movement organized protests. Whereas previous research has mainly studied social movement organizations *as entities*, this dissertation focuses on the process of *protest organizing*: I am interested in how activists plan and prepare contentious action and how these processes change over time.

This introductory chapter provides an overview of the dissertation. The next section elaborates more in detail on the research questions. Section 2 discusses the relevant literature as well as the contributions of this dissertation. Section 3 outlines the main argument of the dissertation. The final section presents the structure of the dissertation.

1   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Demands for independence had been a marginal political issue in Catalonia for a long time. Only after 2009, support for secession from Spain has risen sharply. Pro-independence activists have repeatedly voiced their claims in the streets and through a series of unofficial referendums. Spanish state actors responded with judicial and soft repression, but did not actively interfere in the region's politics. While these interactions became contentious on occasions, they did not put into jeopardy the integrity of the Spanish state. The balance of power between secessionist challengers and the host state remained relatively stable until 2017.

The 1-O referendum broke with the routine interactions between the independence movement and the Spanish state. The efforts to hold a binding referendum provoked an escalation of conflict that manifested itself in a dense sequence of secessionist contention and counter-secessionist repression. The rapid expansion of contention confronted organizers in the independence movement with challenges that differed very much from the normal interactions in previous times. In addition, the contentious character and contested outcome of the referendum itself dramatically altered the opportunity structure for the independence movement. In short, the announcement of the referendum sparked an unprecedented "contentious episode" (Tilly 2008, 10).

In a recent article, Donatella della Porta (2018, 3) has called to differentiate between "normal times and intense times." Following this idea, the secessionist cycle of contention can be divided in the normal times before Puigdemont's referendum announcement and the intense 1-O episode of contention that followed. At the outset of this introduction, I have stressed the role of the movement's organizational capacity in its push towards independence before 2017. But it is unclear how the organizational dimension of the independence movement has evolved over time. This presents the main research question of this dissertation: how did the intense 1-O episode of contention shape the ways in which the secessionist movement organized protest? I break this question down into two parts.

First, I focus on the protest organizing *during* the 1-O episode of contention. The *1-O episode of contention* is the term I use for the series of contentious interactions from the vote on the Law on Self-Determination in the Catalan parliament on September 6 and 7 until the application of article 155 of the Spanish constitution and the ineffective declaration of independence by the Catalan parliament on October 27. A the time of writing this dissertation, this period of roughly seven weeks represents the peak of the larger secessionist cycle of contention, which has been under way at least since 2009 and whose end remains unclear. How were protests organized during this episode of intense contention? To answer this question, I look at organizational practices and processes in this time in comparison to the previous mode of normal organizing.

Second, I turn to protest organizing in the time *after* the 1-O episode of contention. The referendum triggered a series of strategic and repressive mechanisms that initiated the contraction of the cycle of contention, in particular after October 27. The Catalan parliament's declaration of independence was ineffective, while the application of article 155 by the Spanish senate involved the suspension of Catalan autonomy and put the region under the control of the Spanish government. Article 155 also removed Puigdemont and his government from office, dissolved the Catalan parliament, and called a snap election in the region. While these events brought the focus of the secessionist conflict back to the institutional sphere, there were still a number of protests in this period. How did protest organizing change after the 1-O episode? Did organizational practices and processes return to previous modes of organizing? Or did the 1-O referendum have a lasting transformative impact? This is the second set of questions this dissertation seeks to answer.

The challenge in addressing these questions is that concepts like "normal times," "intense times," and "transformative events" do not represent objective temporal units. Previous research has pointed out that the meaning of temporal categories is created by social and political actors in interactive symbolic processes (Basta 2018; Grzymala-Busse 2011; McAdam and Sewell 2001;

Sewell 1996a; Wagner-Pacifici 2010, 2017). Instead of taking events, normal times, and intense times as given, this dissertation takes an interpretive approach, which focuses on participants' understandings of these categories. The goal is to explore to how activists made sense of the referendum and other occurrences and how they linked their organizational processes and practices to these understandings. In other words, I approach these questions through the retrospective view of activists using a series of qualitative methods.

Answering these questions is crucial for understanding one the most salient cases of secessionist conflict around the world. The organizational capacity of Catalan secessionists has been a cornerstone of their successful mobilizations. Studying the organizational dimension of the independence movement over time may tell us more about how it managed to challenge the integrity of the Spanish state. The 1-O referendum was arguably one of the most important events in recent Catalan history.

However, the conflict in Catalonia is not only relevant for Spanish politics. As much as Catalan secessionists voice their solidarity with other independence movements in Scotland, Kurdistan, Corsica, or Flanders, these movements look with great interest at what is happening in Catalonia. For many of them, the organizational capacity of the Catalan independence movement has been exemplary. Arguably, no other independence movement is based on such a dense network of civil society organizations and has repeatedly managed to turn out millions of protesters. Catalonia can hence be considered an ideal case of an organized secessionist movement.

Studying this organizational factor may help scholars understand secessionism as a highly relevant political phenomenon at the intersection of domestic and international politics. The dynamics of secession and counter-secession directly touch upon the sovereignty of states over territory and population, which can be considered the foundational element of modern politics. Perhaps because the state itself is at stake in secessionist conflicts, many of them have turned violent. Roughly half of the 150 self-determination campaigns recorded since 1960 have become violent conflicts (K. G. Cunningham 2014, 14; see also Fearon and Laitin 2003; Griffiths 2016; Sorens 2012). Barbara Walter (2009, 3) even holds that secessionism is the primary source of political violence around the world. Studying how secessionist movements organize protest helps understanding an important facet of secessionism as salient political issue. Secessionist movements' organizational capacity is key for their success or failure to mobilize their supporters and to achieve their goals (K. G. Cunningham 2014, 17–18).

Whether in secessionist movements or other social movements, protest organizing is an important topic in itself. How activists prepare and plan collective action is a central factor for whether that collective action turns into mass mobilization or remains a marginal occurrence. The

capacity of movements to bring about social change depends to a large extent on whether they are capable of organizing impactful protests. But protest organizing matters beyond its instrumental value. Many social movements do not orient their organizational practices and processes towards immediate strategic gains and reject supposedly effective bureaucracy in favor of horizontal, deliberative, and inclusive organizing. In this perspective, protest organizing represents an important democratic practice in civil societies.

2   CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE LITERATURE

Ernest Renan (1882) has famously been quoted that a nation is "a daily plebiscite." But, in fact, referendums on independence are extremely rare in established democracies (Dion 1996; Lecours 2018; López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020). The 1-O was particularly unusual for two reasons. First, while other secessionists (e.g. Scotland and Québec) sought the agreement of the central state government, the 1-O represented an attempt at *unilateral* secession (Holesch and Jordana 2021; Muro, Vidal, and Vlaskamp 2019). Second, when there is no agreement about a referendum, central states usually ignore the vote and treat it as non-binding. In contrast, the Spanish state sent police forces to Catalonia trying to prevent the referendum (Letamendia 2018; López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020). Most importantly, the referendum was accompanied by an unprecedented wave of protest.

Despite the importance of the 1-O referendum for the Catalan conflict in particular, and Spanish politics more broadly, there is still very little research on its impact. Existing studies have focused primarily on the behaviors of the regional and central governments (Ferreira 2021; López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020) and the consequences of state repression (Balcells, Dorsey, and Tellez 2020; Barceló 2018; Della Porta, Gunzelmann, and Portos 2021; Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019). However, the role of the 1-O for other dimensions of the secessionist conflict remains understudied.

More in general, the question of how protest organizing in secessionist movements changes over time has not been addressed so far. One reason may be that research on secessionism has engaged only very little with social movement studies and organization theory. On the other hand, social movement scholars have lost interest in organization studies (Soule 2013) and turned a blind eye on secessionist movements and on ethnic and nationalist movements more broadly (Muro 2015). This dissertation brings together organizational theory, social movement studies, and research on secessionist movements and makes contributions to each of these fields.

The literature on secessionism has developed an extensive body of knowledge on independence movements in established democracies. Scholars increasingly have focused on the strategies and

tactics of secessionist and self-determination movements more broadly (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; K. G. Cunningham 2013; Griffiths and Muro 2020b; Griffiths and Wasser 2019; Sorens 2012). In contrast, how secessionist movements organize these strategies and tactics has not been investigated in a systematic way yet. The contribution of this dissertation to this literature is to explore the organizational dimension of secessionist movements and how it changes over time.

Previous research in social movement studies has highlighted the role of organization for protest (for overviews, see e.g. Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Davis et al. 2005; den Hond, de Bakker, and Smith 2015; McCarthy and Zald 2001; Minkoff and McCarthy 2005; Piven 2013). Contention would often not be possible without preparation and planning, which has sometimes been called the *backstage* of protest (Haug 2013; Rucht 2017). The classic literature focused primarily on the organizational infrastructure of social movements, and the study of social movement organizations (SMOs) in particular, because they often provide the human and material resources that are required for contentious action (Clemens 1997; Curtis and Zurcher 1974; Kriesi 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Minkoff 1995; Zald and Ash 1966). More recently, however, Sarah Soule (2013) has lamented that social movement scholars have lost interest in organization. And indeed, it appears that researchers have dispensed of the notion of organization and stressed the role of other concepts such as networks (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014; Baldassarri and Diani 2007; Castells 2012; Diani 2015; Mische 2008). Den Hond, de Bakker, and Smith (2015) have suggested that this has been due to the narrow focus on SMOs as *formal* organizations and propose to expand the concept to *partial* forms of organization.[1] While I agree with their assessment of the field, I suggest another way forward.

This dissertation tackles a different meaning of organization: as the process of *organizing* protest. Activists spend a great amount of time planning, preparing, and coordinating before the event itself (Della Porta and Rucht 2015; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Haug 2010, 2013; Polletta 2002; Rucht 2017), although spontaneous dynamics can unfold during protests (Cheng and Chan 2017; Killian 1984; Snow and Moss 2014). In the present study, I am primarily interested in these organizing processes in the independence movement and how they were shaped by the contentious interactions with its opponents over time. I build on organization theory to distinguish between organizations as entities, organizing as a process, and organizationality as a property (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman 2019). This distinction allows for a more comprehensive approach to the organizational dimension of social movements.

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[1] The concept of *partial* organization was developed by Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) and denotes modes of organization that only exhibit some of the features of formal organizations.

Most studies of secessionism have ignored the temporal development of movements. Strategies, for example are studied as static objects (K. G. Cunningham 2013; Griffiths 2016; Griffiths and Muro 2020b; Griffiths and Wasser 2019). However, Mark Beissinger (1996, 2002) emphasized that secessionist protest unfolds in waves. This dissertation builds on Beissinger's work and examines secessionist protest organizing over time. Other scholars found that social movements often undergo organizational changes. New groups emerge; old groups shift their goals and strategies; others disappear. Social movements may follow paths of oligarchization (Michels 1911; Piven and Cloward 1979; Zald and Ash 1966), institutionalization (Staggenborg 2013; Tarrow 2011), professionalization (McCarthy and Zald 1973; Staggenborg 1988), commercialization and involution (Kriesi 1996), and radicalization (Kriesi 1996; Tarrow 2011). One problem with these studies was that they focused exclusively on how *organizations* change. This dissertation advances this literature by approaching the organizational dimension more comprehensively, as mentioned above.

Finally, Beissinger (1996, 2002) in his work on the Soviet Union also highlighted the role of events as endogenous factors in the development of secessionist contention. He showed how one secessionist protest led to another one and spread across the Soviet Union, eventually resulting in its disintegration. Karlo Basta (2018) emphasized the symbolic power of transformative events, demonstrating how Catalan secessionists anticipated the 2010 ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court on the Statute of Autonomy and attempted to frame it in their favor. Social movement scholars have been more attuned to eventful approaches. A series of contributions examined the role of transformative events and critical junctures (Della Porta 2008, 2018; Della Porta, Gunzelmann, and Portos 2021; McAdam and Sewell 2001; Sewell 1996a; Wood et al. 2017). This dissertation expands this literature by focusing on the consequences of the 1-O referendum as a transformative event on the organizational dimension of social movements.

3   THE 1-O REFERENDUM AS A TRANSFORMATIVE EVENT

Drawing on rich qualitative evidence, my argument essentially is the following: Although the 1-O referendum did not lead to Catalan independence, it did have important consequences for the independence movement itself. The referendum fundamentally changed the ways in which activists organized protest both during and after the 1-O episode of contention.

This research idea builds on a previous contribution by Donatella della Porta, Martín Portos, and myself (2021). We found that the 1-O referendum altered the movement's action repertoire, frames, and organizational dimension. This is why we argued that the 1-O referendum can be considered a *transformative event* (McAdam and Sewell 2001) or even a *historical event* (Sewell 1996a)

for the independence movement. Transformative events have been defined as "very brief, spatially concentrated, and relatively chaotic sequences of action [that] can have durable, spatially extended, and profoundly structural effects" (McAdam and Sewell 2001, 102).

Sewell, McAdam, and others have used the concept of transformative events referring to large-scale overhauls of political structures, such as revolutions and regime changes, but also other occurrences triggering important political change, such as 9/11 or the Montgomery bus boycott. In contrast, our research confirmed that contentious events can also "have cognitive, affective and relational impacts on the very movements that carry them out" (Della Porta 2008, 30). However, our research only scratched the surface of the problem. Leaving aside action repertoires and frames, this dissertation explores the transformative impact of the 1-O on organizing in the movement much more in depth. I argue that the 1-O referendum was eventful for how the movement organizes protest in two ways.

First, the concentration of contentious interactions between the Spanish state and the Catalan secessionist challengers had an impact on how the independence movement organized protests *during* the 1-O episode of contention. Time pressure, enhanced contingency, and opponent action made previous routines of long, detailed, and deliberative planning impossible to maintain. Instead, protests were organized in short, directed processes between or outside organizations. At the heart of this episode is the so-called defense of the voting stations. In the days before the referendum, activists from different backgrounds came together in open assemblies at the local level to form Committees for the Defense of the Referendum (*Comitès de la Defensa del Referèndum*, abbreviated CDRs) to occupy the voting stations and obstruct the Spanish police intervention. The referendum as a shared goal allowed activists to organize the defense of the voting stations without the support of the pre-existing SMOs.

Second, the referendum had consequences for protest organizing even after the end of the 1-O episode. Some of the changes that happened during the 1-O episode were there to stay and sedimented into permanent properties of processes and practices. The CDRs changed their name to Committees for the Defense of the *Republic* and became an important third civil society actor. But the referendum also triggered four mechanisms that transformed protest organizing beyond the 1-O episode. Exhaustion, facilitation, repression, and strategizing made internal communication and interorganizational collaboration became more difficult. Organizational leaderships were weakened and could rely less on directing. Not everything was changed though. Protests after the 1-O episodes resembled protests before in that there was less spontaneity and organizational processes were longer and more meticulous. Organizational structures and practices provided some inertia in turbulent times.

4   PLAN OF THE DISSERTATION

The 1-O referendum fundamentally altered the ways in which the Catalan independence movement organized protest. I develop this argument in four parts. The first part elaborates the conceptual framework of the dissertation and presents the research design. Chapter 2 turns to the main object of inquiry: protest organizing. It uses lesser-known organization theories as analytical resources to develop a holistic framework of the organizational dimension in social movements, which focuses on four concepts: organizations as structures, protest organizing as a process, organized protest as organizationality, and organizational practices. It then addresses how these components change over time. Chapter 2 also proposes an eventful approach to organizational change in social movements. It develops the core theoretical argument of the dissertation: Contentious episodes can be eventful and transform protest organizing in social movements through a series of mechanisms. Chapter 3 builds on the conceptual chapter and outlines the research design for the dissertation.

The second part of the dissertation describes the strategies, protest actions, and organizing of the independence movement during the normal times of the secessionist conflict between 2009 and 2017. Chapter 4 builds on the relevant literature on secessionism and social movements to define the scope and context of the research question. It clarifies what secessionist movements are and what they do and traces the secessionist cycle of contention in Catalonia from its origins in 2009 to the 1-O episode of contention. In this time, demands for independence became more prominent and were accompanied by the emergence of a pro-independence civil society. Chapter 5 describes how these civil society actors organized protest in the normal phase until the announcement of the referendum. It introduces a generalized account of organizational practices and how they functioned in normal times of conflict.

The third part of the dissertation focuses on the intense 1-O episode of contention. Chapter 6 discusses the unique character of the 1-O as a *contentious* referendum in comparative perspective. It explains how the idea of a binding and unilateral referendum emerged and how the push for the referendum resulted in the 1-O episode of contention. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on protest organizing during the 1-O episode. Chapter 7 compares the five protest cases in this period of time. Chapter 8 analyzes in detail the most curious of these cases: the defense of the voting stations on the day of the referendum.

The fourth part addresses the changes of protest organizing after the end of the 1-O episode. Chapter 9 compares four protest cases that took place after the cycle of protest started to contract on October 27, 2017. It shows that there were three trajectories of protest organizing in this period

of time: re-equilibration, sedimentation, and transformation. Transformation was driven by four mechanisms: repression, facilitation, strategizing, and exhaustion. Chapter 10 focuses in detail on the mechanism of strategizing by outlining how strategy debates after the 1-O referendum impacted protest organizing. Chapter 11 describes how organizers adapted to repressive action by the Spanish state and what they perceived as an increased level of surveillance. Chapter 12 concludes the dissertation by summarizing the findings and discussing their implications.

PART ONE: CONCEPTS AND METHODS

Chapter Two

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Research on secessionist conflicts has produced some important theoretical developments over the last thirty years. Most of these writings are theories *of* secession. They theorize when substate actors pursue independence, how host states respond, and under what conditions secession eventually occurs (Griffiths 2016; Sorens 2012). Questions about the organizational and temporal dimension of secessionist conflict have only been of secondary importance, both theoretically and empirically. These questions are, however, the central concern of this dissertation.

This chapter presents the conceptual framework of the dissertation. The chapter is divided in two parts. The first part concerns the organizational dimension of the research question. Building on a number of writings in organization theory, it discusses three meanings of organization: organization as an entity, as a process, and as a property. I develop the central concept of *protest organizing*, which is the primary object of inquiry of the dissertation. The second part tackles the temporal dimension of the research question. It uses cyclical approaches to contentious politics as a starting point to theorize the temporal development of social movements over time, distinguishing between "normal" and "intense" times of conflict. Building on the work of William H. Sewell (1996a) and others, I develop the argument that intense episodes of contention can be eventful and have transformative consequences for protest organizing. The result is an eventful approach to organizational change in social movement.

However, the framework is not constructed as a theory of organizational change. Instead of formulating theoretical expectations about the conditions under which protest organizing changes, the framework is composed of sensitizing concepts that guide and structure the empirical analysis. Moreover, the framework does not advocate a single approach to the study of organization and social movements, but draws inspiration from a series of theoretical resources in an eclectic fashion. Nevertheless, most of these inspirations share an ontological attention to processes, events, agency, and practices. Social structures are relegated to the background of the analysis. In other words, I am concerned with how collective action in social movement evolves over time and in relationship with other actors.

1   ORGANIZATIONS, ORGANIZING, AND ORGANIZATIONALITY IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

It is virtually impossible to read a text in social movement studies without coming across the phrase "to organize a protest". Take Charles Tilly's classic *The Contentious French* as an example:

> By Bastille Day 1921 the themes of peace and internationalism had regained prominence after dissolving in World War I. On the morning of that holiday Dijon's "communist socialists" *organized* a march to the city's cemetery. One hundred fifty to two hundred people (including some twenty women) gathered at the Place du President Wilson. (Tilly 1986, 37, emphasis added)

Throughout the book, Tilly used the expression 29 times to describe how collective actors engaged in demonstrations, strikes, campaigns, and resistances. Despite its abundance and centrality in the text, Tilly did not elaborate on what he exactly meant when writing that activists "organized a march" and one might be inclined to ask: why should he? After all, the expression is familiar from everyday language and media reports on social movements. However, delving into what it means to organize protest is more than a linguistic exercise. I suggest that the novel concept of *protest organizing*, which represents the main object of inquiry of this dissertation, holds the potential to clarify the relationship between structure and action in research on protest and social movements.

Since its emergence as a subfield of the social sciences, there has been a lot of debate on organization in social movement studies, which is documented in text books and edited volumes (Davis et al. 2005; Della Porta and Diani 2006, 2015; Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004b; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Nevertheless, there is still a lot of conceptual confusion, as I see it. This is why it is best to begin with a basic distinction.

What is organization? In his seminal *Power in Movement* (2011), Sidney Tarrow distinguished three meanings of *organization*: first, organization may refer to "the connective structures or interpersonal networks" (124). To avoid confusion, I would like to relegate this meaning immediately to the realm of network analysis.[2] Second, the more common usage of organization is as "the advocacy organization - or formal associations of persons" (123), which has been made prominent by the concept of the social movement organization (SMO). The third meaning of the term refers to "the organization of collective action at the point of contact with opponents" (123).

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[2] This is for two reasons. On the one hand, network and organization represent two fundamentally different types of social order (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011). On the other hand, social network analysis possesses far better concepts to describe the structures of networks than the term "organization" (Diani 2015; Diani and McAdam 2003). Thus, there is no need to stretch the concept "organization" to this area.

This is what I would like to call *protest organizing*: the planning and preparation of contentious action. Tarrow's two latter meanings reflect the common distinction in organization studies of "organizations, as things or nouns, from organizing, as a verb or process" (Van de Ven and Poole 2005, 1379). I suggest that there is a third meaning of organization in social movements: organization as a property of collective action. Protest can be more or less *organized*. Drawing on Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman's (2019) terminology, I call this the *organizationality* of protest.

This leaves us with three dimensions of organization: organizations as entities, organizing as the process of preparing protest, and organizationality as a property of protest. It must be stressed that these are different phenomena and it is important not to confuse them. Following again Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman's (2019) and other organizational theorists, I use the noun when referring to an *organization* as a specific entity, the verb or gerund form when speaking about the process of *organizing*, and the adjective *organized* when describing a quality of collective action. Table 1 summarizes this terminology.

Table 1: Organization, organizing, organizationality (based on Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman 2019).

Concept	Definition	Grammar
Organization	Entity within a social movement	Noun
Organizing	Process of preparing contentious action	Verb, Gerund
Organizationality	Property of contentious action	Adjective

This conceptual distinction avoids conflating three phenomena that are often described with the same term. Using three different terms is more than just a grammatical difference or a play on words but helps keeping ontologically different objects analytically separate.

The field of social movement studies has produced an impressive literature about organizations as entities. Organizationality has not been treated as a term itself, but there has been considerable debate on the closely related topic of *spontaneity*. In contrast, Dieter Rucht (2017) has recently pointed out that there is no systematic account of the preparatory activities of protest, which are usually treated as one among many elements in case studies on social movements. Thus, despite a large body of literature on organizations and social movements, we know very little about how activists actually organize contentious action.

In my view, the reason for this shortcoming is that most social movement scholars only read and use entity-based organization theory if any. Organization studies is a more diverse than that, however. Process and practice approaches have been around for some time (Corradi, Gherardi, and Verzelloni 2010; Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Langley and Tsoukas 2010, 2016; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). More recently, theories prioritizing communication (Cooren et al. 2011; Putnam, Nicotera, and McPhee 2009; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman 2019) and decision (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 2019b; Ahrne, Brunsson, and Seidl 2016) have proliferated. I do not argue that any of these approaches is theoretically superior to an entity-based approach. Neither do I want to redefine the meaning of organization in social movement studies. If anything, the introductory distinction has shown that there is a plurality of meanings of organization, which refer to very different research objects.

The goal of this first part of the chapter is to use less-known organization theories as analytical resources to develop the central concepts of this dissertation. This allows shedding light on a largely neglected phenomenon: protest organizing. By integrating existing theories of organization and spontaneity, I develop a holistic framework of the organizational dimension in social movements. I start in the next section with the most established of the three concepts: the social movement organization as an entity. Second, I turn to the organizationality of protest and juxtapose it to spontaneity. The third section focuses on the main object of inquiry. I develop the concept of *protest organizing*, drawing on existing theorizations in the field of organization studies. Fourth, given that I have a particular interest in developments over time, I tackle the issue of organizational change. The final section summarizes these three concepts and shows how integrating a more diverse range of organization theories benefits social movement studies immensely.

1.1 Organization

The social movement organization (SMO)

Any discussion on organization in contentious politics starts with the concept of the social movement organization (SMO). The term was coined in the 1970s by the proponents of resource mobilization (RM) theory, primarily John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald. They defined the SMO as a "a complex, or formal organization which identifies its preferences with a social movement or a counter-movement and attempts to implement their goals" (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1218).[3]

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[3] Note that the classic definition by McCarty and Zald is partly tautological: a social movement organization is an organization. Rather than being an analytical slippery, the definition takes for granted that organization is an entity.

As such, it has clear boundaries and membership, rules and (professionalized) roles, as well as defined goals and procedures. Prominent examples are the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in the civil rights movement, or Greenpeace in the environmental movement. The SMOs of a social movement compose its social movement industry (McCarthy and Zald 1977, 1219) or infrastructure (Kriesi 1996, 153), abbreviated SMI. The SMIs of all movements in a society form its social movement sector (SMS; McCarthy & Zald, 1977, p. 1220). SMOs, SMI, and SMS constitute the organizational basis of social movements.

For a long time, the RM approach had been the workhorse of social movement studies in the United States. And while the theoretical propositions of resource mobilization have been criticized in recent debates, the SMO as a concept still enjoys some relevance as a central building block, for example in the contentious politics paradigm (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2011; Tilly and Tarrow 2015), but also in network analyses of social movement fields (Baldassarri and Diani 2007; Diani 2015). The methodological advantages of focusing on SMOs are obvious: First, formal organizations are easily identifiable (Rucht 2013, 171). There are more or less complete lists of SMOs, for example the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, allowing for the study of organizational populations (Minkoff 2002). Second, when boundaries are clear, it is easier to determine what is organizational and what is not. Third, SMOs produce a series of documents that can be used as data. Their representatives can be interviewed as speaking for the SMO. Finally, studying SMOs is not only a convenient matter of obtaining data, but in many cases SMOs represent the most influential groups of a social movement – precisely because they are formally organized.

Alternative modes of organization

Proponents of the RM approach not only described the properties of the SMO, they also championed its role for effective mobilization. Other researchers were more critical of formal organizations. Often drawing on Robert Michels' famous *Iron Law of Oligarchy*, some authors argued that formal organizations over time tend to shift their focus from mobilization to organizational maintenance (Piven and Cloward 1979). Over time, the Iron Law has attracted some considerable debate with no conclusive empirical results (Breines 1980; Clemens and Minkoff 2004; Leach 2005; Rucht 1999; Staggenborg 1988; Zald and Ash 1966).[4]

Skepticism towards formal organization has not only come from within social movement scholarship, activists themselves have often preferred alternative modes of organization. As early as the 1970s, many new social movement groups refused to formalize membership and leadership,

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[4] For a contribution in organizational studies, see Courpasson and Clegg (2006).

turning to informal modes of decision making and participation (Curtis and Zurcher 1974; Freeman 1970). Other groups did not reject structure completely, but referred to themselves as *collectives* and implemented participatory forms of organizing instead of bureaucracy (Rothschild-Whitt 1979). In contrast to the strategic and instrumental character of formal organizations, these alternative types of organizing were considered *prefigurative*, i.e. a goal in themselves and a way of bringing about a more democratic and inclusive society (Boggs 1977; Breines 1980; Epstein 1991). Prefiguration has become an important value for many subsequent progressive movements around the globe. Anarchist and autonomous movements have often rejected any kind of formal organization (Flesher Fominaya 2014; Graeber 2009; Leach 2006; Sutherland, Land, and Böhm 2014). The global justice movements of the 1990s and 2000s in particular adopted horizontal and loosely structured forms of organization that emerged as complex transnational networks (Della Porta 2009a, 2009b; Haug 2010; Maeckelbergh 2011). Movements in many places have championed deliberative and participatory decision making (e.g. Della Porta 2005; Della Porta and Rucht 2015; Felicetti 2017; Haug and Teune 2008; Nez 2012). The wave of Occupy movements that accompanied the financial and economic crisis after 2008 were characterized by large assemblies in public squares as the primary organizational form (e.g. Baumgarten 2016; Della Porta 2015; Hardt and Negri 2017; Juris 2012; Maeckelbergh 2012; Tejerina et al. 2013). More recent writings have pointed out that these movements, in contrast to descriptions of earlier scholars, did not perceive prefiguration as opposed to strategy, because it represented a means of implementing some of their goals (Eleftheriadis 2015; Leach 2013; Maeckelbergh 2011; Yates 2015b).

Of course, this short review cannot do justice to the vast differences in the ways in which these movements organize. What they all have in common, however, is that they reject bureaucracy and professionalization, and sometimes formal organization entirely. Hence, the debates around organization reflect the dilemmas of formality versus informality and horizontality versus verticality (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 142). The point here is that organizational entities represent important collective actors in social movements. This role must be acknowledged by the present framework, even if its purpose is precisely is to distinguish organizations from organizing processes.

In sum, I distinguish four basic organizational components, building on Rucht's (2013) comprehensive discussion of social movement structures. First, there are small local groups that usually do not have any formal structure. Rucht (2013) called them *basic action groups*, I call them *grassroots groups* or *local groups*. These must be distinguished from the second category, which is the SMO in the narrow sense of an entity with some degree of formalized membership, goals, rules, and roles. The size, the level of horizontality/verticality, and professionalization, among other

things, may vary greatly within this category. The diverse groups and SMOs of a social movement often work together. If they do so for a limited amount of time, they may form a *campaign network* or an *umbrella organization* (Rucht 2013). While Rucht saw these as belonging to distinct types of structures, I suggest that the boundaries are fluent. I use the term *platform* for this category. Finally, networks of local groups, SMOs, and platforms may be more durable, which is why Rucht (2013) called them *enduring networks*. These can consist of formal or informal interactions and can be located at the local or regional level. Although not all of these organizational units engage in protest (Minkoff 1995, 62–63), they often play a crucial role as drivers of protest action. In the next section, I turn explicitly to the idea of organized protest as opposed to spontaneous protest.

1.2 Organizationality

Spontaneous or organized?

Throughout the first half of the 20ᵗʰ century, but also in post-war times, many social scientists described protests as unexpected, irrational, and chaotic. As Buechler (2007, 47) wrote, "social movements were seen as one subtype of collective behavior along with panics, crazes, crowds, rumors, and riots." The collective behavior approach considered protests as a result of strain and breakdown of existing social norms (Blumer 1951; Smelser 1962). *Spontaneity* was a central element of the collective behavior approach and its emergent norms thesis (R. H. Turner and Killian 1987). Drawing on Freeman (1979), Killian (1984, 779) emphasized that "actors can and do make on-the-spot decisions which are not part of a plan for continuous action and whose consequences are unanticipated." In response to these strain and breakdown theories of social movements, proponents of RM theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1973, 1977) claimed that collective action was organized and calculated, not spontaneous and chaotic. Tilly argued that

> authorities and thoughtless historians commonly describe popular contention as disorderly […] But the more closely we look at that same contention, the more we discover order. We discover order created by the rooting of collective action in the routines and organization of everyday social life, and by its involvement in a continuous process of signaling, negotiation, and struggle with other parties whose interests the collective action touches. The forms of contention themselves display that order. (Tilly 1986, 4)

Tilly and others disagreed with the earlier view of protest as irrational behavior driven by grievances. Instead they highlighted the organized and often routine character of collective action. The idea of orderly and purposeful protest has become encapsulated in two concepts. A contentious performance is defined as "relatively familiar and standardized ways in which one set of political actors makes collective claims on some other set of political actors" (Tilly and Tarrow

2015, 14) and the repertoire of action as the available set of these "familiar routines" (Tilly 1986, 4). Even seemingly disorderly actions such as barricades, riots, and political violence were seen as conscious choices by challengers. With the dominance of resource mobilization and political process approaches in the field, the view of protest as organized increasingly replaced the previous emphasis on spontaneity (Buechler 2007; Della Porta and Diani 2006). However, spontaneity has not fully disappeared as a topic and has even received more attention recently (Cheng and Chan 2017; Fominaya 2011; Polletta 2006; Snow and Moss 2014; Wagner-Pacifici and Ruggero 2018).

It is not my goal to bring back the question whether social movements *inherently* involve organized or spontaneous collective action, which has dominated many scholarly debates in the past. Neither is it my intention to start a functional or even normative debate whether organized or spontaneous action is more useful for social movement to achieve their goals (Piven and Cloward 1979).

My point in this subsection and the next one is that organized protest should not be equated with the presence of organizations. Building on the aforementioned more recent line of research, I understand spontaneity and organization as opposed categories of the same concept, which may vary from one protest event to the other. In short, a protest is organized if it is preceded by a process of planning and preparation. But let us start with a definition of spontaneity.

> Spontaneity may best be understood as a cover term for events, happenings, and lines of action, both verbal and nonverbal, which were not planned, intended, prearranged, or organized in advance of their occurrence. (Snow and Moss 2014, 1123)

Snow and Moss essentially conceptualized spontaneity as the absence or the opposite of organized action.[5] This is why the debates around spontaneity are interesting for the conceptual framework of this thesis: I define spontaneous and organized action as opposed poles within the same concept: the organizationality of protest. However, Snow and Moss (2014, 1126) have warned against conceptualizing spontaneity and organization in binary terms, arguing that they "are neither dichotomous nor oppositional, but are instead often highly interactive." Building on this insight, I conceptualize the organizationality of protest as a *temporal* continuum. On the one end of this continuum, the amount of time that goes into planning and preparing a contentious performance is basically zero. The decision to take an action is made on the spot, i.e. spontaneous. In the middle of the spectrum, one can imagine protests that are organized within a couple of hours or days. The other end of the continuum is potentially open, because there is no theoretical limit to the

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[5] Spontaneity should not be confused with irrationality though, as Killian (1984) has argued: a spontaneous action can be considered rational as much as a planning process may be fully irrational.

amount of time that can go into organizing protest. In most cases, this is likely to take several weeks or months.

There are two caveats to this concept. The first is that, empirically, the operationalization of what counts as spontaneous or organized will depend very much on the duration and timing of the protest and its organizing process. This often rests on the researcher's decision what counts as part of the protest event and its preparation (see chapter on research design). Second, by the adjective *organized* I do not mean that protest is peaceful or constrained. Chaotic riots can be planned and prepared ahead of time, and therefore be organized. In other words, the term refers exclusively to the temporal dimension and not to the repertoire of action. Whether one type of action is more prone to spontaneity than others is subject to empirical inquiry.

In sum, the concept of organizationality I have developed here acknowledges that protest may be spontaneous or organized, depending on whether activists spend time preparing and planning or decide to act on the spot. Before I turn more in detail on the process of organizing, I outline how the concept of organizationality and the idea of *organized protest* differs from traditional social movement approaches.

Organized action without organizations

The concept of organizationality developed here diverges in its understanding of *organized protest* from much of social movement studies. In the classic works of the political process approach and RM theory and later contentious politics, the organized character of protest essentially meant that it was driven by SMOs representing shared interests. In fact, as mentioned above, organizational structures were seen as an important precondition for the occurrence of sustained protest in the first place. Or, as Tilly (1995, 32) put it: "whatever stress ordinary people may have endured, the critical difference between action and inaction was the extent to which they had become involved in organized movements." Spontaneity was not a concern for political process and resource mobilization scholars. Social movements - as a category of action, not as an actor – were regarded as inherently organized, and that meant: based on organizations (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004a, 10; Tilly 2004, 3; Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 11).[6]

The emphasis on organizational entities by the dominant streams of social movement research was criticized by other writers in the field. As mentioned before, Piven and Cloward (1979) argued in their research on movements of the poor in the US that organization hindered rather than

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[6] At the same time, Tilly (2004, 6) warned against equating "a movement's collective action with the organizations and networks that support the action". But in practice, this warning was often ignored.

enabled mobilization. They suggested that formal organizations over time were more concerned with their own survival than with effective collective action. Hence, activists refrained from disruptive contention, thereby trying to avoid putting the organization at risk. Piven and Cloward criticized RM scholars and others for neglecting protest that was not initiated by SMOs. As a result, they concluded that protest was "depicted as overorganized in a good many RM case studies. The rise of movements is signified by organizational paraphernalia, such as the formation of SMOs with leaders who make demands and call for demonstrations or lobbying" (Piven and Cloward 1991, 449). This critique was accepted by some proponents of the RM approach, who acknowledged that "organizations are very important in social movements, but they are not the whole story" (Oliver 1989, 1).

During the last two decades, however, a more fundamental challenge to classic approaches to organization in social movements has appeared. This challenge revolves around the impact of technological change and digital media in particular on activism. While the discussion on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is a complex one, a common thread in the literature is that the traditional concept of the SMO has increasing difficulties to account for recent waves of mobilization. This conceptual debate has been spurred by a series of empirical observations of protests that have surged in the 2010s, such as the Indignados in Spain, the Arab Spring, or Occupy Wall Street.

For instance, Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo (2014, 751) found in their study on the 15-M demonstrations in Spain that "traditional mobilization agents played no role whatsoever." The primary vehicle for mobilization was the online platform Democracia Real Ya!, which bound together many little-known activist groups: "The demonstration was not called by large traditional organizations, but by ad hoc platforms that acted as loose, flexible structures centered on a particular issue that linked people and small organizations without a specific long-term commitment or formal membership" (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014, 757). The primary organizational structures in the aftermath of the 15-M were protest camps, neighborhood assemblies, and online platforms rather than SMOs in the classic sense.

While the wave of protest in times of global crisis underlined the empirical relevance of digital media for social movement studies, some scholars had tried to come to grasp – both conceptually and empirically – with the impact of ICTs on organization long before. One of the first attempts to capture the impact of digital media on organizing was the classic work by DeSanctis and Monge (1999) on "virtual organizations," which are defined as "collection of geographically distributed, functionally and/or culturally diverse entities that were linked by electronic forms of communication and rely on lateral, dynamic relationships for coordination" (693). Another

influential conceptualization was the notion of the "hybrid mobilization movement" (Chadwick 2007, 284): the internet allows organizations to "sometimes behaves like an interest group, sometimes like a social movement, sometimes like the wing of a traditional party during an election campaign." More recently, David Karpf (2012, 3) has argued that the digital age creates different forms of organizations: Internet-mediated issue generalists, online communities of interest, and neo-federated organizations. These concepts, however, were mostly concerned with how organizations as entities were changed by the technological transformations – rather than how the nature of contention itself changed.

The most comprehensive answer was proposed by Bennett and Segerberg's (2012, 2013) work on the "logic of connective action." The authors suggested that the transformative moment in ICTs and social media in particular lies in that they enable individuals to create, share, adapt, and reproduce personal action frames online. Instead of having to overcome the free rider problem of the "logic of collective action" (Olson 1965), social media incentivize individuals to get involved in "connective action." The spread of personal action frames allows for coordinated contentious action online and offline. Organizations might make use of both of these dynamics, creating hybrids of connective and collective action, but the diffusion of personal action frames also functions without the support of a movement infrastructure.

Other approaches dispensed with the notion of organization entirely. It certainly is no coincidence that the rise of social media has been paralleled by the growing popularity of social network approaches to the study of social movements (for overviews, see e.g. Diani and McAdam 2003; Krinsky and Crossley 2014). Pavan (2017) for example demonstrated how online networks facilitate collective action without making reference to organizations. Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl (2005, 2012) argued that new technologies have created communication channels that were previously reserved to formal organizations. Other approaches focused on crowds (Bennett, Segerberg, and Walker 2014) and multitudes (Hardt and Negri 2005) as the central units of analysis. Some pundits went as far as to claim that collective action has entered a phase of "organizing without organizations" (Shirky 2009).

The impact of technological change showed more openly than ever before that organizational entities are not a necessary precondition for contentious action. All protest is not initiated by SMOs. This highlights that instead of taking the presence of organizations as given, as much of political process and resource mobilization theories do, it is necessary to analytically separate organizationality from organizations. This distinction opens up the possibility to investigate the relationship between organized action and organizational structures. Theoretically, several scenarios exist. On the one hand, spontaneity has often been linked to unorganized crowds and

mobs. But in theory SMOs can also call protests without any kind of planning or preparation. On the other hand, organized protest is likely to be prepared by a specific SMOs. However, the preceding discussion of literature on ICTs shows that it is also possible that contentious action is organized without the support of SMOs. This leads us to the central concept to link protest and structures: the process of organizing.

1.3 Organizing Protest

The process perspective

Let us leave aside the issue of spontaneous protest and focus on organized protest instead. In the previous section, I have argued that organized protest should not be confused with SMOs as entities but should be understood as collective action that was planned and prepared beforehand. What I mean by that can be illustrated using an example from the literature on the Catalan independence movement. Kathryn Crameri opened her book on the movement (2015a, 1) as follows:

> A campaign entitled "We don't want to pay" (#novolempagar), organized on Facebook and Twitter and reported by the media, succeeded in causing long tail-backs as motorists refused to pay tolls. The campaign was launched on 1 May, with organized convoys of vehicles targeting various key points around the region.

This quote shows the ubiquity of the phrase "to organize." In the first three sentences of the book, Crameri used it twice. Several observations about the expression can be made. Crameri employed it to describe "organized convoys of vehicles." This expresses that participants' behavior was not random or chaotic, but exhibited some kind of pattern. This orderly character did not occur by chance, but as the result of a prior process: the convoy was part of a campaign that was "organized on Facebook and Twitter." Crameri did not mention any organizations, nor which collective or individual actors actually planned and prepared the campaign. This dissertation takes into view precisely what the use of the passive voice obscures here: how contentious action is organized.

I propose the novel concept of *protest organizing* to capture how collective actors organize contentious action. Theoretically, the concept builds on the process perspective in organization studies (for overview, see Langley and Tsoukas 2010, 2016; Poole et al. 2000; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). This approach has been heavily influenced by the writings of Karl Weick and his work on the process of organizing. Weick defines organizing as follows:

> *Organizing* [..] is defined as a *consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviors.* To organize is to assemble ongoing interdependent actions into sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes. (Weick 1979, 3 emphasis in the original)

Drawing on this basic definition, I develop a preliminary concept of the organizing process of contentious performances. In the following, I briefly discuss its three basic components: sensible outcomes, sensible sequences (i.e. process), and reducing equivocality.

First, it seems best to start from the end of the definition. In Weick's view, organizing creates sensible *outcomes*, i.e. something that is meaningful to the organizers. In this part of the dissertation, I am interested in how activists organize protest. This means that I look only at specific kinds of organizing processes, namely those that lead to protest, strikes, occupations, or other types of contention. Of course this does not mean that social movements are always oriented towards contentious performances. The field has long acknowledged that activists do much more than protest (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 168). Organizing can have a range of different outcomes, what matters is that they make sense to the participants. Nevertheless, a viable empirical analysis requires narrowing down the focus to a clearly identifiable type of outcome. Put in Weick's terms, the analysis presented here is concerned only with a particular class of sensible outcomes.

Second, organizing is "accomplished by processes," as Weick (1979, 89) put it. In other words, organizing is a series of activities that constitute the planning and preparation of contentious action. These activities unfold over a certain period of time before the action. The organizing process has a start, a duration, and ends with the onset of the contentious action. While this might seem a somewhat banal statement, it helps distinguishing organized (i.e. prepared and planned) contentious performances from other courses of action. The main point is conceptual: organizing consists of a "sensible sequence" of "interdependent actions" (Weick 1979, 3), which takes place *prior* to the contentious action, whereas spontaneity unfolds during the contentious performance itself.

Third, process theorists suggested that organizing is an attempt to create order out of chaos (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, 570). In Weick's words, organizing is reducing equivocality and assembling other activities. When organizing a contentious performance, activists make plans about how the action should unfold: where and when to protest, which claims to bring forward, and what to do in case of confrontation with authorities. Thereby, they try to minimize spontaneous and random action. At the same time, it must be stressed that organizing represents only an *attempt* to reduce uncertainty. No matter how well planned a contentious performance might be, there will always

be a chance for unforeseen events. Bringing together the three components, I define *protest organizing* as:

> The process of reducing equivocality about a future contentious action by assembling interdependent actions into a sensible sequence.

Reducing equivocality means to devise a plan about the contentious action. This plan draws together otherwise loose preparatory actions, which can involve activist participation, framing, material and symbolic resources. I use the phrases "to plan" and "to prepare a protest" interchangeably with "to organize a protest" to make the text more readable. Figure 1 depicts the concept.

Figure 1: Protest organizing.
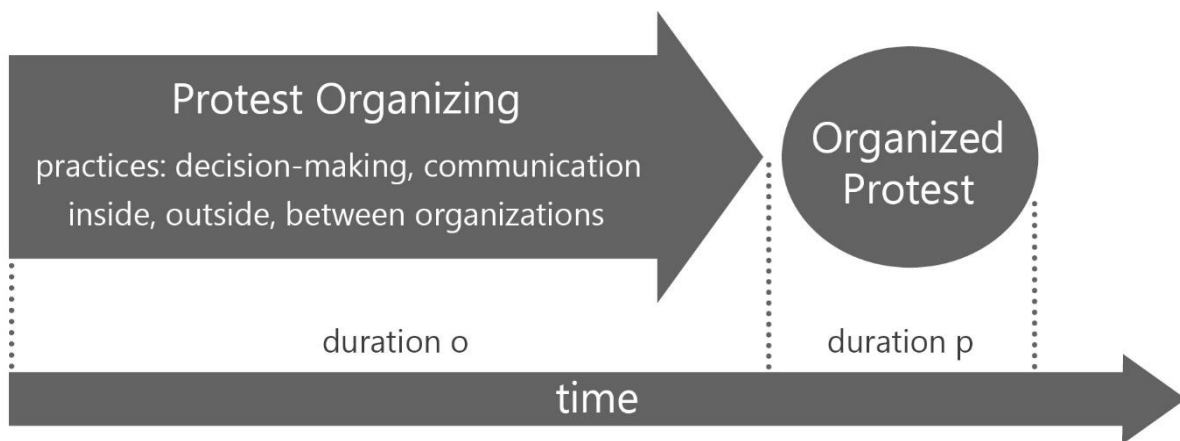
It must be stressed that this concept refers to a very narrow and particular meaning of organizing. It excludes basically all those activities in social movements that are not directly geared at protesting. This is not intended as a redefinition of the concept in instrumental terms. I am well aware that there are many processes and practices in social movements that are not immediately leading to protests but still might be called organizing.

For instance, my concept of *protest organizing* should be distinguished from the notion of organizing in the trade union context or in community organizing. By organizing, writers in this tradition meant "to develop organizational structures," or to build a "mass power organization," as Saul Alinsky (1989, 4) put it. In order to distinguish this kind of work from protest organizing, I refer to it as *structuring*.

Until this point, I have treated organizational structures and processes as analytically separate. It seems reasonable, however, that they are closely related empirically. Organizational structures,

and formal SMOs in particular often have division of labor, assign roles and responsibilities, and sometimes work with rules and sanctions. These elements of formal organization create routines that are useful for protest organizing (cf. Rucht 2013, 183). If organizational routines are already in place, this likely lowers the cost of the preparatory process. The concept remains a very abstract formulation and tells us very little about the concrete activities in organizing that reduce equivocality. Therefore, I bring in two other strands of organization theory to propose two practices that are essential in the organizing process: decision making and communication.

Organizational practices in organizing processes

In social movement studies, there are only few studies that deal explicitly with the concept of practice (Eleftheriadis 2015; Mattoni 2016, 2017; Shoshan 2017; Yates 2015a). In contrast, a larger body of work on practices exists in organizational sociology (for an overview, see e.g. Corradi, Gherardi, and Verzelloni 2010; Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Nicolini and Monteiro 2016). More generally, practice theories have developed into an established strand of social theory over the course of the last 30 years and have proliferated a vast amount of empirical studies on all sorts of practices. Several definitions of practice have emerged, emphasizing different dimensions of the concept. Many organizational scholars, and also social movement scholars such as Yates (2015a) and Mattoni (2017), have drawn on the synthetic concept by Andreas Reckwitz (2002, 249):

> A "practice" (Praktik) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, "things" and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge.

Practice theories point to the recurring character of social activities, as well as the relationships between their cognitive, emotional, and material elements. Practices cannot be reduced to any of these elements or to a single performance. They represent recognizable *ways of doing things*, which require knowledge, learning, and experience by the practitioner. Organizational practices are relevant for the purpose of this dissertation, because they represent "a primary way to study organisation processually" (Nicolini and Monteiro 2016, 110).[7]

For practice theorists, the social is made of practices (Schatzki 2001a, 12). Departing from this ontological premise, the researcher is faced with the problem of isolating practices for analysis (Gherardi 2012, 173). I suggest focusing on two broad categories of practices in the organizing

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[7] However, most of these works remain within an understanding of organization as an entity, as Feldman and Orlikowsi (2011) pointed out.

process: communication and decision-making practices.[8] This choice is motivated by two bodies of literature that have gained weight in organization studies over the last decade. On the one side, the communication-as-constitutive (CCO) approach to organization (Cooren et al. 2011; Fairhurst and Putnam 2004; McPhee and Zaug 2000; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman 2019), and, on the other side, the Luhmannian approach putting decision at the center (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 2019b; Haug 2013; Luhmann 2011). Building on these literatures, I argue that decision making and communication are essential for the organizing process, because they represent excellent means of reducing equivocality.

First, Ahrne and Brunsson (2011, 8) suggested that a primary way for organizational members to reduce uncertainty is through decisions: "Decisions are attempts at creating certainty, at establishing what the future will look like." In other words, decisions suppose a "commitment to future action" (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret 1976). Decision also implies a "a choice among several courses of action" (P. H. Rossi 1957, 417; cf. Dahl 1960, 26; Bachrach and Baratz 1962, 639). Activists have several options for action available, but to reduce uncertainty they must rule out all options but one. In this perspective, decision is seen "as the most fundamental aspect of organization" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 3). Or, put the other way round, organizations are essentially "decision machines" (Nassehi 2005). This means that decision making represents a crucial practice in protest organizing.

Second, communication practices are fundamental in organizing processes. This assumption builds on the claim that "communication is constitutive for organization," around which an entire approach coined by its acronym CCO has developed (Cooren 2000; Cooren et al. 2011; McPhee and Zaug 2000; Putnam, Nicotera, and McPhee 2009; Robichaud and Cooren 2013; J. R. Taylor and Van Every 2000). In contrast to classic organization theory, which treats an organization as a container inside of which communication happens, CCO views organization as being constantly co-produced through communicative interaction. Thus, communication is not a vehicle or tool for other ends; "rather, it is the means by which organizations are established, composed, designed, and sustained" (Cooren et al. 2011, 1150). Putting communication at the heart of the analysis implies that organized action must be seen "as rooted in process (or array of processes)," rather

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[8] Organization studies have proliferated a research on a wide range of practices such as strategizing (Fenton and Langley 2011; Jarzabkowski 2004; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007; Whittington 1996, 2003), knowing (Brown and Duguid 1998; Gherardi 2006; Nicolini 2003; Orlikowski 2002), and learning (Brown and Duguid 1991; Gherardi 2000; Rerup and Feldman 2011).

than in static "abstract structures" (Putnam, Nicotera, and McPhee 2009, 11). Organizing a protest without communicating is impossible.

What makes these practices organizational? Practice theorists, like ethnomethodologists, have emphasized that social life is always already ordered. The structured character of practices lies in their routinization. Reckwitz (2002, 255) stressed that "social fields and institutionalized complexes – from economic organizations to the sphere of intimacy – are 'structured' by the routines of social practices." Similarly, Giddens (1984, xxxi) emphasized the role of routines in the structuration of societies, because they provide "transformation points in structural relations". However, it would be a misconception to understand practices as rigid repetitions that give rise to stable systems of a Parsonian type. In fact, practices are subject to change, they "emerge, persist and disappear as links between their defining elements are made and broken" (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012, 21). Neither does it imply that *all* human action is inherently ordered, nor that order can exclusively arise through routines.

This is precisely the point where organizational theory comes in: organizing represents a *deliberate* structuring of social action. Communication and decision-making practices are organizational in that they *order* other collective actions. They are part of the effort to create order out of chaos (Tsoukas and Chia 2002) by reducing uncertainty. They are deliberate attempts to produce, alter, or even break down the routine order of practices. This means that practices are not simply the invariable result of routinization, habitualization, and learning, but they can be actively shaped by practitioners.

However, it must be stressed that organizing is a practice itself, too: it exhibits routine patterns, requires practical knowledge, and is recognizable to a community of practitioners. In this sense, organizing is not a force that is located outside of the field of practices, but represents a *specific* kind of practice. Organizational practice "anchors" (Swidler 2001) other practices in that it regulates the relationships between their bodily, mental, discursive, and material elements.

Protest organizing is the process of preparing and planning collective contentious action. It consists of reducing equivocality about the protest event through a number of practices, in particular decision making and communication. Protest organizing naturally unfolds over time, it can range from a couple of hours to several weeks or months. There is a second temporal dimension though. The processes of protest organizing may change from one protest event to the next. The next section tackles this level of organizational change.

1.4 Organizational Change

Social movement scholars have studied a range of organizational transformations, in particular when resource mobilization theory represented a primary reference point in the field. Organizational change can occur on different scales and timeframes. A series of works has looked at the development of macro processes over extended periods of time. I have already discussed the impact of technological change on organizations and organizing as a prominent example. Others have studied more limited organizational populations (Clemens 1997; Minkoff 1995) or even cases of single organizations, focusing on shorter time periods. Although technological change represents an important backdrop, the present study falls in the second camp, studying a single movement over a relatively limited stretch of time.

Social movement scholarship has addressed a series of topics within the broad framework of organizational change. First, organizational emergence and survival has received some attention. Although they are treated as an important precondition for mobilization, SMOs are often born in phases of heightened contention (Tarrow 2011: 122-123). However, few groups that emerge in contention actually turn into organizations, and even fewer persist over extended periods of time (Blee 2012; Minkoff 1995). The key to organizational survival lies not only in obtaining material resources but also social capital (Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Walker and McCarthy 2010).[9]

Second, with regard to changes in the properties of SMOs, there has been considerable debate around the "movement career model" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 65; Zald and Ash 1966), which is derived from Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy (1911). The model predicts that, over time, SMOs become more bureaucratic, hierarchical, and conservative. This process involves three types of change: goal transformation, organizational maintenance, and oligarchization. Organizations shift their goals from social change to their own survival over time, as they simultaneously become less participatory. In some cases, this is accompanied by professionalization (McCarthy and Zald 1973; Staggenborg 1988). Despite a series of empirical studies that have dealt with the Iron Law in one way or another (Breines 1980, e.g.; Leach 2005; Lipset, Trow, and Coleman 1977; Rothschild-Whitt 1979; Rucht 1999), there is no consensus about its veracity, mainly because it has

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[9] From a process perspective, there are fundamental problems with using organizational entities as units of analysis, as Abbott (1992, 433) pointed out: "Although the organizational ecologists have addressed the question of merger and division, they treat the processes merely as the continuation of one group coupled with the death or birth of another, thus avoiding the central questions posed about the continuity between entity and attribute. Existence in such an argument becomes an attribute that is somehow possible for an entity to lose, thus producing the philosophical monstrosity of an entity that can be defined as an entity but that doesn't exist".

been operationalized in various ways and applied to different organizational contexts. Whether it represents a general trend in social movements or not, previous research documented many instances where SMOs turn at least more moderate, if not oligarchic over time.

Moderation is not the only possible organizational transformation though. Another possibility is that movement organizations turn more radical over time. This can even occur within the same movement. Research on the environmental movement found, for example, that the institutionalization and professionalization of established SMOs in the 1990s led to the emergence of less-structured and more radical groups (Diani and Donati 1999; Rootes 1999). In other cases, organizations have even chosen to go underground and adopt violent tactics (Della Porta 1995, 2013). Tarrow (2011, 207) pointed out that moderation and radicalization may occur simultaneously as a cycle of contention contracts. Thus, they often do not only occur in the same movement but also in the same period of time.

In sum, social movement studies have produced an impressive body of research on organizational change. However, there are two problems with this kind of research. I have addressed the first one in previous sections of this chapter already. The notion of organizational change in this research rested on the concept of organization as an entity. Scholars described moderation and radicalization as changes of SMOs.[10] In contrast, in this dissertation I am concerned with the change of *protest organizing* as the central concept. Put differently, I am simply looking at another object of change. This does not mean that the existing research on organizational change in social movement is not instructive for the present study and can be simply ignored. Many studies in this literature are relevant, because they did not only look at the structural features of SMOs, but also at their repertoires (Diani and Donati 1999; Kriesi 1996). For example, the findings on institutionalization were as much about vertical structures as about moderate actions. The combination of both these dimensions speaks indirectly to how SMOs organize protest.

The second problem is that this body of work saw the drivers of change as structural, too. This could be the organizational structure itself (Clemens 1993), or the political opportunity structure in the political process model (McCarthy 1996). Concrete actions and practices have not featured in the existing approaches to change. This is why in the second part of this chapter I develop an

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[10] Moreover, this type of research rests on a particular idea of change, too: "In the organization-as-entity-view, change is seen as a transformation of structure [...]. In this model, change becomes a transition between one stable structure, t0, and another, t1" (J. R. Taylor and Van Every 2000, 142). Process approaches, in contrast, follow the idea that change rather than stability is an inherent property of organizing (Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Van de Ven and Poole 2005; see also Abbott 1992).

eventful approach to organizational change in social movements. The next section summarizes the sensitizing framework for the study of protest organizing.

1.5 Summary

Social movement scholars following the RM approach suggested that movement infrastructures, and SMOs in particular, represent crucial preconditions for contentious action (Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow 1989; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1986). As I have outline in section 1.2, recent empirical research has shown that not all protest is organized by or in organizations (Anduiza, Cristancho, and Sabucedo 2014; Bennett and Segerberg 2013). What does this mean for social movement theory? There are two possible responses to this issue. One is to stretch the concept of organization to encompass all sorts of structures that enable the coordination of contentious action. Another one is to dispose of the concept of organization entirely, which has become broader trend in social sciences, as Ahrne and Brunsson (2011) argued.

The proposition I have laid out in this section is a different one: I suggest it is more fruitful to ask how protests are organized, i.e. to focus on their organizationality and organizing. In the previous sections, I have developed the concept of *protest organizing*, which is the central object of inquiry of this dissertation. Protest organizing essentially refers to the process of planning and preparing collective contentious action. In this process, activists reduce equivocality about the protest event through communication and decision making. It represents an attempt to prevent spontaneous or random lines of action during the protest action. Thus, protest organizing directly relates to the concept of *protest organizationality*. If spontaneous and random action is minimized as a result of previous preparations, a protest can be called *organized*. In contrast, if protest occurs without any kind of previous organizing, it qualifies as spontaneous.

This perspective shifts the analytical attention away from the properties of organizational entities to what activists actually *do* to make protest happen. Staging street demonstrations, calling for strikes, and occupying squares often require meticulous planning and a great amount of preparatory work. The crucial insight of this process-based approach is that this work can be done within organizations but also between and outside of organizations, as theorists have pointed out (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 2019b; Ahrne, Brunsson, and Seidl 2016; Haug 2013). This is why defining what is *organizational* along the boundaries of organizational entities, as organizational ecologists do, is problematic. Or, as Weick (1979, 31) put it:

> The problem with this type of search should be obvious. Events inside organizations resemble events outside organizations; sensitivities of the worker inside are continuous with sensitivities of the worker outside. Since people have as much desire to integrate the

various portions of their lives as to compartmentalize them, what happens inside affects
what happens outside, and vice versa.

The problem of organizational boundaries is particularly relevant in social movements, where multiple membership of activists, the emergence, disappearance, mergers and factions of groups, and the informality of many entities render it difficult to draw boundaries in the first place and locate practices and processes within them. This is why De Bakker, den Hond, and Laamanen (2017, 217) argued that there "is much more organizing in social movements than social movement organizations, but much of social movement organizing is not quite befit with that label."

This does not mean that SMOs are irrelevant to the question of whether protest is organized or not. While it emphasized a different angle, the process approach to social movement organizing is far from being incompatible with resource mobilization theory. As mentioned before, RM theory has long stressed the importance of organizational structures for mobilization. The SMO should not be understood as "a reification of processes" (Van de Ven and Poole 2005, 1380), as "metaphysics" (Ford and Harding 2004) or a "myth" (Weick 1979, 88). Activists themselves would outright reject these terms, because for them organizations represent concrete and real objects. Thus, the present framework treats organizations as tangible collective actors that may or may not be involved in the processes of protest organizing.

This framework is not intended to be an accurate description or even a theory of organizing, but to be employed as a sensitizing framework for empirical inquiry. While resource mobilization and political process approaches have departed from the structural side of social movements, my framework proceeds in the opposite direction. Starting from a particular protest action, it allows to formulate a series of analytical questions, which I describe more in detail in the chapter on research design. The framework shifts the attention precisely to the gap between contentious performances and its preconditions (whether structural or of another kind), which is missing in much of social movement theorizing.

2   EVENTS, CONTENTIOUS POLITICS, AND ORGANIZING

There are times when the nation state might seem like a monolith to the ordinary citizen. Its norms and institutions, territories and boundaries appear to transcend the experiences of the individuals that inhabit it. Mark Beissinger (1996, 104) wrote that in "times of normalized politics," the established structure of the nation state "is backed by the effective authority of the state and is not subject to open challenge from within," so that individuals normally accept "a given institutional

arrangement as unalterable and even natural."[11] During these normalized times, political occurrences mostly "reproduce social and cultural structures without significant changes" (Sewell 1996b, 262, see also 1992; Giddens 1984). Usually, secessionist movements and protest organizing follow routines and only change gradually. The relationship between secessionists and the host state remains unaltered most of the time.

This, however, is only one part of the picture. Time and again, nation states around the globe witness periods of upheaval during which their territorial integrity is challenged from within their own borders. Discontent and grievances turn demands for greater autonomy into claims for outright independence. Although these conflicts often extend over several decades, the time during which they go beyond the institutional sphere tend to be rather brief. During these "secessionist crises" (Bartkus 1999; Basta 2018; Pagoaga Ibiricu 2020), wide-spread mobilization and contention threaten the integrity of the state. Using again Beissinger's terms, the "quiet politics" of secessionism give way to the "noisy politics" of secessionism (1996, 100). In a similar vein, Della Porta (2018) has recently highlighted the difference between "normal times" and "intense times" of protest. Following this idea, I suggest that secessionist conflicts can be divided in normal and intense phases.

The organizational dimension of social movements is subject to change as much as the form and frequency of contentious action, previous research found (e.g. Clemens 1993; Kriesi 1996; Rucht 1999; Zald and Ash 1966). Protest organizing and secessionist movements, as stable as they may seem during times of normalized politics, are never fully static. This is why it is important to study how secessionist protest organizing changes over time. The question at the heart of this dissertation is: Does protest organizing change in intense times of secessionist conflict? If so, how does it change?

The existing literature on secessionism has engaged only very little with the temporal dimension of secessionist struggles (see chapter 4). In contrast, social movement studies have devoted much attention to the trajectories of protest and organizing over time. Contention unfolds in "cycles" (Tarrow 1989, 2011), "waves" (Koopmans 2004), or "tides" (Beissinger 1996, 2002). However, much of this work understood change in structural terms. On the one hand, it focused on the change of organizational structures, and on the other hand, change was seen as driven by structural conditions, such as the political opportunity structure.

The approach of this chapter follows a series of writings that emphasize the role of *events* in the transformation of contentious politics (Basta 2018; Della Porta 2008, 2018; McAdam and

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[11] On the emergence of the symbolic power of the state, see Loveman (2005).

Sewell 2001; Sewell 1996b, 1996a). Building on this body of work, I develop an eventful approach to organizational change that is sensitive to the cyclical dynamics of social movements. The central idea is that intense contentious episodes can be eventful and transform protest organizing in social movements through a series of mechanisms. This argument is elaborated in four steps. The first section introduces the concepts of cycles and episodes of contention drawing on some of the crucial contributions in the contentious politics paradigm. The second section clarifies the notion of the *event*. I follow Basta (2018) and others in making a distinction between three different building blocks of temporality: occurrences, critical junctures, and events. The third section presents the core of the argument. I claim that intense contentious episodes transform protest organizing *while* they unfold and *after* their conclusion. The fourth section explicates the symbolic dimension that is inherent to eventful episodes and their transformative mechanisms.

2.1 Cycles and Episodes of Contention

Contentious politics is episodic per definition (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). Social movement scholars have found that contention concentrates in time (Beissinger 2002; Koopmans 2004; Tarrow 2011). It has been observed that periods of relative tranquility are followed by outbursts of conflict. This pattern has been described as a "cycle" (Tarrow 2011) or a "wave" (Koopmans 2004) of contention.[12] Tarrow defined a cycle of contention as follows:

> A phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors, a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention employed, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, a combination of organized and unorganized participation, and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities. (Tarrow 2011, 199)

In longitudinal perspective, cycles of contention go through the stages of mobilization and demobilization. As such, they "describe parabolas from institutional conflict to enthusiastic peaks of contention, to ultimate collapse, or – in the case of successful revolutions – the consolidation of new regimes" (Tarrow 2011, 212). Throughout the cycle, three types of mechanisms drive mobilization and demobilization: expansion, transformation, and contraction (Koopmans 2004). As a result, the repertoire of action changes through accumulation, innovation of experience, and external constraints (Tilly 2008, 27). But it is important to stress that the cyclical progression does not refer exclusively to protest activity: authorities and other opponents of social movements mobilize their resources as well and make use of their available means to respond to challengers

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[12] Like most scholars I use the terms interchangeably.

or to try to prevent protest at all. This results in rising levels of repression and facilitation throughout the cycle (Tarrow 2011). In sum, what varies throughout the cycle is not just the number of protesters, but the relationship between challengers and authorities (Koopmans 2004).

The main works of reference to approach secessionist conflict through the lens of contentious politics are the writings of Beissinger (1996, 1998, 2002, 2007, 2009) on the nationalist mobilizations during the final phase of the Soviet Union. Using two large catalogs of contentious events from a variety of sources, Beissinger showed that contention spread from early risers, such as Armenia and Estonia, to other ethnic groups within the Soviet state, provoking a cycle – or tide as Beissinger called it – of protests. Beissinger's work highlighted the endogenous dynamics within cycles of contention, where one mobilization can lead to another one. The tide of secessionist protests was not just an expression of the fragile state of the Soviet Union, but must be understood as a chain of events that ultimately resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Beissinger's work represents an important reference point for the present dissertation, because it highlighted the importance of the temporal dimension of secessionist contention. Mass protest is not just a tactic which secessionists can take out of their strategic toolbox and employ it easily to advance their demands when institutional strategies are exhausted. Like other kinds of contention, secessionist protest erupts in waves that are driven by the interactions between challengers and authorities.

Cycles of contention often expand over several years (Tarrow 1989). In this dissertation, I focus more narrowly on the peak of the secessionist cycle in Catalonia at the time around the referendum on October 1, 2017. This period of roughly two months can be understood as an *episode of contention* within the larger secessionist cycle. Contentious episodes are defined as "bounded sequences of continuous interaction" (Tilly 2008, 10) between authorities and challengers.[13] The single components of this sequence are actions by secessionist challengers and the host state. An action by one party triggers a response from the opponent party, and so on (Kriesi, Hutter, and Bojar 2019). At the peak of the cycle, these contentious interactions between challengers and authorities often occur in a condensed period of time. Within a few months, weeks, or even just a couple of days, social movement actors repeatedly stage protests, occupy buildings, and go on strike. In turn, authorities make institutional declarations, sue challengers in the courts, and order the police to repress protest. During these heated times, "events suddenly start to fuel themselves, as action produces action" (Della Porta 2014b, 30). Sometimes these contentious events happen in such quick sequence that the actors involved in contention cannot keep up with the pace themselves –

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[13] I elaborate more in detail on how to bound contentious episodes in the chapter on research design.

let alone the external observer. Beissinger (2002, 27) described these phases of intense contention as "thickened history:"

> Indeed, in a period of heightened challenge events can "begin to move so fast and old assumptions become so irrelevant that the human mind cannot process all the new information" – a phenomenon I refer to in this book as "thickened" history. By "thickened" history, I mean a period in which the pace of challenging events quickens to the point that it becomes practically impossible to comprehend them and they come to constitute an increasingly significant part of their own causal structure […] What takes place within these "thickened" periods of history has the potential to move history onto tracks otherwise unimaginable, affecting the prisms through which individuals relate to authority, consolidating conviction around new norms, and forcing individuals to make choices among competing categories of identity about which they may previously have given little thought – all within an extremely compressed period of time.

The quote points to the rapid succession of occurrences that are often too complex to observe in real time – what Tarrow (2011, 199) described as "sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities." In short, episodes of intense contention represent a quick and dense sequence of contentious interaction. The next section describes how these dense sequences can trigger changes in the course of a conflict.

2.2 Contentious Episodes as Critical Junctures and Transformative Events

Research in social movement studies has devoted much attention to the question of how cycles and episodes of contention emerge. The contentious politics approach has synthesized previous findings on the role of the political opportunity structure (Kriesi 1995; Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Tilly 1978), framing (Benford and Snow 2000; Gamson and Meyer 1996; Johnston and Noakes 2005), and organizations (Lofland 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1977) and embedded them in a relational framework. Contentious performances – marches, meetings, strikes – were seen as the product of these factors.

This relationship is reversed in this dissertation. Instead of looking at contentious episodes as outcomes, I am interested in how they trigger change. The idea that some political occurrences can be transformative was advanced by historical sociologist William H. Sewell and other scholars (Abbott 1992, 2001; McAdam and Sewell 2001; Sewell 1996b, 1996a; Wagner-Pacifici 2010). These occurrences are called *transformative* or *historical events* and are different from routine or normal occurrences, because they have exceptional impact on the course of politics and society. In the words of Sewell (1996b, 263), "events bring about historical changes in part by transforming the very cultural categories that shape and constrain human action." Building on this insight, Donatella della Porta (2008) argued that protest can be eventful, too. This means that contentious episodes

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can have transformative consequences for the course of movements, institutions, and even entire societies.

Of course not all contentious episodes are necessarily eventful. To appreciate this fact, it is helpful to distinguish between occurrences, critical junctures, and transformative events (Basta 2018). Occurrences are "all instances of political action, from the routine (e.g., regularly scheduled elections, or normal legislative or regulatory acts) to the unusual (acts of civil disobedience, outbreaks of political violence, corruption scandals)" (Basta 2018, 4). Or, as I would put it, occurrences are *action-in-time*. They are the sum of all political happenings. Many of them go unnoticed by analysts and political actors themselves.

There are two kinds of occurrences that are of special interest, because they represent departures from normal politics: critical junctures and transformative events. They are subclasses of occurrences, where every transformative event is also a critical juncture (Basta 2018, 6). Figure 2 shows the relation among these three categories as a Venn diagram.[14]

Figure 2: Venn diagram of occurrences, critical junctures, and transformative events. Based on Basta (2018).

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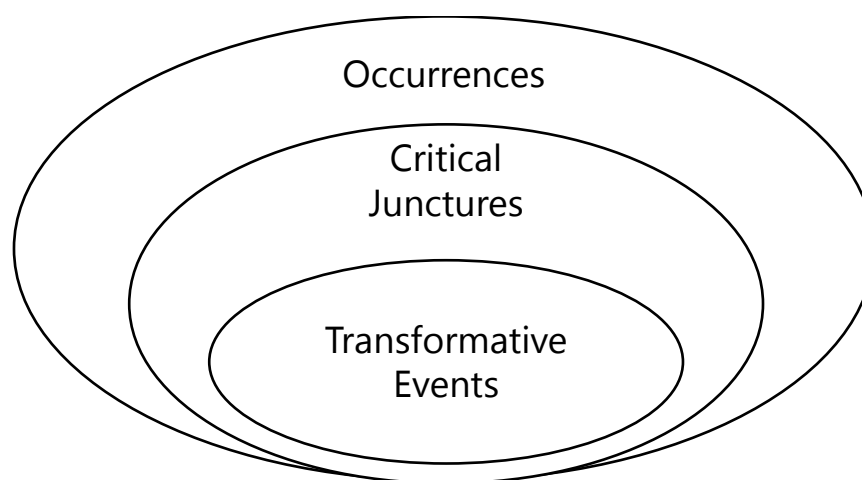
[14] The diagram naturally represents a simplification, because critical junctures or transformative events in fact cannot reduced to a single happening. Sewell (1996a, p. 843) argued that events do not represent single points in time, but "should be conceived of as sequences of occurrences". I do not go into the theoretical details of duration and overlap (Abbott, 1992, p. 438) or bounding and unbounding (Wagner-Pacifici, 2010, pp. 1354–1355) here, but stress the point that transformative events and critical junctures represent periods of time that are relatively short in relation to their temporal consequences (McAdam & Sewell, 2001).

First, there are windows of opportunities, during which it appears that the course of history *could* go either way, towards radical change or the maintenance of the status quo. In social science, and in particular the historical institutionalism literature, these moments of increased contingency have been labeled *critical junctures* (R. B. Collier and Collier 2002; Mahoney 2002; Roberts 2015) and have become a central concept for understanding change and stability in politics. Critical junctures are phases when structural constraints on political action are reduced and actors have enhanced agency to pursue their agenda (Basta 2018; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007; Mahoney 2002, 7; Soifer 2012). In the language of social movement scholars, a critical juncture can be described as a shift in the political opportunity structure (Meyer and Minkoff 2004; Tarrow 2011; Tilly 1995). Even in the face of fierce opposition, protest can produce critical junctures or overturn structural constraints entirely (Della Porta 2018). However, as Capoccia and Kelemen (2007, 352) emphasized, critical junctures do not necessarily result in political change:

> Tempting as it may be to equate critical junctures and change, this view is not commensurable with the emphasis on structural fluidity and heightened contingency that are the defining traits of critical junctures. Contingency implies that wide-ranging change is possible and even likely but also that re-equilibration is not excluded.

Taking the concept of contingency seriously, and not just as a placeholder for opportunity, means leaving room for failed transformations. Thus, critical junctures also include negative cases, in which a structural opening does not result in long-lasting change.[15] Including these "near misses" (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 352) avoids selection bias and also draws the attention to counterfactual analysis. Counterfactual scenarios allow us to see critical junctures as "choice points" (Mahoney 2002, 6). The shift of political opportunities that characterizes a critical juncture opens several options for political actors, some of which might lead to radical change, some of which might result in a reproduction of established patterns. Thus, focusing on critical junctures is essentially "the analysis of decision making under conditions of uncertainty" (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 354). However, not every political decision represents a critical juncture. What makes them critical is that "once an option is selected, it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still available" (Mahoney 2002, 6–7). In other words, the decisions taken during a critical junctures have long-lasting and near-irreversible impacts on the future.

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[15] Contingency has been a major point of debate in research on critical junctures (D. Collier and Munck 2017, 4). Other scholars regarded change as a necessary element of critical junctures (R. B. Collier and Collier 2002; Della Porta 2018; Slater and Simmons 2010).

Events represent the second class of rare occurrences. Whereas critical junctures describe the enhanced *possibility* of transformation, events are occurrences that *do* result in profound political change, which is why they have been called *transformative* (McAdam and Sewell 2001).[16] Hence, transformative events are a subclass of critical junctures (Basta 2018, 6) that have far-reaching consequences for politics and society. Sewell's (1996a) prime example was the taking of the Bastille as the event that truly started the French Revolution. The taking of the Bastille led to regime change, because it was "interpreted as a direct and sublime expression of the nation's will - that an act of popular violence could be articulated directly with sovereignty to form the new political category of revolution" (Sewell 1996a, 861).

Following this distinction, a contentious episode consists of series of political occurrences. Contentious episodes of a certain magnitude – such as the 1-O episode – arguably represent critical junctures. In some cases, contentious episodes might even lead to profound political transformations, such as the French Revolution. This cannot be simply assumed from the outset, however. Whether a contentious episode can be considered critical or eventful is up for empirical research, which I turn to in the latter chapters of the dissertation.

In the remainder of this chapter, I develop the theoretical argument that contentious episodes as "intense times" may shape the organizational dimension of social movements and thus become eventful. This is a twofold argument. On the one hand, intense contentious episodes shape protest organizing already while these episodes unfold. The ways in which secessionists organize protests *during* the accelerated succession of occurrences differs fundamentally from protest organizing in normal times. On the other hand, intense contentious episodes have consequences for protest organizing also *after* the peaks of contention. How activists organize protests is often affected in the long run.

2.3 Eventful Contentious Episodes and Organizational Change

What do events transform? When Sewell first formulated the idea of transformative events, it were large-scale changes such as revolutions and other regime changes that he had in mind. He is mostly quoted with his definition of events as "sequences of occurrences that result in the transformation of structures" (1996a, 843). This is problematic, because reducing the concept of events to this single quote might result in an overly structural approach to transformation. It suggests a binary reading that equates events with action and change, and structure with stability. On the very same

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[16] Following Sewell (1996a) and others I define events as inherently transformative and use the terms "event" and "transformative event" interchangeably.

page of his famous article, however, Sewell wrote that an event "durably transforms previous structures *and* practices" (843, emphasis added). This reflects Sewell's "dual" understanding of structure following the work of Anthony Giddens (1984). Like Giddens, Sewell held that structures "shape practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute and reproduce structures" (Sewell 1996a, 842, see also 1992). Thus, an event does not just represent a transformation of social structure, it also implies "a surprising break with routine practice" (Sewell 1996a, 843). What might seem like an ontological debate for social theorists has fundamental implications for the empirical research that follows in this dissertation for two reasons.

First, Della Porta (2008, 2018) argued that transformative events can also have important consequences at a lower level of abstraction. While Sewell and others focus on the impact of events on macro-level structures, she suggests that contentious events can have "effects not only (and might be not mainly) on the authorities or the public opinions but also on the movement actors themselves" (Della Porta 2008, 48). She demonstrated that "many protests have cognitive, affective and relational impacts on the very movements that carry them out" (2008, 30). Social movements do not just take part in contentious events – contentious events also change social movements. I follow Della Porta's work in that I am interested in how contentious episodes may be eventful and result in organizational change in social movements.

Second, the narrow reading that events transform *structures* might lead the researcher's attention to organizational structures in social movements and design a study that uses organizational entities as the primary units of analysis. This would imply focusing on SMOs and other elements of the social movement's infra*structure*. However, as outlined in the first part of this chapter, I have taken a different approach to organization in social movements. Given my interest in how activists organize protest, I have built a conceptual framework that prioritizes organizational processes without neglecting the role of both practices and structures. In this sense, my approach is compatible with Sewell's dual view of structure and practices. Events do not just transform organizational structures, but also organizing processes.

Building on these two assumptions, I argue that episodes of intense contention can be eventful and transform the processes and practices of how activists organize protest. This argument comprises two parts. On the one hand, I suggest that intense times have important repercussions already *as they unfold*. Events have the power to transform structures and practices while they happen. When contentious interactions occur in dense sequences, organizers are faced with heightened contingency, resistance from opponents, and time pressure. As a result, organizational processes and practices vary substantively from organizing in normal times. Second, intense times also have transformative effects on the organizational dimension of social movements *after* the

events themselves come to a conclusion. While some of the changes during the contentious episode are reverted and normalized afterwards, others solidify over time and become part of the organizational practices of the movement. In the next two sections, I elaborate further on these arguments.

Organizing during intense times

"Intense times" are different from "normal times" of conflict. Following this assumption, the first argument is that these two kinds of "times" matter for how secessionist movements organize protest. In essence, I suggest that protest organizing during intense periods of time differs fundamentally from organizing in normal periods of time. As mentioned above, the peaks of cycles of contention are characterized by a dense sequence of occurrences. The compressed succession interactions has a profound impact on the ways in which social movement actors organize protests *during* intense times.

In normal times, social movement organizers face a number of challenges to overcome the collective action problem despite the routinization of interactions with authorities (Della Porta and Reiter 1998) and the normalization of protest (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Organizing mass protest requires a series of preparatory activities (Rucht 2017). These "kinds of coordinations, complex in normal times, become even more difficult" (Wagner-Pacifici and Ruggero 2018, 2) in intense times. When organizers are "faced with an emerging event, individual decisions about whether (or not) to continue adhering to normal schedules of organizational and personal life become charged and consequential" (Wagner-Pacifici and Ruggero 2018, 2). This pertains not just individual decisions, but also collective ones. Theoretically, there are three factors that shape organizing in intense times: resistance from opponents, increased uncertainty, and time pressure.

First, organizers meet severe opposition from authorities in intense times. It is a general feature of protest that it seeks to disrupt established political practice. Social movements have been defined as engaging in conflictual relationships with their opponents (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 22–23). At the same time, over the past decades, protests have become an everyday feature of established democracies. In the course of this conventionalization of contentious politics, interactions between challengers and authorities have become routinized (Della Porta and Reiter 1998); institutions might choose, for instance, to simply ignore contention from social movements. While these routines shape protest organizing in normal times, they do not uphold in eventful times. As cycles of contention unfold and reach their peak, authorities are more likely to respond to challengers with enhanced repression (Tarrow 2011). Thus, when activists organize protest

during phases of intense contention, they face legal barriers, police action, and counter-mobilization, all of which make preparing and planning collective action much more difficult.

Second, events have sometimes been seen as sudden and unforeseen ruptures or cracks (Della Porta 2018). An occurrence becomes an event for observers when the "current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world" (Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005, 409). Unexpected events pose an enormous challenge for social movement organizers. During periods of intense contention, governments, courts, or the police often act without previous notice, which may call for an immediate response from challengers. But also the sudden eruption of protest itself can create a need for organizers to adapt to an unforeseen situation. At the peaks of contentious cycles, these types of action cluster within short periods of time, which creates a climate of uncertainty and contingency that has fundamental consequences for how movements organize protest in these times.

Of course, not all events are unexpected. In some cases, such as scheduled elections, political actors can anticipate and prepare for their occurrence. They can try to prospectively frame the event in their favor (Basta 2018). Even so, the event remains contingent; its outcome is unclear until after it has occurred. In contentious interactions, and in particular at the height of cycles of contention, it is impossible for social movement actors to prepare in advance for all potential scenarios. This relates to the previous point on opponents: in eventful periods of contention, authorities are more likely to respond to protest action. The range of possible government responses are usually known to protesters, but the exact nature of that response remains unforeseeable. Consequently, there is a greater level of uncertainty during protest organizing processes. If organizing is defined as reducing uncertainty (see the first part of this chapter), then one could say that there is simply "more" to organize in eventful times.

Third, intense times represent dense sequences of contentious interactions. As mentioned before, these chains of interaction between challengers and opponents rarely unfold in linear fashion or at a steady pace, but accelerate as contention intensifies. Thus, organizers must deal with their opponents' actions and increased uncertainty repeatedly over the course of a short period of time. This creates time pressure for activism in intense times, as Della Porta (2018, 9) explained:

> The intensity of extraordinary times reduces the availability of the time that would be necessary to collect information, to reflect, to deliberate. In these intense times, activists report, crucial decisions have to be made quickly, in the heat of the moment. Time accelerates because of the breaking down of previous institutions, rules, and norms. Rather than being based on routines, which are perceived as no longer effective, decisions often favor creativity and innovation, and the capacity of movement actors to occupy these spaces, changing them in the process.

Time pressure has an enormous impact on how activists organize protest. It alters previous routine and practices. It reduces the time for deliberation and decision making, but also creates a need for innovation, which can ultimately result in transformative consequences.

These three mechanisms – interactions with opponents, increased uncertainty, and time pressure – fundamentally suggest that protest organizing during intense times differs from organizing in normal times. The critical reader might raise the concern that the argument suffers from endogeneity. Indeed, the suggestion that intense contention influences the ways in which activists organize precisely these activities seems either tautological because a large part of contention is protest activity, or an absurd reversal of the relationship: does not the conflict become more contentious because activists organize protest? In a positivist view, there might be too much conceptual overlap between the two "variables" protest organizing and contention.

There are at least three answers to this critique. First, waves of contention and intense times do not just describe the density of protest, but they refer to actions of both challengers and their opponents. Thus, contention should be seen as inherently relational transactions rather than isolated behavior of actors (Emirbayer 1997). It is not the occurrence of protest, but the relational dynamics between challengers and opponents that shape protest organizing. The three mechanisms described above all include the element of oppositional action. The second response builds on the first one by adding the temporal element. Protest organizing in contentious episodes is not just influenced by a single instance of protest, but by the course of contentious transactions over time. Events and temporality play a crucial role in this influence. Some of these events are protest events, others are not.

Third, the more radical answer is that endogeneity, in fact, is a central part of my argument. From an eventful perspective, a series of protests cannot be understood independently from each other nor from their preparatory processes. Beissinger (1996, 126–27) has rightfully pointed out that not "only should more frequent efforts to organize mobilization lead to higher levels of participation, but successful mobilizations should also lead to more frequent attempts to organize mobilization." This means that when studying how activists organize protest, one must take into account that the outcome (i.e. the protest) has an anticipated impact on its own preparation on the one hand, and on the subsequent protest preparations in the contentious episode on the other hand. The organizing processes that I analyze later on must not be understood as independent and equivalent cases, but as events within a sequence (cf. Sewell 1996b).

Eventful transformations

The second part of the argument concerns the idea that the impact of intense times on organizing does not stop once the cycle of contention contracts. In fact, the notion of "eventful temporality" (Sewell 1996b) carries a much more radical claim than the one I have developed as the first part of my argument. Sewell and others have suggested that outstanding political occurrences often affect the course of politics beyond the very moment in which they happen, leading to fundamental changes in political discourse, public policy, or even regime types. This is why they have been defined as "very brief, spatially concentrated, and relatively chaotic sequences of action [that] can have durable, spatially extended, and profoundly structural effects" (McAdam and Sewell 2001, 102). Thus, eventful times are not just ruptures and breaks, after which the course of political action returns to normality as if nothing happened. Rather, they have *lasting* consequences for social structures and practices. Following this understanding, eventful times are not just transformative for protest organizing because of the specific challenges they pose as they unfold, but also for the period of time that follows.

Let us assume that the first part of the argument developed in the previous section holds true: opponent action, time pressure, and contingency transform the ways in which activists organize protest. It follows that there are, from a theoretical point of view, three possible trajectories after the contentious episode comes to a close.

First, intense contentious episodes need not necessarily lead to durable transformations. They can be critical junctures and change the ways in which activists organize in the very moment, but not in the long run. Institutionalist scholars have stressed that critical junctures represent moments of greater possibility for change, but it is not inevitable. Instead, "re-equilibration" (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007, p. 352) can also take place afterwards. Following this idea means that the various patterns of organizing during the intense period of contention can be exceptional, and once this phase is over, activists go back to previous modes of normal organizing.

Second, contentious episodes can create what Della Porta (2018) calls "sedimentations:" Transformations stabilize and become long-term outcomes. For the organizational dimension, this means that some of the organizational practices that emerge during the peaks of contention are adopted by activists and become part of their normal repertoire – even when the mechanisms of intense contention (time pressure, opponent actions, contingency) become less relevant. This means that protest organizing during intense contention was not just an exceptional period. Sedimentations can be seen as a continuity beyond the episode of contention itself.

Third, there may be transformations that are different from both re-equilibration and sedimentation. Contentious episodes can also be eventful in the way that they trigger a series of

mechanisms that are still at play after the episodes is over. The theoretical framework of the contentious politics paradigm highlights five mechanisms that lead to the contraction of the cycle: exhaustion, repression, facilitation, radicalization, and institutionalization (Tarrow 2011, 190). These mechanisms and others can theoretically change the ways of how activists organized during the contentious episode, but without bringing them back to their pre-contention state. They may produce totally novel forms of organizing.

Drawing on this distinction, I suggest that intense contentious episodes can be eventful and produce durable changes in the ways in which social movements organize protest. These transformations extend beyond the contentious episode itself. The trajectory of change can take two forms. On the one hand, transformations that emerged during the contentious episode can sediment and turn into long-term legacies. On the other hand, contentious episodes can produce a series of mechanisms that continue to transform protest organizing in ways that are different from those during the contentious episode.

The twofold argument, which I have developed here suggests that the dynamics of contention produce a series of mechanisms that can have a transformative impact on how activists organize protest. It represents an *eventful* approach to organizational change and stability. However, there is one problem that I have bracketed until this point. Contentious events do not represent objective temporal units. Their symbolic dimension is the result of a process of social construction. The next section tackles this problem and integrates the constructivist level into the argument.

2.4 The Social Construction of Eventfulness

Time in itself is not transformative. It is not "simply an independent and self-evident causal force […] clock time is the medium through which processes unfold, the environment in which processes take place" (Grzymala-Busse 2011, 1273). Time does nothing but pass by.

Neither are events objective. They are not facts out there in the empirical world waiting to be discovered. But neither are they pure imaginations of the researcher's mind. Rather, occurrences become events through a process of social construction (Basta 2018; Sewell 1996a; Wagner-Pacifici 2010, 2017).[17] The duration and meaning of an event are results of collective articulations:

> Social and political actors seek to identify discrete political and historical events and entities. They also seek to distinguish between events and entities (sometimes referred to as "structures" in social scientific analyses). In and with their documents, speeches,

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[17] The phrase "social construction of events" comes from Basta (2018), drawing primarily on Sewell (1996a, 861), who used the term "symbolic interpretation" among others. Wagner-Pacifici (2010, 2017) has even developed a "political semiosis" to analyze the symbolic production of events.

gestures, and images, actors want to be able to bind and map these phenomena, to determine their beginnings and endings. (Wagner-Pacifici 2010, 1354–55)

Events only come into existence through symbolic creation. Most political occurrences go unnoticed. Only if actors devote attention to it and attribute relevance to it, an occurrence becomes an event.

The symbolic level is fundamental for the transformative power of eventful episodes. In the previous sections, I have argued that episodes of intense contention may shape protest organizing in numerous ways. During the episode, time pressure, contingency, and opponent actions may impact organizational practices and processes. After the episode, these practices and processes may revert or sediment. Or they may be further transformed through exhaustion, repression, facilitation, institutionalization, and radicalization as the cycle of contention contracts. However, none of these mechanisms is self-evident. They are mediated through processes of sensemaking, interpretation, and narration. In periods of intense contention – and afterwards – activists must constantly make sense of occurrences and decide how to deal with them. In this interpretive process, they construct events and their meaning. This is best illustrated by Sewell's piece on the French Revolution:

> The novel articulation that makes this happening a momentous event in world history is an act of signification. Terms - for example, "Bastille" and "revolution," but also "people," "liberty," "despotism," and so on - took on authoritative new meanings that, taken together, reshaped the political world. This implies that events are, literally, significant: they signify something new and surprising. They introduce new conceptions of what really exists (the violent crowd as the people's will in action), of what is good (the people in ecstatic union), and of what is possible (revolution, a new kind of regeneration of the state and the nation). The most profound consequence of the taking of the Bastille was, then, a reconstruction of the very categories of French political culture and political action. (861)

As an action, the taking of Bastille was not decisive in a military way, Sewell argued. But it in a moment of heightened contingency, established meanings of political structures become unstable and thus open for what Sewell (1996a, 861) called "transformative rearticulation."

This means that organizational change does not follow mechanically from a given contentious event, because that event is, after all, a socially constructed unit of time. Political occurrences do not have consequences on organizational change (or anything actually) by themselves, the link between event and transformation is a product of activist meaning-making. This symbolic process is not different from the mechanisms in the dynamics of contention. In fact they are inherent in them. With regards to political opportunity structures for example, McAdam, Tilly, and Tarrow argued that "no opportunity, however objectively open, will invite mobilization unless it is a) visible

to potential challengers and b) perceived as an opportunity." The same goes for other mechanisms as well. Repression can only have an effect on activism if it is interpreted as such. In the face of blunt state violence, this can be an unequivocal process, but may be more ambiguous in the case of subtle forms of repression, such as surveillance.

Taking the constructivist perspective on events and organizational change seriously has fundamental implications for the overall research project. Instead of looking for objective causal relationships, the constructivist approach implies reconstructing organizational change through the lens of participants. Following Bruner (2002), Czarniawska (1998, 6) wrote that "people's nonscientific explanations and interpretations of life events are grounded in attempts to establish a connection between the exceptional and the ordinary." Studying the relationship between intense times and organizing thus requires focusing on activist experiences. It shifts the attention to their narratives and interpretations. This allows understanding how and why activists adapt how they organize protest.

2.5 Summary

In the first part of this chapter, I have outlined an analytical framework to the study of organization in social movements. This framework distinguishes between organizations as entities, organizing as a process, and organizationality as a property. Based on this distinction, I have developed the central concept of this dissertation: *protest organizing*, which describes the process of preparing and planning protest.

The main research question of this dissertation concerns how protest organizing changes over time. The second part of this chapter has conceptualized the temporal dimension of this question. Building on cyclical approaches to contentious politics, I have made an analytical distinction between two times of secessionist conflict: normal times and intense times. The theoretical argument is that intense times can be eventful and have a transformative impact on the ways in which activists organize protest. In the empirical chapters of this dissertation, I try to show that contentious events are transformative in at least two ways. First, activists organize protest events differently during the peaks of cycles of contention in comparison to what can be called normal times of conflict. Second, eventful times can have durable effects on protest organizing long after the most contentious phases of the cycle.

This argument represents an eventful approach to organizational change and contentious politics. It recognizes the power that some political occurrences may have on the course of social movements. This is very different from the existing research on organizational change in social movements. In that line of research, change was understood as structural in a double sense. On

the one hand, organizational change was conceived as change *of* structures, that is organizational entities as a specific materialization of movement infrastructure. On the other hand, organizational change was regarded as driven mainly by structural factors: these can be in the rather immediate political opportunity structure or in the large-scale transformations of societies, such as the technological innovation that has driven much of the theories on digital organizing. Contentious events did not play any role in these approaches, at best they are an expression of structures. The theoretical argument I have developed here goes in the opposite direction: it holds that sequences of contingent political events and their associated temporal dynamics may play a central role in shaping the ways in which activists organize protest – both in the short and the long run.

Chapter Three

RESEARCH DESIGN

It is in the nature of any PhD dissertation, or any research project, that research design and methods develop over time. This is particularly true for qualitative social research, which often starts with open questions. I began this research project with two broad questions in mind: how does the Catalan independence movement organize, and how does organizing change over time? Previous research in social movement studies primarily employed organizational entities as the unit of analysis to address these questions, using often large samples of organizational populations (Clemens 1997; Edwards and McCarthy 2004; Kriesi 1996; Minkoff 1995, 2002; Walker and McCarthy 2010).

In the previous chapter, I have outlined several lines of critique against this kind of research, which led me to pursue a different approach that draws on process and practice theories in organization studies. Building on these literatures, I tried to go beyond organizational boundaries by studying organizing inside, outside, and between organizations. This unconventional approach presented two difficulties for the research process. First, conceptually, there was very little literature on organizing in social movement studies that did *not* focus on organizations and on which I could have built. Hence, in the early stages of the empirical research, the conceptual framework was not as developed as presented in the previous chapter. Second, going beyond entity approaches to organization meant I could not simply collect data on organizations as cases. This made the start of my fieldwork much more difficult.

In the absence of existing literature on organizational practices and processes beyond organizations in social movements, I decided to take an open and exploratory approach to the empirical part of my research, which borrows many elements from grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Mattoni 2014). In May 2018, about seven months after the Catalan referendum on independence, I embarked on fieldwork in Barcelona with the two broad questions mentioned above and a general understanding of organizing as reducing equivocality. In began to explore the field to clarify these questions and concepts, using a combination of ethnographic methods and expert interviews. On the one hand, I observed a series of activist meetings, protest

events, and had a number of informal conversations with organizers in the independence movement. These data were gathered in the form of ethnographic field notes. On the other hand, I spoke to seven experts, mostly activist scholars from the independence movement. These were open conversations rather than structured interviews. I derived the topics for these conversations from the research problem, the literature, and my previous knowledge of the case. Besides the literal exploration of the Catalan independence movement as a field of research, this early stage of research served two primary purposes. First, experts and observations provided a way of getting in contact with key organizers without having to base the data collection on a sampling of organizations. Second, and most importantly, the exploratory phase helped me to refine the conceptual framework, the unit analysis and the case selection. The next section describes how the conceptual framework then translated in defining the unit of analysis and selecting cases.

1   UNIT OF ANALYSIS AND CASES

During the exploratory fieldwork, I realized that in order to go beyond organizational boundaries, I needed a different "anchor" for the analysis. Building on readings in organization theory, the main design choice of this dissertation was to focus on *protest organizing*, which meant to focus more narrowly on a specific meaning of organization (see chapter 2). Focusing on protest organizing excluded much of what might be considered organizational in social movements, but it had two crucial advantages. First, it defined the concept much more concretely and distinguished it from other meanings of organization. Second, it allowed bounding instances of organizing in meaningful chunks that could be described and compared empirically.

The protest event represents the main unit of analysis for this dissertation. Following Della Porta and Diani (2006, 165), I define protest broadly as "nonroutinized ways of affecting political, social, and cultural processes." The non-routinized character of protest lies in the absence of formal or institutionalized frameworks for its exercise. This does not mean that there are no routines in protest, however. Charles Tilly (1986, 1995, 2004, 2008) pointed out that protest – or contentious performances as he called them – is a learned and familiar activity for activists. However, innovation is also part of protesting as social movements often search for novel ways of disruption (Tarrow 2011, 101). Although the repertoire of contention goes well beyond public demonstrations and seems to be ever-expanding, I limited my analysis to the classic "social movement repertoire" by Tilly (2004, 3): namely, the "creation of special-purpose associations and coalitions, public meetings, solemn processions, vigils, rallies, demonstrations, petition drives, statements to and in public media, and pamphleteering."

In the early stages of fieldwork, my analysis was focused on the case of the referendum as the most relevant recent protest event in the Catalan secessionist conflict. However, I shifted this strategy very soon, because this "initial sampling" (Charmaz 2006, 100) was limiting for two reasons: on the one hand, it became clear that I needed to dissect the referendum event itself into its different components, distinguishing between administrative actions of the Generalitat, repressive measures by the Spanish state, and contentious actions by the independence movement (see chapter 6). As a result, I chose to focus more narrowly on how the defense of the voting stations was organized. On the other hand, it was necessary to expand the cases to other protest events if I wanted to address changes over time and the impact of the referendum itself.

Drawing on the initial empirical material I had gathered, I constructed seven cases for the central period under study, which I call the 1-O episode of contention. To refine the analysis further, I then expanded the comparison a second time and collected data on one more case before the 1-O episode and four more cases after the 1-O episode, which makes a total of twelve cases. Table 2 provides an overview of these cases.

The cases included different types of protest events (demonstrations, strikes, occupations), but also five campaigns. Comparing single protest events and campaigns may seem an odd design decision at first, because in social movement research, the concept campaign is commonly used to describe a series of protest actions, or sometimes even a social movement itself (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 11). And indeed, the campaigns included here involved a range of different actions. Their focus lied on spreading pro-independence narratives in newspapers, television, and social media. However, they also featured demonstrations, public speeches, and concerts. Despite the variety of actions, there were three reasons to include them as single cases though. First, and foremost, the campaign cases emerged from the data as meaningful categories for the organizers themselves. Especially for ANC and Òmnium Cultural, the campaign represented the primary unit of contentious action. Second, although the campaigns involved different kinds of action, they all were consistently *contained* forms of protest. They could thus be considered a coherent series of actions. Third, the various kinds of action of each campaign were organized in a single preparatory process. The organizations did not plan or prepare them in isolated fashion, but as part of the campaigns. For these reasons, it made more sense to compare campaigns as cases instead of dissecting into their components, which would have increased the number of cases drastically and rendered them isolated and potentially meaningless.

The cases do not represent a sample from a clearly defined set of protests. Instead, they are the result of an empirically driven casing strategy (Ragin 1992). I constructed these protest events on the basis of the empirical data collected during the fieldwork, drawing in particular on exploratory

interviews with experts. Case construction and data collection occurred as almost simultaneous inductive processes. Even so, casing did not follow automatically from the data, but required the active involvement of the researcher. Centering the analysis on a bounded episode of consequence allowed for a more focused analysis of the relational dynamics of contention by identifying the processes and mechanisms that led to the sequential unfolding of interactions. This raised the crucial point of how to delineate both episodes of contentions and protest events (Tilly 2008, 10). I had to dissect the continuous flows of contention and organizing into meaningful chunks through "temporal bracketing" (Langley 1999). While there are no objective criteria for bounding and selecting the protests as displayed above (and thereby omitting other instances of contentious action), I tried to follow three rationales in the casing operations: scale, timing, and type of action.

The first one was scale. I decided to include primarily large-scale protests and neglect many smaller local protests. The reason was that mass protest requires much more organizational effort and would thus yield deeper insights into the preparatory process, whereas small protests were expected to require less coordination (Rucht 2017). The second principle for constructing these cases followed from the research questions. Since I was interested in changes over time and especially during phases of intense secessionist conflict, I focused on the peak of the cycle of contention around the 1-O referendum. Most of the cases fell into what I defined as the 1-O episode of contention, which lasted from the parliament vote of the Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination on September 6 until the approval of article 155 on October 27. Four cases were selected to reveal transformations during the contraction of the cycle of contention that followed the 1-O episode. Only a single case (the *Ara és l'hora* campaign) strictly referred to the time before the 1-O episode, because this period had already been studied in the literature (Crameri 2015a, 2015b; Della Porta et al. 2017; Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019; Dowling 2018). Some of the cases did not neatly fall into these three temporal categories: Òmnium Cultural's *Crida per la Democràcia* campaign started before the beginning of the 1-O episode, but lasted until the day of the referendum. The Diada demonstration and the ANC's referendum campaign unfolded during the 1-O episode, but were prepared mostly beforehand, as I show in the empirical part of the dissertation. The *Llibertat Presos Polítics* campaign by Òmnium Cultural started during the 1-O episode, but continued afterwards. This is why the brackets in Table 2 indicating the three periods of time coincide in some cases. A third criterion consisted in including different kinds of contentious actions: street demonstrations, occupations, blockades and obstructions, strikes, non-violent resistance, and media campaigns. The goal was not to develop a typology of the preparatory processes of these different kinds but to recognize the variety of the repertoire of contention.

Table 2: Overview of cases.

Case	Dates	Description	Period
Ara és l'hora campaign	17/07/2014 – 09/11/2014	ANC campaign	Normal Times
Crida per la Democràcia campaign	10/07/2017 – 01/10/2017	Òmnium Cultural campaign	
Diada demonstration	11/09/2017	Massive street rally (Passeig de Gràcia and Carrer d'Aragó Barcelona)	
Sì campaign	14/09/2017 – 01/10/2017	ANC campaign	
20-S demonstration	20/09/2017	Obstruction of exits of the Catalan Department of Economy (Rambla de Catalunya, Barcelona) and the headquarters of the CUP (Carrer de Casp, Barcelona)	1-O Episode of Contention
Occupation University of Barcelona	22/07/2017 – 02/10/2017	Occupation of the Historic Building of the University of Barcelona (Plaça Universitat, Barcelona).	
Defense of the voting stations	29/09/2017 – 01/10/2017	Occupation of voting stations and resistance against police intervention	
3-O general strike	03/10/2017	Strikes, pickets, mass rallies and marches	
Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign	17/10/2017 – 05/04/2018	Òmnium Cultural campaign	
8-N general strike	08/11/2017	Highway and railway blockades, strikes, pickets, marches	
March 2018 protests	23/03//2018 – 31/03/2018	Highway and railway blockades, marches, rallies	Post 1-O Period
Primàries campaign	01/07/2018 – 26/05/2019	ANC campaign	

Organizing a strike was expected to require a different kind of preparation than the occupation of a university building. Including and examining different actions thus provided a more comprehensive picture of protest organizing.

This casing strategy allowed for comparisons of protest organizing in three different time periods: in what Beissinger calls "normalized times" (1996, 104), during the 1-O episode of contention, and the period afterwards. Through the analysis of this time frame, I addressed the question of how protest organizing changed in periods of intense contention and afterwards. Including different types of protest allowed going beyond the specific preparations of one single type. At the same time, the low number of cases allowed studying the protest organizing processes in depth. However, the casing strategy had one main limitation: it covered only a limited time span. Most of the cases fell into the nine months of the second half of 2017 and the beginning of 2018. This is why the findings on changes after the 1-O episode of contention must be considered with care. I discuss the question of whether these constitute *durable* transformations in the concluding chapter.

2   DATA COLLECTION

In order to describe these twelve cases and their organizing processes, I employed what Langley (2010, 411) called the "big three of qualitative research:" observation, interviewing, and document research. More precisely, I drew on four types of qualitative data: direct observations, expert interviews, semi-structured interviews with organizers, and documents. I have already described the collection of direct observations and expert interviews during the exploratory phase above. This section describes how I collected the semi-structured interviews with key activists and a series of documents about the protest events.

2.1   Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews represented the main data source for this dissertation. The reason why I focused primarily on semi-structured interviews lies in my approach to the main research question. As I have described in the conceptual framework, transformative events emerge through a process of social construction. This means it is necessary to study the role of events, such as the 1-O referendum, for organizational change through the lenses of participants. I wanted to know how activists themselves understood the referendum and its impact on the movement. This interpretive approach thus required a method that was able to produce these kinds of constructions of time and change. Semi-structured interviews were my technique of choice.

Between May 2018 and March 2019, I conducted 30 interviews with key organizers from the Catalan independence movement. I define organizers as activists who regularly engage in the planning and preparing of collective contentious action. Organizers attend meetings, communicate with other activists and organizers, make decisions where and when to protest, choose frames and tactics, and mobilize resources and participants.[18] This distinguishes organizers from activists that merely participate in protests or only occasionally in the preparatory process.

The figure of the organizer overlaps with other activist categories. First, organizers often hold positions in organizational entities, for example on boards or executive committees. These offices may authorize them with the power to make decisions. But organizers who are not "officers" may also exercise influence in the organizing process, especially when such positions are fully absent for lack of formalization. Second, organizers may or may not be professional staff in organizations (cf. Staggenborg 1988). Third, organizers are often social movement leaders, who have been defined as those activists "accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty" (Ganz 2010, 527). I distinguish organizers from leaders, because leaders do more than protest organizing: they build relationships, create narratives, devise strategies, and construct structures (Ganz and McKenna 2017). Conversely, some organizers might not necessarily be considered leaders of the movement.

Building on this understanding, I targeted organizers in the various milieus of the independence movement for interviews. The main selection criterion for the interviewees was that they were actively involved in at least one preparation of the twelve cases. My starting point for data collection was asking experts about potential interviewees, which yielded a series of contacts, from which I proceeded through theoretically controlled snowballing (see below). Even so, the extent to which interviewees were involved in organizational tasks themselves and could talk about it could only be determined in the interview. In a few instances, I discovered only during the interview that the respondent had only been marginally involved and I had to exclude them from the database afterwards.

As mentioned above, I started with a focus on the case of the defense of the voting stations and gradually expanded the cases. This allowed to structure the data collection around comparable instances of organizing. At the same time, my aim was to keep an open approach. In order to

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[18] There is a subtle difference between this understanding, and the one by Han (2014, 8), which distinguishes between organizers and mobilizers: "Organizers invest in developing the capacities of people to engage with others in activism and become leaders. Mobilizers focus on maximizing the number of people involved without developing their capacity for civic action. The high-engagement chapters did both". Her approach is closely related to what I like to call the Alinksyian meaning of organizing as community organizing and structure building.

include a series of organizational perspectives and experiences, and to go beyond organizational boundaries, I needed to maximize the variety of organizational affiliations. This involved several criteria.

First, I selected interviewees from different organizational entities. I put emphasis on the three most important ones (ANC, Òmnium Cultural, CDRs), but included also smaller actors, such as student and youth groups (Universitats per la República, Arran, Sindicat d'Estudiants dels Països Catalans, La Forja), one trade union (CSC-Intersindical), a profession-based group (BxR). I also included some organizers that had no organizational affiliation at the time but were nevertheless involved in some of the protest preparations. Second, I tried to achieve variation on the organizational level at which organizers were active. This included the local level (neighborhood, village, town), some intermediate levels (city, district, province), and the regional level (Catalonia).[19] Third, the interviewees came from different geographical contexts. This includes different neighborhoods of Barcelona, its suburbs (L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, Gavà), some mid-sized towns (Girona, Tarragona, Sabadell), and some smaller towns, which I have anonymized to protect the identity of the interviewees (Fastiada, Montanya). Fourth, with regards to individual biographies, I selected interviewees from different activist generations and with different organizational "careers." Some of them had remained with one organization for a long time, others had switched several times or were active in multiple entities. Finally, I tried to achieve some balance on age and gender. The sample was far from perfect, however: there certainly was a bias towards left-leaning activists with a university education.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face in Spanish, but some interviewees would employ Catalan vocabulary here and there.[20] The interview guide consisted of five parts. First, I asked the respondents about their "activist history:" how they got involved in the movement, which groups they had been participating in. Second, I was interested in the organizing processes they were involved in. In the beginning, this revolved around the 1-O referendum but expanded to other cases later. The third part consisted of questions about the internal life of the groups the interviewee participated in. These questions referred primarily to the two categories of practices presented in the conceptual framework: decision making and communication. Fourth, I asked open question about how practices, organizational entities, and organizing processes had changed

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[19] Of course, independentists refer to this as the "national" level. In this dissertation, I employ the term "regional" instead, unless it is a proper name such as the National Assembly of the Committees for the Defense of the Republic.

[20] I chose to do the interviews in Spanish, because my Catalan was rather poor at the beginning of the fieldwork. Surprisingly, the choice of language was never an issue. None of the interviewees declined to respond in Spanish. This might have been due to the fact that as a foreigner, they did not expect me to know Catalan.

over time, and in particular after the 1-O referendum. The final part consisted of questions about why the interviewee wanted Catalonia to be independent, and how they thought this goal could be achieved. As it is convenience in qualitative interviewing, these questions were not standardized and led to many follow-up questions in between.

The weight and order of these topics changed throughout the interviewing process. In the beginning, I opened the interview with questions about the referendum on October 1, as an anchor to get hold of organizational processes and practices. When I felt that there was some satisfaction in the answers on the referendum itself, I shifted the focus of the interviews and included other protest events as cases. In this second phase of interviewing, I would begin the interviews with some questions about their activist history and then turn to the other sets of questions. Despite the shift in the emphasis, the two interview phases rendered similar data.

Studying protest organizing through qualitative interviews had two disadvantages. The first one was that I carried out all interviews *after* the protest cases had occurred, with the exception of the ANC's Primaries campaign which was still ongoing during my fieldwork in Catalonia. Thus, the interviews represent retrospective views on the cases under study, which bears problems of memory, narrative, and ex post rationalization. The second disadvantage was that the interviews could only capture individual perspectives on organizing as an essentially *collective* phenomenon. In other words, organizational interactions and practices, which usually involve groups of people, were only tangible through interviewees' representations. Both these limitations were somewhat remedied by the use of documents as collective and temporarily situated data (see next section). Moreover, most of the cases were covered by several interviewees, which allowed for cross-validation within the data. Even so, there remained a retrospective bias in the data that I make transparent throughout the empirical analysis wherever necessary.

The limitations of the interview data were outweighed by their advantages. First of all, despite their retrospective bias, semi-structured interviews offered a flexible access to the past. While observations are bound to the present, and documents to the past, qualitative interviews are "temporally versatile in that respondents can draw on their memories and link phenomena across time" (Langley 2010, 411). Thus, they are "are able to provide a longitudinal window on social movement activism" (Blee and Taylor 2002, 95). Through organizers' accounts, qualitative interviews allowed accessing different cases of protest organizing.

The second strength of qualitative interviews is their level of detail with regards to the research object. Della Porta (2014a, 228–29) suggested that for researching internal processes in social movements "in-depth interviews are to be preferred, especially where the researcher is aiming to make a detailed description." This level of depth was necessary to provide insights into

the organizational processes and practices that were the core interest of this thesis. Qualitative interviews offered the potential to make use of organizers' knowledge, which would not be accessible to same extent through observation or documents.

Third, collecting data through organizers meant prioritizing their agency. In-depth interviews were particularly well suited to reveal individuals' agency and the sense they attribute to their actions (Blee 2013; Della Porta 2014a; Rathbun 2009). They revealed the organizers motivations, interpretations, evaluations, and strategies. Most crucially, more than organizational documents or direct observation, semi-structured interviews allowed organizers to elaborate on how they perceived episodes of intense contention and how they translated them into action. As I have described in the conceptual framework, events are not objective facts that are ready to be discovered through the researcher. Rather, I needed the interviewees to do that kind of work for me.

The interviews were fully transcribed, with the exception of two. Two interviews involved two respondents, the rest were individual interviews. The raw interview data amounts to 2451 minutes of audio recordings and 555 pages of transcripts. The appendix shows a full list of the interviews with the interviewees' organizational affiliations.

2.2 Documents

In addition to the interview data, I collected three types of documents: governmental and legal documents, press articles, and documents produced by SMOs. First, the eight governmental and legal documents referred primarily to actions of state institutions, for example the activation of article 155 by the Spanish senate, but also other institutionally produced documents such as the official results of the 1-O referendum. Second, the 26 press articles came from three (online) newspapers in Spanish and Catalan: Vilaweb, El País, La Vanguardia. These articles were reports about contentious actions taken by the various actors in the secessionist conflict. Third, the data included 16 documents produced by the SMOs of the independence movement: press releases announcing some of their actions, internal organizational rules, and organizational histories.

The first two types, governmental/legal documents and press articles were gathered on the basis of the case selection. After I had constructed the protest cases and the other contentious actions on the basis of the exploratory and the interview data, I searched official sources for documents with complementing information on these cases – for example the exact wording of the Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination. I proceeded in similar fashion for the press articles, performing a web search of the online newspapers Vilaweb, El País, and La Vanguardia to find additional information on the cases. The third type, organizational documents, were

selected on the basis of interviewees' affiliations, but for some loosely structured groups, such as the CDRs, no documents were available.

The final document catalog did not represent a comprehensive sample of any of the three categories. Instead, the catalog was a qualitative selection of the most relevant documents. Documents – even those produced by SMOs themselves – tell us very little about organizational practices and processes. I used these documents primarily to crosscheck what interviewees told me about contentious events and to add more data on the cases. The documents were downloaded and archived in PDF format. The appendix includes an overview of them with links to their web sources.

3   DATA ANALYSIS

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are intertwined parts of the research process. As I have described in the previous sections, the data I collected in the exploratory phase through observations and expert interviews served then as a basis for the construction of the cases and the selection of organizers for interviews. These two operations did not occur at one point in time, but over the course of the ten months of fieldwork, and in conjunction with the analysis of the already collected data. This was a complex and multilayered process that involved a back-and-forth between data, cases, and concepts. In this section, I describe the central features of the interpretive process, which took place on three levels of analysis: the case level, the practice level, and the eventful level. These analyses were performed in MaxQDA and involved different coding and summarizing strategies, which I explain more in detail where adequate.

3.1   Tracing the Cases

The basic analytical task consisted in describing the twelve cases of contentious action and their preparatory processes. This descriptive analysis started from the outcome (the case of protest action) and traced their organizing processes backwards in time. Therefore, the technique resembled "case-centric process tracing" (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 9–11), although it did not share the focus on causal inference of political science process tracing. Instead, I followed a series of guiding questions, which referred to the different concepts outlined in the framework (see chapter 2, but also Killian, 1984):

1. Organizationality: Was the protest case spontaneous or organized?
2. Organizing: How was the protest case organized?
3. Organization: Which organizational entities were involved in the process?

First, it was important to determine whether a contentious performance had been organized at all, i.e. whether it was the result of deliberate planning in advance or could be characterized as spontaneous or even random action. Second, if they were organized, how so? This was the central step in the tracing of the organizing process. Collier (2011, 824) insisted that the description of processes "begins not with observing change or sequence, but rather with taking good snapshots at a series of specific moments," which requires "to characterize key steps in the process." This involved a series of more specific questions: What were the various preparatory activities? How did organizers try to reduce uncertainty about the action? What was the sequence of these activities and did it matter for the outcome? The third step of the analysis addressed the role of the actors involved in the process. Most importantly, it focused on existing and emergent structures in the process.

This set of analytical questions guided the coding process. Most of the codes that emerged from the data were rather general, because I used them primarily to organize the raw data instead of generating categories in grounded theory fashion. The goal was not so much to arrive at a more general model of the preparatory process, such as the one by Rucht (2017). Rather, I wanted to create an accurate account of each case, following what Langley (1999) called a "narrative strategy" for the analysis of qualitative process data. This is why I used the codes primarily to produce short descriptive summaries of each case, using the "summary grid" and "summary table" in MaxQDA. These descriptive summaries represented the basic analytical unit for the further analyses, which I describe in the next two sections.

3.2 Identifying Organizational Practices

The second part involved the analytical construction of organizational practices from the empirical data. This analysis was the one which closest followed the procedures of grounded theory – and in particular its constructivist variant (Charmaz 2006) – because I departed only from a minimum of conceptual premises. From the review of the relevant literature, I knew that decision making and communication were central features in two strands of organization theory. Apart from this idea and a general notion of *practice*, the process was driven by the empirical data.

This was a complex process, because for practice theorists, the social is made of practices (Schatzki 2001a, 12). Departing from this ontological premise, I found myself faced with an abundance of practices in the data. These practices "overlap and connect" (Schatzki 2005, 474) and can be located at various levels of abstraction. I approached organizing as a *field of practices* (see chapter 2). Gherardi (2012, 75) defined a field of practices "as composed of activities and practices interconnected in constantly changing patterns". This concept draws attention to the

connections between practices and the arrays of these connections, which Gherardi called "texture of practice." Drawing on this definition, organizing represents a field of different organizational practices. Gherardi (2012, 173) underlined that "isolating a practice within a texture of practices is a heuristic operation by the researcher who, depending on his/her research interests, delimits a field of analysis." In addition, practices, as well as the "texture" they form, will depend very much on the organizational setting in which they are located. For instance, strategizing and decision making will not only work differently in a business organization than in an academic department, but also the ways in which they are combined will vary substantively.

As Gherardi (2012, 155) pointed out, a methodological advantage of this approach lies in recognizing the interconnection of practices, which allows to "shift the analysis from a practice to a field of practices which contains it, and vice versa." My aim was to focus primarily on the series of organizational practices in a social movement at a given point on time. This meant tackling a lower level of abstraction, trying to identify concrete practices within the case of the Catalan independence movement, which could then be described with a higher level of accuracy. These practices are described in detail in chapter 5.

The data analysis departed from the very broad sensitizing concept of organizational practice outlined above. I have already mentioned the difficulty of delineating this concept. This involved both differentiating organizational practices from other practices, as well as mapping the "texture" (Gherardi 2012) of the field of practices. I approached the empirical data with the operational definition of organizational practice as *a practice that deliberately orders other activities and practices by reducing equivocality*. But the larger part of the analytical process consisted in induction from the empirical materials. Methodologically, the inductive analysis was informed by grounded theory (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Mattoni 2014).

For recognizing practices in the empirical data, linguistic cues were particularly helpful. In the Spanish language there is a basic difference between two past tenses: while the preterit (*indefinido*) highlights completed actions in the past, the imperfect (*imperfecto*) refers to habitual or repetitive activities (Frantzen 1995). This was not a strict rule that was always followed by the interviewees, but it often revealed whether they meant an action at a specific moment in the past (using preterit often in combination with a temporal marker) or one that was repeated over a period of time (using imperfect). Using imperfect, interviewees often signaled that they referred to a practice of doing things rather than a single concrete action.

This linguistic element represented a resource for analysis, but also pointed to a methodological problem: how to delineate the temporal frame of practices. Since the imperfect does not directly refer to a specific point in time, the scope of the activity was often unclear. In other words,

interviewees often did not make transparent in which period of time they were doing a certain action. However, this also reflected the idea that practices represent somewhat generalized ways of doing things that transcend a particular moment in time. The only way to deal with this analytically was to infer from the context in which an interviewee's statement was placed.

With regard to the analytical procedures, I started by identifying four organizational practices through the coding of interviewee data and field notes. This analytical step was performed after the explorative rounds of coding and the coding of the preparatory processes described in the previous chapter. Initially, I worked with the parts of the data that referred to the process of organizing the defense of the voting stations. From there, I expanded the analysis to the other organizing processes described previously. This served two purposes: on the one hand, to get a sense of what the generalized features of the practices were, and on the other hand, how these features might have change over time. I address the latter issue in the empirical parts of the thesis.

3.3 The Change of Protest Organizing

After tracing of the twelve cases and identifying four relevant organizational practices, I turned more explicitly to the question which is at the heart of this dissertation: how do periods of intense contention shape protest organizing? This question tackles another level of process: the change and stability of protest organizing over time. More precisely, I analyzed the development of the four central concepts (organizationality, organizing, organizations, and practices) using two techniques.

First, I compared the narrative summaries of the twelve cases, which I have described in section 2.2, with regards to the four analytical categories. I employed summary grids and summary tables in MaxQDA. Focusing on the four concepts, this allowed to establish descriptive patterns of changes and continuity over time. For example, I could check whether one communication practice was employed more or less frequently by activists in some cases and whether there was a difference during the 1-O episode of contention.

Second, I focused on direct statements on change and stability in the data. This was done primarily in the interviews with experts and key organizers. I asked these interviewees explicitly about changes over time. The responses to these questions were often quite analytical already and helped a lot to enrich the cross-case comparisons. For example, some interviewees described how deliberation as a practice became more important in organizing processes after the 1-O referendum. I coded these explicit statements on change and stability and summarized them, using summary grids and summary tables.

Afterwards, I brought the summaries of the two techniques together and produced analytical narratives on changes and stability of protest organizing in the independence movement. The final phase consisted in reconnecting these results with the theoretical approach to the temporal dimensions. This involved two steps: first, I analyzed the narrative summaries with regards to the dynamics of contention, checking whether there was evidence on how these dynamics shaped changes in protest organizing. These findings are displayed in chapter 9. Second, I checked how changes in protest organizing were connected to specific contentious occurrences and their meanings. This was done to reveal whether there were any transformative events in the 1-O episode of contention.

These were the most important steps in addressing the question of organizational change during and after the contentious 1-O episode. As the reader will have noticed this involved both splitting the data into workable pieces and a series of isolated analytical coding and summarizing techniques. However, in line with the rationale of qualitative research, I tried to maintain a holistic approach to the research object by constantly crosschecking the different procedures and acknowledging the discursive and temporal context of the pieces of data. Finally, I have not described here the many failed deviations of the analysis that were part of this research process. Qualitative research is an ongoing engagement between empirical data, theory, and the researcher that is seldom a smooth process.

Part Two: Normal Times. The Catalan Cycle of Contention 2009-2017

Chapter Four

THE CONTENTIOUS POLITICS OF SECESSION IN CATALONIA

Throughout the world, a number of regions strives to break away from existing countries and form sovereign states of their own. In particular after World War II, the struggle for independence became such a common feature of global politics that Buchanan (1991) called it the "age of secession," a trend that has continued after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Griffiths 2016). Countries as diverse as Papua New Guinea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Serbia, and the UK have recently faced secessionist challengers who aim to redraw the borders of these states. The protests that took place in the time around the 1-O referendum in Catalonia can be seen as part of this global phenomenon.

In political science, the challengers of existing states are commonly called *secessionist movements*. Despite the use of this term, the literature has actually engaged very little with work on social movements and contentious politics. Vice-versa, social movements scholars have largely turned a blind eye on the dynamics of secessionist conflict, with some notable exceptions (Beissinger 1996, 2002; Della Porta et al. 2017; Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019; Huszka 2014). Not just with regards to secession, but also more broadly, "research on ethno-nationalist conflict and social movements has remained regrettably separate" (Muro 2015, 2). The goal of this chapter is to situate the secessionist challenge in Catalonia within this broader context by bringing together research on secessionism and social movement studies. The chapter has two parts.

First, I review the relevant literature on secessionism and social movements to clarify the some of the key terms that are used throughout the dissertation. Instead of providing an exhaustive review, I discuss a series of key concepts that are necessary to clarify the research questions of the dissertation. This means I largely omit, for instance, the literature on the drivers, dynamics, and outcomes of secessionist conflict. The present chapter devotes more attention to what secessionist movements are and what they do: I discuss the concepts *secessionist movement*, *secessionist strategy*, and *secessionist contention*.

The second part of the chapter focuses on secessionist contention *before* the 1-O episode of contention. Research on secessionism has devoted much attention the institutional sphere (Barrio

and Rodríguez-Teruel 2017; Ferreira 2021; Griffiths 2015; Pagoaga Ibiricu 2020), referendums (Della Porta et al. 2017; Lecours 2018, 2020; López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020; Qvortrup 2014b), strategies (Butt 2017; Cortés Rivera 2020; Griffiths and Muro 2020b; Griffiths and Wasser 2019; Sorens 2012), and the international arena (Doyle 2010; Holesch and Jordana 2021; Muro, Vidal, and Vlaskamp 2019; Saideman 1997). Only few studies have treated secessionist contention in its own right (Beissinger 2002; Della Porta, Gunzelmann, and Portos 2021; Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019). This chapter falls within the last category of studies. I describe how the historical hegemony of autonomism in Catalonia was slowly replaced by demands for independence after 2003. Drawing on the existing empirical literature on Catalonia as well as on my own data, I show how secessionist challengers used massive street performances and referendums to advance their claims in the period from 2009 to 2017.

These two parts introduce the Catalan independence movement as a case of a secessionist movement. By describing the most recent history of the self-determination struggle in the region, the chapter shows how secessionist demands were shaped by institutions, parties, and movements over time. This interactive and conflictual process has often been linked to the political, economic, and territorial crisis in Spain after 2008 (Della Porta et al. 2017; Ubasart-González 2021). This "triple crisis" represented an important background for the emergence and evolution of secessionist contention in Catalonia. The notion of crisis also conveys a sense that the time after 2008 was exceptional. In contrast to this reading, I suggest that the actual *secessionist* crisis did not unfold until 2017 (cf. Ferreira 2021).

Empirically, the main point of the present chapter is that the secessionist cycle of contention before 2017 can be seen as what Beissinger (1996, 2002) called "normalized times" of conflict – in comparison to what followed afterwards. Interactions between secessionist challengers and the state mostly followed contained trajectories. Movement actors seldom employed disruptive tactics and state actors limited themselves to soft repression and counter-secession in the courts.

Before tackling the two parts of the chapter in detail, it is necessary to clarify one question: what is *secession* actually? Pavković and Radan (2007, p. 5) defined secession as "the creation of a new state by the withdrawal of a territory and its population where that territory was previously part of an existing state." This is a quite straightforward definition, yet there are some caveats to it. First, as Hechter (1992) pointed out, not all secessionists want to form their own states. The goal of irredentists is to secede from a state to join another state – very often one that they previously have been part of. These efforts may be supported by the state that wants to reclaim the seceding territory (Sorens 2012). Second, the definition refers to states as sovereign entities of the international system. In cases of *substate* secession, territories and populations split from an

entity at a lower level (e.g. from a Swiss Canton or a German Bundesland) without leaving the federation (Seymour, 2011). Third, some authors treat states that were created in the aftermath of large multinational states (such as the Soviet Union or the Austro-Hungarian Empire) as cases of state fragmentation, because of the collapse of the previous polity (Hechter 1992). States that result from decolonization are sometimes considered a different outcome as well, as colonies were never fully integrated into their respective host states. However, I follow Griffiths (2016) in seeing state fragmentation and decolonization as cases of secession, too, while acknowledging that there is a variety of contexts in which secession can occur.

1   SECESSIONIST MOVEMENTS

Territorial conflicts in regions as diverse as Bougainville, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Azawad have recently caught the attention of international observers. In political science, challengers seeking withdrawal from an existing state are commonly called secessionist movements. Despite the use of this term, the literature on secessionism actually engages very little with research on social movements and contentious politics.

As a result of this disconnect, secessionist movements are still poorly conceptualized in political science. Much of the existing literature does not define secessionist movements at all. Authors who do define them neglect their internal complexity by understanding them broadly as nations or narrowly as organizations. Most importantly, none of the existing conceptualizations explains why secessionist movements are movements. This is not just a problem of labels. Proper conceptualization is utterly important, because concepts represent the building blocks of political inquiry (D. Collier and Mahon 1993; Sartori 1970). The concept of secessionist movement is often taken for granted or even poorly understood. The existing conceptualization of secessionist movements can be categorized into three approaches.

First, a series of empirically-oriented studies uses the term secessionist or separatist movement but does not define it explicitly. This pertains both single case studies (e.g. Boylan 2015; Musgrave 2003) and comparative case studies (e.g. Butt 2017), as well as large-n quantitative works (e.g. Giuliano 2006; Saideman 1997; Siroky and Cuffe 2015). Cases are either assumed to be secessionist movements, or selected from existing data bases in which they appear as such. There is no conceptual discussion what a secessionist movement entails and what sets it apart from other concepts.

The second approach defines secessionist movements very broadly. For instance, Griffiths (2016, 50) defines a secessionist movement as "a nation that actively seeks to obtain independence from its sovereign," provided that it lasts at least one week, features at least 1000 people, claims

rule over at least 100 square kilometers, has a flag, and has formally declared independence. This is problematic, because the highly contested notion of a nation anchors the concept but remains unspecified. It implicitly assumes that the nation represents a unified entity, but there are abundant examples of seceding territories where large portions of the nation's population are firmly opposed to secession. Moreover, there are a couple of cases where secessionist efforts are not based on a distinct national identity (Pavković and Radan 2007). A second approach is to define secessionist movements more narrowly. One example is Sorens (2012, 9), who holds that "a secessionist movement is an organization" that aims at enhancing internal sovereignty and does not reject the achievement of external sovereignty. The problem with Sorens's definition is that it reduces secessionist movements to a singular organization. The same problem also creeps up in research on specific secessionist entities, which are then taken to represent "the movement."

The literature in these three approaches focuses primarily on empirical problems of secessionism. The minimal conceptual effort may be adequate for these research goals, but it carries two problems: it neglects internal complexity and fails to apprehend the movement character of secessionist movements.

First, the existing approaches abstract from much of the internal complexity of secessionist movements. Whether defining them broadly, narrowly, or not at all, the existing conceptualizations assume that secessionist movements represent unitary actors. Gallagher Cunningham (2014, 18) discussed this prominently in her book on self-determination (SD) groups:

> The central problem with this body of work is that it tends to treat these groups and, to a lesser extent, their host states, as essentially unitary. In these studies the "movement" or ethnic "group" has preferences, the "group" is a certain size, and the "group" is relatively poor or rich. Similarly, "states" face a certain number of challengers and are either democratic or authoritarian (or open or closed) but are generally treated as similar within these categories. In reality, there is often as much (or more) disagreement about self-determination within SD groups and states as between them.

Like other self-determination movements, secessionist movements are usually assumed unitary actors while in reality they are composed of various collective actors. This may be a problem when assessing findings from different studies if secessionist movements are defined in very different ways or not defined at all. Ignoring internal complexity might be fine for large-n comparative research, which is more concerned with generalizability across cases than the accuracy of the operationalization for each individual case. Other approaches, however, might be interested precisely in studying this internal complexity of secessionism. What is thus required for such research is an analytical concept that preserves more accuracy of the empirical reality of these movements.

Second, the existing concepts tell us nothing about why secessionist movements *are movements*. Why not just call them secessionist nations or secessionist organizations? What is it that makes them a movement and not just a group of people? Labels matter in the social sciences: a reader who is not familiar with the literature might associate the term secessionist movement with politics from below, massive mobilization, and extra-institutional action. The word movement carries a different normative connotation than secessionist elites, parties, or entrepreneurs for instance.

However, it is not my intention to argue that the label movement should be dropped. In fact, there are good reasons to define secessionist movements as social movements and some writers have done so. Huszka (2014, 4) has defined secessionist movements as "a particular type of social movement with a specific political goal: independence." But she has not further specified what a social movement is, nor why secessionist challengers should be considered social movements. In the next section, I draw on social movement theory to develop a concept of secessionist movements that highlights their social movement character.

The concept of social movement is complex. In political science, social movements are often seen as a specific category of political actor. They are distinguished from other political actors, such as political parties or interest groups on functional and organizational grounds (Rucht 1993; J. Wilson 1973). In contrast, I build on the concept by Della Porta and Diani (2020, 21) that views social movements as a "distinct social process" in which actors "hold conflictual orientations to clearly identified opponents, connect through dense, informal networks" and "share a distinct collective identity." Merging this concept with Pavković and Radan's (2007) understanding of secession, I define a secessionist movements a

> a distinct social process in which actors seek the withdrawal of a territory from an existing state, hold conflictual orientations with that state, connect through dense, informal networks and share a distinct collective identity.

This definition appreciates the movement character of secessionist movements. Secessionist movements do not constitute a kind of collective actor, but a complex and distinct *process*. This process involves three dimensions.

First, secessionist movements engage in conflictual relationships with the host state. Pavković and Radan (2007, 38) emphasized that in "many cases, even those of peaceful secessions [...] there is often a political contention and/or conflict between the secessionist movement and the authorities and political parties of the host state." The present concept goes even beyond Pavković and Radan and includes the involvement in conflictual relationships as a necessary criterion for a secessionist challenge to be considered a movement. In addition, these conflictual relationships must be somewhat durable. Tilly and Tarrow (2015, 11) stressed that a social movement is "a

sustained campaign of claim making, using repeated performances that advertise the claim." Thus, it is not enough for secessionist movements to declare independence a single time, as Griffiths (2016, 50) holds, but they do so repeatedly through public actions. Very often, secessionists only achieve independence after a long struggle, which can span several decades.

Second, secessionist movements are bound by a shared identity. They are based on a common culture and tradition, which fosters solidarity among its individual and collective actors. Movement identity, culture, and tradition should not be considered stable objects. Rather, they are constantly reproduced and redefined by activists and play a crucial role in the constitution of a movement as a collective (Melucci 1996). Many secessionist movements are based on the idea of a shared nation or ethnicity, but there are some exceptions to it, such as the Confederate States of America or Western Australia (Musgrave 2003; Pavković and Radan 2007). However, all secessionist movements face the question of who belongs to the demos of the claimed independent state (A. E. Buchanan 1991).

Third, and most importantly, secessionist movements are informal networks of actors (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 25–28; Diani 1992). They are composed both of individual and collective actors, ranging from informal grassroots groups and voluntary associations to professional organizations and political parties. Most of the literature on secessionist movements fails to apprehend this point. Oliver (1989, 4) pointed out that

> all too often we speak of movement strategy, tactics, leadership, membership, recruitment, division of labor, success and failure-terms which strictly apply only to coherent decision-making entities (i.e., organizations or groups), not to crowds, collectivities, or whole social movements.

Building on Oliver's argument, secessionist movements should not be put in the same category as secessionist parties, organizations, or interest groups, because they lack overall coordination and decision making that these actors have. It also shows how Sorens's (2012) definition clashes with one of the basic conceptual assumptions in the field of social movement studies that "social movements are not organizations, not even of a peculiar kind" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 26).

This definition of a secessionist movement as a social movement is narrower than the existing concepts in research on secessionist conflicts. It reserves the term secessionist movement to a distinct social process that involves a plurality of actors and individuals that are bound by a shared identity and repeatedly engage in conflictual relationships with the host state by demanding independence.

This concepts allows distinguishing secessionist movements from other political phenomena. First of all, a secessionist movement is different from the single actors that compose it. Analytically,

there is no need to call a single secessionist party, organization, or interest group a secessionist movement. The conceptual terms and tools to describe these collective actors are already available. Empirically, however, it appears likely to encounter a variety of actors pushing for independence as a common goal, as Pavković and Radan (2007, 45) pointed out: "In many cases, the core organizational base of a secessionist movement is in fact a coalition of political parties and cultural organizations with little if any coordination among them." Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham (2014, 5) showed that self-determination movements "often contain multiple internal factions." It is precisely this lack of central coordination between (often conflicting) actors that requires the concept of secessionist movement.

Second, on the basis of the conceptualization presented here, secessionist movements can be distinguished from other social movements. Secessionist movements are distinct in that they are defined by the very goal they pursue: gaining independence from the host state (Huszka 2014, 4). In contrast to other social movements, where goals are often multiple, ambiguous, or ill-defined, secessionists usually have a clear idea of what they want. Pavković and Radan (2007, 38) formulated these differences in goals as follows:

> First, non-secessionist and non-autonomist parties and movements aim at changes in the policies and social/political structures within the host state while secessionists want only to escape from it. Second, their escape involves a withdrawal or detachment of a territory and its population from the host state. Non-secessionists have no such aims.[21]

Despite these differences there is some substantial conceptual overlap of secessionist movements with other movements. Secessionist movements can be regarded as a subclass of *self-determination* movements. Self-determination is defined as the "desire [of] greater control over their own affairs (which at the extreme can entail demands for their own independent state)" (K. G. Cunningham 2014, 4). Another form of self-determination are autonomist movements, which also strive for greater self-government, but do not seek the proclamation and recognition of independence (Pavković and Radan 2007, 36–37).[22]

Most secessionist movements are based on *national* identity, which is why they are sometimes treated as part of a broader class of racial, ethnic, and nationalist movements (Brubaker 2009;

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[21] For self-determination movements, Gallagher Cunningham (2014, 18) similarly argued that they "are somewhat unique among social movements because they challenge the basic legitimacy underpinning the state system, and make appeals only on behalf of a bounded group."

[22] Radical secessionist demands can be employed as a strategy to obtain greater autonomy, however (Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe 2007).

Muro 2015; Olzak 1983). Notwithstanding the importance of the nation as a basis for secessionist movements' identities, there are some notable cases that are not grounded on this category (Pavković and Radan 2007, 44). A well-known example is the Confederate States of America, a less well-known is the case of Western Australia in 1932 (Musgrave 2003). Conversely, not all nationalist movements aim at secession – in fact many nationalist movements engage in counter-secession on the side of the host state. This is the primary reason why secessionism should be considered a political phenomenon in its own right.

Secessionists themselves usually avoid the use of the word "secession," because it bears the risk of invoking the breaking of the UN charter and international law. Instead, many secessionist movements refer to themselves as "independence" or "pro-independence" movements, which has a more positive undertone (Pavković and Radan 2007, 35). I use the terms secessionist movement and *independence movement* interchangeably. I also employ the term *separatism* as synonymous to secessionism (Huszka 2014), although some authors (Bartkus 1999; Hechter 1992) see separatism as a non-secessionist form of autonomism.

Third, secessionist movements should be regarded as distinct from the types of action they employ. Social movements have often been linked, and sometimes been equated with, protest behavior. Tilly (2004, 3) called vigils, demonstrations, petitions, pamphleteering etc. the "social movement repertoire." Activists often use these extra-institutional and "unconventional" (Barnes and Kaase 1979) forms of political participation, because they lack direct access to governments. Despite this affinity, it is important to stress that "social movements certainly do not use protest alone and do not have a monopoly on protest" (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 168). Mc Adam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001, 7) stressed that "boundaries between institutionalized and non-institutionalized politics are hard to draw with precision" and "interact incessantly." The same is true for secessionist movements. The literature has pointed out that secessionists use violence, non-violent actions, and institutional channels for their aims, often combining several of these methods (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; K. G. Cunningham 2013; Griffiths and Wasser 2019). I discuss these strategies in the next section.

2 SECESSIONIST STRATEGIES

Michael Hechter (1992, 277) pointed out that a "key fact about secession is that it is among the rarest of major political outcomes." If secession is regarded as distinct from decolonization and state fragmentation, only a handful of successful cases remain. In established democracies, secession appears to be virtually impossible. The closest cases are the independence of Norway from Sweden (1905), Iceland from Denmark (1918), and Ireland from the United Kingdom (1922),

but these secessions happened only a few years after the introduction of universal suffrage (Dion 1996). Also, they took place about a century ago and are hardly comparable to contemporary examples. Recent examples include the cases of East Timor (2002), Montenegro (2006), and Kosovo (2008), which broke away from Indonesia and Serbia respectively, both of which are countries with a mixed democratic record at that point (Griffiths and Wasser 2019). Overall, established democracies have been quite successful at dealing with secessionist challengers through accommodation or repression. Yet, there currently is a number of serious endeavors to pursue statehood in democracies as well – from Scotland and Flanders to this dissertation's object of inquiry, Catalonia. Given the low chance of success, it seems puzzling that secessionist movements pursue the goal of independence. How do they want to achieve independence in the face of severe opposition from the state? This question draws attention to secessionist strategies.

Strategy is broadly conceived as "a plan of collective action intended to accomplish goals within a particular context" (Maney et al. 2012, xvii).[23] The literature views strategy as long-term, whereas tactics refer to the means to advance a strategy in the short run (Jasper 2006, 14; Nepstad and Vinthagen 2012; F. M. Rossi 2017, 35). In theory, secessionists and other social movements may pursue a range of strategies and tactics to achieve their goals. Both social movement studies and research on secessionism have devoted a great deal of attention to the strategies and tactics of social movements and secessionists in particular. In social movement studies, two approaches to strategy can be identified (F. M. Rossi 2017, 36). On the one hand, Charles Tilly (1986, 1995, 2004) and others have championed the idea of the *repertoire of contention*: in given time and place, activists have a limited range of learned and practiced options for contentious action available. A movement's repertoire is intrinsically linked to the dynamics of contention over time. On the other hand, authors such as James Jasper (2004, 2006) have focused more on how activists make choices within the available repertoire. While Tilly's approach focused on the structural limitations of strategies, Jasper highlighted a number of general dilemmas that activists face in many contexts. Jasper also put emphasis on short-term choices, while Tilly's work paid more attention to the historical dimension of strategy (F. M. Rossi 2017, 36).

Are the strategies and tactics of secessionist movements any different from other social movements? Muro (2015) suggested that ethnic and nationalist movements – a category in which secessionist challengers often fall – do not employ different means to pursue their goals than other kinds of social movements. In the literature on ethnic conflict, much attention has been devoted

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[23] For similar definitions see: Maeckelbergh (2011, 6), Griffiths and Wasser (2019, 6), Jasper (2006, 4–5), Smithey (2009, 660–61)

to the question of violent strategies. About half of the 150 self-determination campaigns recorded since 1960 have turned into civil wars (K. G. Cunningham 2014, 14; see also Fearon and Laitin 2003; Griffiths 2016; Sorens 2012). Barbara Walter (2009, 3) even claimed that secessionism is the major source of political violence around the world. Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) argued that non-violent repertoires of action are ultimately more effective than violent means in political conflict, although this is not the case in self-determination struggles. However, much of this research ignores institutional means (K. G. Cunningham 2013; Griffiths and Wasser 2019). In contrast, drawing on McAdam and Tarrow (2000), Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham (2013) distinguished between three categories of tactics that self-determination groups can pursue: Conventional/institutional politics, nonviolent extra-institutional politics, and political violence/civil war. Griffiths and Wasser (2019) used this work to develop a typology of secessionist movements based on which (combinations of) tactics they employ.

- State-Based (Institutional Only)
- Civil/State (Institutional plus Extra-Institutional Nonviolent)
- Armed State (Institutional plus Extra-Institutional Violent)
- Full Movement (Institutional plus Extra-Institutional Nonviolent and Violent)
- Protest (Extra-Institutional Nonviolent)
- Armed Insurgency (Extra-Institutional Violent)
- Rebellion (Extra-Institutional Nonviolent and Violent)

This typology highlights that secessionist movements may use combinations of different tactics or focus on a single category alone. How do secessionists choose among the three categories and their combinations? In contrast to research on social movements, which has highlighted the role of traditions and dilemmas (as described above), the literature on secessionism has approached this question from the rational choice paradigm. In her work on self-determination groups, Cunningham (2013, 292) theorized strategic choice as follows:

> I argue that groups pick strategies based on the costs of those strategies and their anticipation of achieving success through them. Operating through conventional politics is generally less costly; however, institutional channels do not exist in all states and, even if they do, not all groups can anticipate achieving their objectives through them. Irregular political strategies (such as mass nonviolence or violence) are likely to be more costly than conventional politics but each may be more attractive to SD groups given certain conditions that lower the costs of mobilization or increase the chance of success.

This line of reasoning is exemplary for theories of secession, which "often treat the phenomenon in terms of a 'cost/benefit' analysis" (Crameri 2015a, 2). Approaches to secession coming from the field of international relations have highlighted that secessionist movements do not operate in a vacuum. In an important contribution to the field, Griffiths and Muro (2020a) proposed the idea of a *strategic playing field* of secession and counter-secession. Three players interact on this playing field: the secessionist movement, the host state, and the international community. The secessionist movement pursues the goal to become an independent state. It can either convince the host state to grant independence to the seceding region or circumvent the host state by lobbying the international community. The host state tries to counter-act the secessionist movement's efforts internally, but also at the international level. The international community is a crucial actor in that the independence of the seceding region ultimately depends on recognition by other states, and UN membership as a formal status. Both secessionists and the host state employ various strategies to pursue their goals and to influence the international community. Thereby, the *strategic playing field* does not focus on the challenger side alone, but embeds movement strategies in their environment, especially taking into account the international community as a third player category.

One important party remains excluded in the scheme, however: the population of the secessionist region. While the population of the potentially seceding territory might not qualify as an agent in secessionist politics, it does represent an important *audience* for both secessionists and the host state. It is evident from referendum results and widely available public opinion surveys that in many regions – particularly in advanced democracies – the population is split on the issue of independence. In these cases, secessionists must persuade the local population that independence represents a desirable and viable goal (Lecours 2020, 144). Thus, secessionist strategies do not only target the host state and the international community, but also their own constituency. In cases in which secessionist can count more firmly on the support of the population, they might be able concentrate their efforts on interactions with the host state and the international community. This is why I expand Muro and Griffiths's (2020a) idea of the playing field by including the local population. Figure 3 depicts the adapted strategic playing field.

Finally, as has been argued above, one should be careful to conceptualize secessionist movements as unitary actors. Describing secessionist challengers usually requires the concept of social movement precisely because they are composed by separate collective and individual actors that are bound by the goal of independence, but might otherwise not have much in common. These actors might even pursue different strategies. Within the same movement a rebel group might employ violent actions, while a related party contends in the institutional arena. The typology of Griffiths and Wasser (2019) acknowledges internal diversity more explicitly than the idea of the

strategic playing field (Griffiths and Muro 2020a). Internal differentiation is important to understand the relationships among challenger groups and why some of them might pursue a particular strategy or not.

Figure 3: The strategic playing field of secession. Adapted from Griffiths and Muro (2020a).
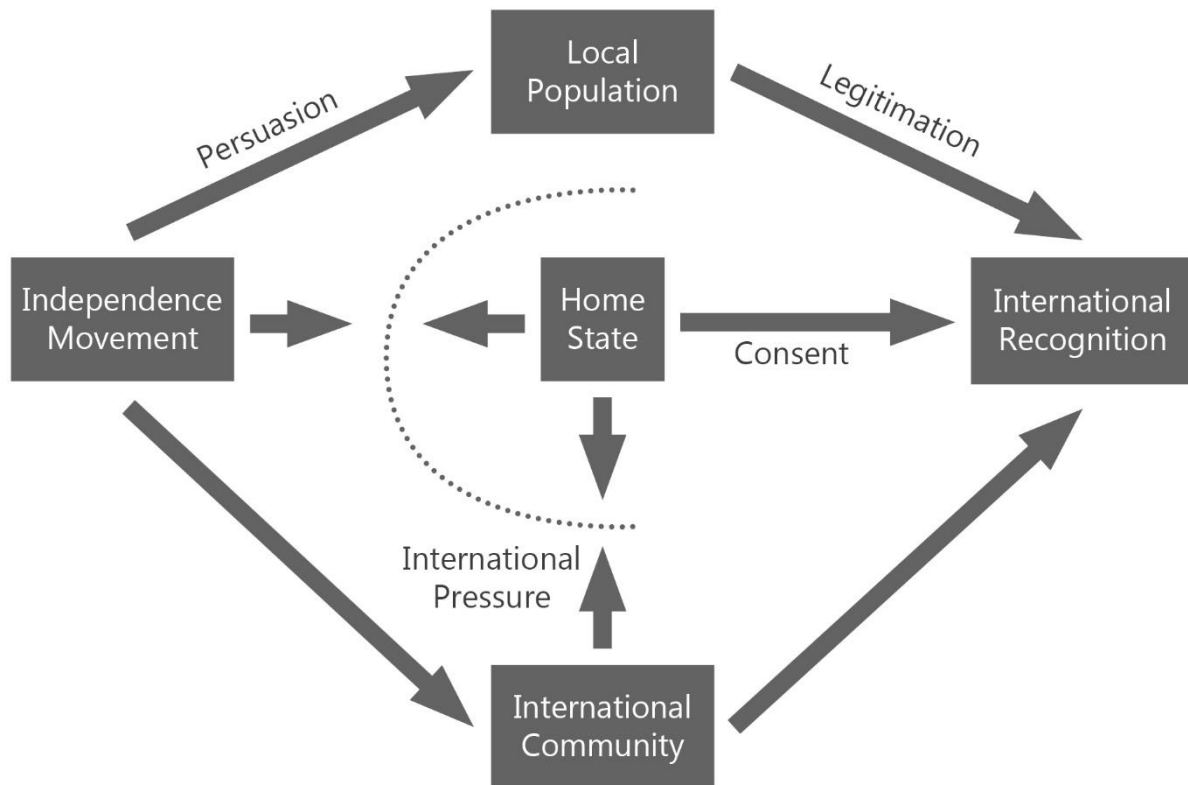
3 SECESSIONIST CONTENTION

Within the framework of secessionist and counter-secessionist strategy outlined in the previous section, the present dissertation focuses on two specific aspects. On the one hand, it deals primarily with the actions of secessionist challengers. On the other hand, it leaves violent and institutional action aside and studies secessionist protest instead. This narrow focus does not mean that the other elements in the secessionist conflict – the host state, the international community, the regional population – do not matter for the research question. Quite the contrary: I adopt a relational approach to the study of secessionist conflict, in which the interactions between challengers and the host state play a central role in how protest is organized over time. This approach to secessionist conflict draws on the framework of *contentious politics* (McAdam, Tarrow,

and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2011, 2013; Tilly 2008; Tilly and Tarrow 2015). According to Tilly and Tarrow (2015, 7), the concept contentious politics refers to:

> Interactions in which actors make claims bearing on other actors' interests, leading to coordinated efforts on behalf of shared interests or programs, in which governments are involved as targets, initiators of claims, or third parties.

Following this definition, the *contentious politics of secession* involves secessionists claiming independence from the host state on the one hand, and the political actors of the host state making contrary claims. With its focus on interactions between claimants and their opponents, the contentious politics paradigm represents a comprehensive relational approach to political conflict and social movements. Contentious politics shares the focus on conflictual relationships with much of the recent work on secessionism outlined in the previous section. This work has gone beyond merely considering secessionist actors and toward a more dynamic analysis of interactions between host states, secessionists, and international actors (K. G. Cunningham 2011; Griffiths 2016; Griffiths and Muro 2020b). However, the contentious politics paradigm provides a conceptual vocabulary to describe these dynamics, which the existent work in secessionism has often been lacking. Most importantly, the approach is more sensitive to temporal dynamics, while the work on secessionism has been rather static.

As outlined in the previous section, secessionists may pursue a number of paths toward independence. Secessionists can try to achieve independence through the regular channels of the political system: winning elections, obtaining seats in parliament, and promoting constitutional change in the legislature. This path is not available to them in authoritarian regimes, but also in established democracies there are limits to institutional means. Secessionist groups usually constitute a minority within the host state, which is why they cannot win elections at the state-wide level. Both democracies and authoritarian regimes will go great lengths to maintain control over a secessionist region and engage in counter-secessionist efforts (Butt 2017; K. G. Cunningham 2011; Griffiths 2016). In short, the road of conventional politics is often blocked for secessionists. This may be an explanation why Griffiths and Wasser (2019, 13) found that "only nine movements sought independence using purely institutional methods" in their data set of 136 secessionist movements around the world. Instead of purely institutional disputes, "there is often a political contention and/or conflict between the secessionist movement and the authorities and political parties of the host state" (Pavković and Radan 2007, 38). Most secessionist movements employ some form of contentious politics, although they often combine them with institutional strategies (Griffiths and Wasser 2019).

Contention is broadly defined as "making claims that bear on someone else's interests" (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 7). *Secessionist* contention can thus be understood as claiming the withdrawal of a territory and population form a host state. Tilly and Tarrow emphasize that contention occurs in many non-political realms of society. However, the claim to independence is inherently political, because it addresses the issue of sovereignty, which is fundamental to the modern nation state.

Contention is not just any kind of claims making, however. What distinguishes contentious from conventional politics is that is inherently *episodic* and thereby "excludes regularly scheduled events" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 5). This means that much of institutional politics – regular elections, parliamentary votes, or party conventions – fall outside of the realm of contentious politics (Tarrow 2013). Instead, "at the core of contention is the power to disrupt through the invention of innovative ways of performing protest" (Tarrow 2011, 101). As mentioned above, the institutional road to independence often is not an option for secessionist. This is why they turn to protest – or *contentious performances*, as Tilly and Tarrow called it. Contentious performances are understood as "relatively familiar and standardized ways in which one set of political actors makes collective claims on some other set of political actors" (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 14). Examples of such performances range from street marches and sit-ins to boycotts, strikes, and petitions. I subsume all these forms of contention under the term protest (see also the chapter on research design).

Secessionists use various forms of protests to claim independence, challenge the host state, and put pressure on their own elected representatives. But the power of contention must be understood even more broadly. Tilly and Tarrow used the metaphor of theatrical performances, because contentious collective action always has an audience in mind.[24] Tarrow underlined that all protest bears some performative element.

> Modern forms of contention are aimed at demonstrating a claim, either to objects of the claim, to power holders, or to significant third parties. This makes contentious politics a form of representative politics – however disruptive – and instills in it symbolic and cultural elements, even in the most violent forms such as terrorism, guerilla warfare, and civil war. (Tarrow 2011, 119)

In the previous section, I have highlighted two important audiences for secessionist conflicts: the international community on the one hand, and the population of the secessionist region on the other hand. Audiences are not an irrelevant side aspect of secessionist contention. To achieve

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[24] The theatrical element sets contentious performances apart from *direct* forms of collective action, which do not serve to make claims to decision-makers, but aim to tackle the problem without deviation (Graeber 2009).

independence, territories must necessarily be recognized as sovereign by the international community (Griffiths and Muro 2020a; Pavković and Radan 2007). Convincing the local population is a democratic necessity (Lecours 2020). Contentious performances thus play a key role in drawing attention to secessionist demands, increase their legitimacy, and pressure the international community to intervene.

Social movements do not employ contentious performances randomly. Instead, performances "cluster into a limited number of recurrent, well-defined type" (Tilly 2008, 27). As I have mentioned above, this concept has been called *repertoires of action* (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) or *contentious repertoires* (Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 14). Tilly (2008, 4) suggested that "people learn a limited number of claim-making performances, then mostly stick with those performances when the time to make claims arrives." In other words, out of all the potentially available performances, activists only make use of some of them at a certain point in time. The basic categorization of repertoires distinguishes broadly between contained and disruptive (sometimes called *transgressive*) repertoires: while contained performances unfold within the accepted rules and norms of a regime, disruptive performances challenge them (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 7). In addition to contained and disruptive repertoires, Tarrow (2011, p. 99) included violent repertoires in his typology.

The focus on repertoires of action is where the contentious politics paradigm overlaps with research on secessionist strategies (K. G. Cunningham 2013; Griffiths and Wasser 2019). However, contentious politics encompasses not only the strategies of movements and regimes, but their interactions more broadly. The central idea of contentious politics is that the relationship between challengers and authorities fundamentally impacts the form, scale, and frequency of contentious performances. In the words of Tilly and Tarrow (2015, 111), "claims and counterclaims do not occur randomly; they take their shape from surrounding regimes, cultures, and institutions. They respond to a regime's opportunities, threats, and constraints." This means that approaching secessionist conflict from a contentious politics perspective must take into view the relationships-in-interaction of secessionist movements and host states, and how these connect with the international community and the regional population.

The next section turns to the empirical case of this dissertation. It first provides some historical context for the emergence of secessionist claims in Catalonia after the turn of the century. Then, it describes how political actors in Catalonia used public performances to voice demands for independence.

4   THE SECESSIONIST CYCLE OF CONTENTION IN CATALONIA 2009 – 2017

For about three decades since Spain's transition to democracy (1975-1978), demands for Catalan independence were a minor issue on the region's political agenda. Autonomism was the territorial ideology of the region's major party coalition, Convergència i Unió (CiU), whose leader Jordi Pujol governed Catalonia from 1980 until 2003. When CiU's rule came to an end and Pujol's government was replaced by a coalition of the Partit dels Socialistes de Catalunya (PSC, socialdemocrats), Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC, republican left), and Iniciativa per Catalunya-Verds (ICV, greens), pro-independence claims surpassed autonomism within the following ten years. After the 2012 regional elections, the Catalan parliament featured a pro-independence majority, including the formerly autonomist CiU, which had shifted its stance on the matter (Rico and Liñeira 2014). By 2014, surveys indicated that 45 percent of Catalans supported secession from the Spanish state (Muñoz and Tormos 2015). The blue graph in Figure 4 shows the sharp rise in support for independence, especially in 2012.

Figure 4: Support for independence in Catalonia. Source: Centre d'Estudis d'Opinió.
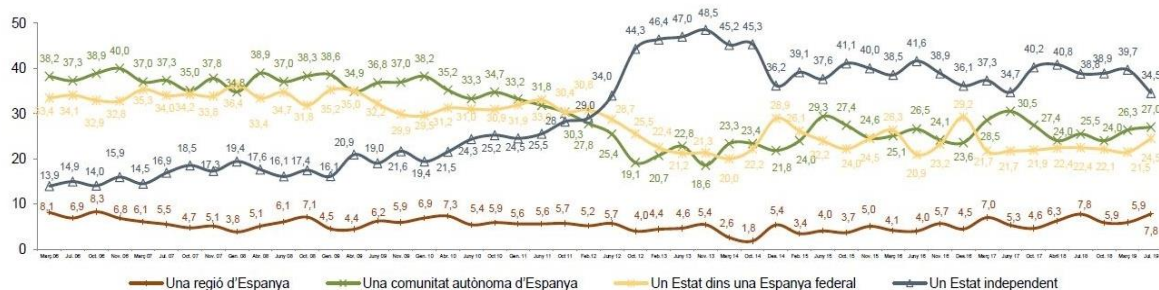
Question: Do you believe Catalonia should be a) a region of Spain b) an autonomous community of Spain c) a state within a federal Spain d) an independent state.

The determinants of the rise of secessionism in institutional politics and public opinion have been discussed extensively elsewhere (Álvarez Pereira, Portos, and Vourdas 2018; Basta 2018; Burg 2015; Guinjoan and Rodon 2016; Muñoz and Guinjoan 2013; Serrano 2013). In contrast, I focus on how Catalans' discontent with the region's territorial arrangement was expressed in collective

contentious actions. I describe in this section how the secessionist *cycle of contention* (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019; Tarrow 1989, 2011) unfolded, focusing on the main actors and contentious events until the announcement of the 2017 referendum. The following section is dedicated to protest organizing during this period.

Demands for self-determination have a long tradition in Catalonia. Hank Johnston (1991), for example, described how working-class immigrants and bourgeois nationalists overcame their prejudices and forged an alliance against Francoism. During Spain's transition to democracy, protesters demanded greater self-determination for Catalonia, which resulted in the region's first statue of autonomy in 1980. Nevertheless, the clandestine violent group Terra Lluire continued to fight for independence and organized several terrorist attacks in the 1980s (Vilaregut 2004).

But pro-independence efforts remained marginal in Catalan politics for most of the second half of the 20th century. Autonomism dominated the political landscape in the region after Spain's transition to democracy. In his seminal book *Nations against the state*, Michael Keating described nationalist civil society as "rather fragile" and splintered into many small groups (Keating 2001, 265). More radical claims only came to the foreground of the region's politics after the turn of the century when self-determination groups started to voice their demands with more frequency and vigor. An early effort to bring these diverse groups together was the foundation of the Platform for the Right to Decide (*Plataforma pel Dret de Decidir,* abbreviated PDD) at the end of 2005 (Vilaregut 2010, 131). The PDD was constituted as a formal organization, but because of its intention to represent a wide spectrum of self-determination groups, it also featured some elements of a federation. At the same time, the PDD also championed norms of internal democracy. The failure to turn these principles into formalized decision-making processes represented one of the weaknesses of the organization and contributed to the rise of internal conflict (Vilaregut 2010, 154; 183–84). In 2007, the PDD internally split into two factions and remained paralyzed for the two following years. Nevertheless, the PDD and its promotion of the right to decide can be considered an "early riser" (Tarrow 2011, 201) that paved the way for more radical secessionist demands that followed.

There was no agreement among expert interviewees with regards to what could be considered the starting point of the secessionist cycle of contention. Some of them included the PDD, but most pointed to September 13, 2009.[25] On that day, the municipality of Arenys de Munt held a nonofficial referendum on Catalan independence. According to Mayor Carles Móra, the goal of the consultative plebiscite was to achieve that the "self-determination of peoples could be talked

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[25] Ubasart-González (2021), in contrast, sees September 11, 2012 as the starting point.

about with normality, and that it could be demanded without fear or taboos."[26] More than 41 percent of the small town's inhabitants participated in the referendum, voting largely in favor of independence. Most importantly, the event received a lot of media attention, which helped spread the idea of a micro-referendum beyond the local context (Muñoz and Guinjoan 2013). Three months later, on December 13, another 166 Catalan towns and cities held referendums, which Guibernau (2013, 17) identifies as the "origin of the pro-secessionist movement." The referendum in Arenys de Munt and other municipalities were formally initiated by the city council, which passed a law to initiate the referendum. However, the referendums were "organized mainly from the civil society" (Muñoz and Guinjoan 2013, 45). Throughout the region, local initiatives emerged to promote the referendums and demanded the right to decide.

Shortly afterwards, mayors from many pro-independence municipalities and members from the PDD, which had overcome its internal conflict, founded a platform to coordinate local referendums following the model of Arenys de Munt (Vilaregut 2010, 167). Within the next two years, 552 of 947 Catalan municipalities organized unofficial referendums on independence (Muñoz and Guinjoan 2013). The PDD had pushed the right to decide as a collective action frame, and the referendums helped spread it across the Catalan region. They established the idea that a referendum represented the preferred way to achieve independence. Moreover, the local referendums not only contributed to the diffusion of the right to decide as an idea, but were also an important means of putting this idea into practice. As such, they can be understood as a prefigurative practice, demonstrating the viability of the referendum as a type of collective action.

The first major contentious event at the regional level took place on July 10, 2010 (abbreviated 10-J). Over a million people protested in Barcelona, claiming *Som una nació. Nosaltres decidim* ("We are a nation. We decide"). This event was organized by the cultural association Òmnium Cultural in response to a ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court some weeks before. After an appeal of the conservative Partido Popular (PP), the Court removed substantive parts of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy, which had been in place since 2006. The ruling represented a transformative event in the secessionist cycle in that it aggravated the existing territorial grievances (Basta 2018; Ubasart-González 2021). This was visible in the 10-J protest as an immediate reaction. The 10-J protest was the largest protest for self-determination since the mobilizations at the end of the Franco regime (Johnston 1991) and Spain's transition to democracy (Guibernau 2004). It also became a strong symbol, as it brought together collective actors of many different political

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[26] Vilaweb. 12.08.2009. Arenys de Munt Consulta Sobre La Independència de Catalunya

orientations (Della Porta et al. 2017, 60). Finally, it marked the beginning of mass-protest performances in favor of self-determination and independence in Catalonia.

In 2011, an explicitly secessionist organization emerged from the coordinating group of the local referendums and the rests of the PDD: the Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC). The following year, the newly founded ANC organized a large demonstration for the National Day of Catalonia on September 11 (called *La Diada*), shortly before parliamentary elections in the region. The protest under the slogan "Catalonia, new state of Europe" was supported by Òmnium Cultural and other SMOs. It mobilized even more people than the 10-J (Crameri 2015b). On the same day of 2013, the ANC organized the so-called Via Catalana. The Via Catalana was a huge human chain along the ancient Via Augusta from the French border through the entire Catalan territory to Alcanar in the Autonomous Community of Valencia. Around 1.6 million people participated in the 400-kilometre demonstration (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019, 6). The 2014 Diada formed part of the campaign Ara és l'hora ("Now is the time") jointly organized by ANC and Òmnium Cultural. Nearly two million protesters filled two of Barcelona's largest intersecting avenues to form a giant "V" (for "Votar, Voluntat, Victòria – Vote, Will, and Victory").

The Diada became a regular event of the Catalan political calendar, mobilizing over a million people in the following years. The Diadas were performances in the very sense of the concept, as interviewee Daniel put it:

> All the mass mobilizations have been perfect from a standpoint of public order, there was never any problem. Everything was like a magnificent, happy performance. You took a picture and participated, you were happy and that's it [...] Perfect for television, for propaganda.

Similarly, an interviewee quoted by Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos (2019, 8) described the Diada as "activism-for-the-picture." Participants had to perform a certain activity, for example raising their hands at a certain time. These features classified the Diada as a contained type of performance. In fact, one could go as far as to argue that the yearly repetition removed the contentious character from the event. According to McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001, 5) contentious politics "excludes regularly scheduled events" such as the Diada. At the same time, the routinization of the Diada contributed to the stabilization of the pro-independence demands that emerged after the ruling on the Statute into a sustained secessionist movement.

In 2014, the Catalan autonomous institutions and civil society actors lifted the local referendums to the regional level. This process started two weeks after the massive 2012 Diada, when Artur Mas, at the time president of the Generalitat, dissolved the parliament and called for a snap election. The following campaign of his party CiU centered on the issue of self-

determination. About a year after Mas's reelection, the Generalitat called for a referendum on Catalan independence, which would take place on November 9, 2014 (called 9-N). However, the Spanish government resorted to the Constitutional Court, which eventually suspended the referendum (Martí and Cetrà 2016). In response to the Court's decision, the "Catalan government decided to set out a popular non-binding consultation instead of a referendum, delegating the organisation to civil society actors, while using the regional government's resources" (Della Porta et al. 2017, 61). Finally, 80.7 percent of the 2.3 million Catalans casting their ballots voted for independence, but the vote had no effect (Martí and Cetrà 2016). The preparation of the 9-N unfolded as a participatory process, which is why Della Porta et al. (2017) dubbed it a referendum "from below".

Using David Altman's (2011, 8) typology, the 9-N and the local referendums can be categorized as facultative (i.e. not constitutionally mandatory), consultative (i.e. non-binding), and proactive (i.e. law-changing rather than conserving). Formally, they were called for by local and regional institutions and can therefore be considered consultative plebiscites. However, because of the broad participation of civil society actors, they were actually closer to facultative *initiatives*. Importantly, Altman (2011, 17) noted about non-binding initiatives: "These are odd in that significant efforts have been made to force a vote, yet the measures do not make the results binding. Why is this so?" From a decision-oriented political science perspective, this is puzzling indeed. Altman suggested that the "the answer is generally found in the constitutional texts of some countries." The Spanish constitution does not allow for referendums at the substate level nor for putting territorial questions for debate. In this context, holding a referendum – even just a consultative initiative or plebiscite – on independence became a demand itself and its execution an act of civil disobedience.

In sum, after reforms of autonomy failed in the first decade of the new century, an increasing number of Catalans began to support independence for the region. New pro-independence organizations such as the ANC emerged. Other actors such as CiU or Òmnium Cultural shifted toward secessionism. These challengers voiced their demands for Catalan independence through a series of public actions – what Tilly (2008) called contentious performances. Two tactics were particularly successful in mobilizing supporters: referendums and mass demonstrations. These contentious performances were organized by an emerging pro-independence civil society. In the next chapter, I describe this network of organizations and how they organized protest in the time until the announcement of the referendum in 2017.

5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of the secessionist cycle of contention in Catalonia from 2009 through 2017. Drawing on the existing literature and my own empirical data, I have traced the emergence of the independence movement and its most important contentious performances. I have also reviewed the relevant literature to clarify some of the key terms of this dissertation and provide a bigger picture for this study. First, I have used literature from mainly political science and international relations on secessionism to develop the concepts of secession, secessionist movement, and secessionist strategies. Second, I have focused more narrowly on secessionist protest, drawing on literature in social movement studies and the contentious politics paradigm more specifically.

In this dissertation, I seek to explain how actors organize the latter category of secessionist action, which I refer to as protest, contention, or contentious performances. This focus does not fully omit institutional actions by the independence movement, but it relegates them to a secondary role. The body of literature on secessionism I have reviewed here treats protest as one strategic option of secessionist movements. In this view, the choice to protest is based primarily on a cost-benefit calculation. In contrast, my approach follows the work of Beissinger, Tilly, Tarrow, and others by focusing on the relational and cyclical dynamics of secessionist protest in Catalonia in the time around the referendum on independence on October 1, 2017.

The chapter has revealed two further blind spots in the literature on secessionism. First, the literature on secessionism treats tactics as immediately available to secessionist challengers. Pursuing one tactic or another is primarily a cost-benefit calculation. How these tactics are realized is omitted from the view. In the case of secessionist protest, this is not an irrelevant matter. A first open question is: How do secessionist movements *organize* protest? Social movement studies have highlighted that overcoming the collective action problem is no small feat for activists. This is precisely the problem that this dissertation seeks to address.

Second, the literature on secessionism largely neglects the temporal dimension of secessionist struggles. The idea of the strategic playing field is a static one (Griffiths and Muro 2020a). The choices of tactics are treated as independent from time (K. G. Cunningham 2013). But strategies and tactics are likely to change over time. If one strategy does not lead to independence, secessionist might try another one. Movements may institutionalize or radicalize. This is particularly true for secessionist protest: Beissinger (2002) has found that secessionist protest occurs in *tides*. The second open question thus is: How do secessionist strategies, protests, and organizing change over time? This is why it is important to address the temporal dimension of

secessionist protest. These two blind spots are the central concern of this dissertation. I have used the conceptual chapter of this dissertation to develop a theoretical approach to these questions.

In contrast, this chapter has provided some first empirical answers to these questions. I have shown that between 2009 and 2017, despite the repeated engagement in contentious action, the relationship between secessionist challengers and the host state remained relatively stable. The independence movement refrained from disruptive action that would truly threaten the territorial integrity of the Spanish state, which in turn engaged primarily in legal actions but did not actively intervene in Catalan politics. Following Beissinger (1996, 2002) and Della Porta (2018) I call this period the "normal times" of the secessionist conflict in Catalonia. The notion of "normal times," as I employ it, neither designates that the state of the conflict was permanent or static, nor that it was normatively acceptable or even desirable. It is purely meant to be understood in differentiation to the secessionist crisis that would follow in 2017.

The normal times of the conflict were best exemplified by the Diada demonstration. The ANC has been organizing this massive street performance on each September 11 since 2012. The Diada became a routine event in the calendar of the independence movement. It was a symbolic protest that served as a perfect WUNC display (Tilly 2004). In the first three years it put pressure on the movement's representatives. This was condensed in Carme Forcadell's "President, posi les urnes!" (President [Mas], put the ballot boxes) at the 2014 Diada, which pushed the Generalitat to hold a binding referendum. However, it always remained a contained tactic that did not disrupt institutional politics in the Spanish state. Over time, it became more of a festive ritual rather than a contentious performance – the Diada became a "normal" event. As such, it reflected the routinization and normalization of protest, which many scholars of social movements have diagnosed since the 1990s (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). As a normal protest, the Diada did not challenge the relatively stable relationship between secessionist challengers and the host state.

The next chapter goes one step further in addressing the two questions mentioned above by tackling the organizational dimension of the Catalan cycle of contention. It describes how civil society actors emerged, as support for independence started to grow in Catalonia after 2009. Drawing on the existing literature and my own empirical material, I show how these civil society actors organized protest in the normal times of the conflict which I have described in this chapter.

Chapter Five

ORGANIZING SECESSIONIST PROTEST IN NORMAL TIMES

When academics or the media observe social movements, they often describe what is most visible to the public eye: activists marching in the streets, shouting their demands, occupying squares, and fighting the police. Melucci (1994, 107) called this perspective on social movements the "myopia of the visible." There is much more to social movements than their public expressions. Many protests would not be possible without hours of previous preparations. Activists often spend much more time organizing protests than in the streets (Haug 2010; Haug, Haeringer, and Mosca 2009; Polletta 2002; Rucht 2017).

The previous chapter has described how Catalan secessionists employed contentious performances, in particular mass protests and referendums, to demand independence from Spain. This is only the public side of the secessionist cycle of contention – what some have called the "frontstage" of protest (Haug 2013; Rucht 2017). This chapter, on the other hand, turns to the "backstage" of secessionist contention before 2017. It describes the organizational dimension of the secessionist cycle of contention. Catalan pro-independence activists invested significant organizational efforts into sustained mobilization. The chapter is structured along the three levels of analysis introduced in the conceptual framework.

The first part focuses primarily on organizations as *entities*. It describes the main organizational actors and dynamics that led to the emergence of a pro-independence civil society after 2009. The second part looks at the processes of *protest organizing* in normal times. Using the case of the Ara és l'hora campaign, I show how the major SMOs, ANC and Òmnium Cultural, organized protest in detailed, professionalized, and highly-structured processes. I also discuss how organizations of the independentist Left championed horizontal organizing. The third part focuses on *organizational practices*. It first provides a general and abstract account of organizational practices in the independence movement rather than at a specific point in time. Drawing on the empirical data, I identify four core organizational practices in the independence movement: public assemblies, instant messenger applications, deliberation, and directing. Then I turn to the concrete texture of

these practices in normal times. The three parts of the chapter provide the basis for the chapters that engage directly with the secessionist crisis in 2017.

1   THE RISE OF AN ORGANIZED MOVEMENT 2009 – 2017

In 2009 the demands for Catalan independence picked up momentum through a wave of local referendums that swept many towns of the region (Muñoz and Guinjoan 2013). Although these referendums normally were formally introduced by the local town halls and pro-independence parties, they were often prepared by civil society actors. Organizationally, the local referendums were important in two ways. Expert interviewees reported that the preparations of the referendum brought together activists from different organizations and political parties at the local level. At the Catalan level, the coordinating platform for the local referendums represented the nucleus for a new organization: the Assemblea Nacional Catalana (ANC). In fact, the origin of the ANC goes back to the day of the first local referendum in Arenys de Munt. Back then, two experienced activists, Pere Pugès and Miquel Strubell, discussed the idea of a new platform to unite the different sectors of the independence movement. They joined forces with two other organizers, Enric Aïnsa and Miquel Sellarès. The latter had been one of the founders of the anti-francoist Assemblea de Catalunya, which served as a historical reference for the new organization. In early 2011, the four activists organized the Conferència Nacional per l'Estat Propi (National Conference for the own State), which was attended by over 1,500 people, and where a provisional leadership group was elected. Simultaneously, participants and organizers of the unofficial referendums were recruited into local assemblies (Crameri, 2015). About a year later, 7,000 participants officially founded the ANC in a constitutive assembly. Within the next three years, the ANC experienced an unprecedented organizational growth and established itself as a major collective actor within the independence movement (Crameri, 2015).

The other large civil society organization, Òmnium Cultural, was founded as a cultural association by progressive members of the Catalan bourgeoisie and intellectuals in 1961. In 2010, Òmnium Cultural started to get involved in contentious politics and organized the first large protest in the cycle of mobilization. The 2010 protest was indicative of a fundamental change that Òmnium Cultural went through as an organization. While occasionally participating in pro-independence campaigns (e.g. Free Catalonia in 2004), the self-understanding of Òmnium Cultural had always been resting on the promotion of Catalan culture and language. However, the failure of the Statute of Autonomy, as well as the wave of unofficial referendums confronted the organization with a changing political reality. Interviewees reported that a key event for the

organization was its General Assembly of in Santa Coloma de Gramenet in 2012, when it officially decided to push for Catalan independence.

After 2012, the ANC and Òmnium Cultural became the two most important civil society actors. In this time, they were successful in recruiting members and resources, founding dozens of local chapters throughout Catalonia and even abroad. Organizationally, this implied a change from the initial grassroots phase to formal and large organizations under the strong leadership of Carme Forcadell (ANC) and Muriel Casals (Òmnium Cultural) (Dowling 2018, 99–100).

Around ANC and Òmnium Cultural as the two main SMOs emerged what expert interviewee Eduard called a "diffuse magma" of individuals, smaller groups, and organizations. This magma could be distinguished into two important organizational networks. On the one hand, the groups that initiated the wave of local referendums persisted as loose networks in the neighborhoods of Barcelona and other cities, and especially in small towns and villages. On the other hand, there was a series of groups and organizations that were often subsumed under the term *independentist Left* (Esquerra independentista). The left-wing struggle for independence has a long history in Catalonia, but has usually been split into a number of organizations, parties, and grassroots groups (Bassa 1994). After 2009, these groups coalesced into the CUP (Candidatura d'Unitat Popular), a movement party that previously had only been running in local elections and had no organizational structure at the regional level, which is why it was often called in plural (*Les CUP*). In 2012, the CUP made the leap into the Catalan parliament and obtained three seats. It even enhanced its representation to ten seats in 2015. In this time, the CUP was connected to a network of smaller left-wing organizations and grassroots groups: this included trade unions (CSC-Intersindical and Coordinadora Obrera Sindical), youth organizations (Maulets and Coordinadora d'Assemblees de Joves de l'Esquerra Independentista, who later formed Arran and then La Forja), a student union (Sindicat d'Estudiants dels Països Catalans), and the CUP's two branch organizations Poble Lliure and Endavant. These organizations formed a dense network and many activists participated in several of them at the same time. Moreover, there was considerable overlap of the independentist Left with the aforementioned local networks, but also with ANC and Òmnium Cultural.

In sum, there were five organizational dynamics that sustained the contentious performances described in the previous section: The emergence of the PDD as an early riser, the formation of dense local networks through the local referendums, the subsequent foundation of the ANC, Òmnium Cultural's shift towards a secessionist stance, and the solidification of the independentist Left into the CUP. These five dynamics outlined above established two large SMOs (ANC and Òmnium Cultural), dense civic networks at the local level, and a series of smaller organizations. These organizational structures had considerable overlap and formed a strong pro-independence

civil society. As a result, some have attributed civil society organizations "a stronger leadership than the political parties" (Ordeix & Ginesta, 2014, p. 929). In fact, Catalan civil society played a key role in the preparation and planning of collective action throughout the cycle of contention. The next section describes how these civil society actors organized protest actions until 2017.

2 PROTEST ORGANIZING IN NORMAL TIMES

From 2009 to 2017, Catalan secessionists repeatedly voiced their discontent with the region's territorial arrangement through a series of contentious performances. At the same time, a number of smaller organizations and dense activist networks emerged at the local level to sustain these contentious performances. The previous literature and interviewees in my data highlighted the central role of the two large SMOs, ANC and Òmnium Cultural, in protest organizing during this period of time (Crameri 2015b; Della Porta et al. 2017; Della Porta, Gunzelmann, and Portos 2021; Dowling 2018; Ubasart-González 2021). Often, the two organizations jointly mobilized for protests and their leaders – Carme Forcadell and Muriel Casals until 2015, Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart afterwards – frequently appeared together in public. However, there were some important differences in how these organizations worked.

Òmnium Cultural was led by a Board of 24 volunteer directors (*Junta directiva*). Six of them formed the Executive Committee (*Comitè Executiu*): the president of the organization, the treasurer, the secretary, and three vice presidents. The Board met once a month and the Executive Committee once a week, in person or via messenger. Around the time of my fieldwork, Òmnium Cultural had more than 80 paid staff members. Interviewees reported that there were fewer staff members before 2017, but they already played an important role in the organization. Staff worked in a series of different areas, from event management and stage production to social media outreach and graphic design. The organization always had a large and growing membership pool, which rose even more after 2015 and has reached over 180.00 members at the time of writing. The large membership provided an important funding basis. However, the large majority of these members did not participate actively in the organization. Members could get involved in one of the 45 local chapters, but had little influence on the leadership apart from internal elections and the yearly membership assembly. In short, Òmnium Cultural was a highly professionalized SMO based on strong leadership and concentrated decision making.

The ANC's structure blended horizontal and vertical elements in the phase between 2012 and 2017. On the one hand, there was a strong leadership like in Òmnium Cultural. The ANC had a National Secretariat (*Secretariat Nacional*), which consisted of 77 elected secretaries. Each secretary was a member of two committees (for example mobilization, communication, etc.). The chairs of

each committee formed the Permanent Committee (*Comitè Permanent*), together with the president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and the leaders of the organizations' administration. The National Secretariat met once a month and the Permanent Committee once a week. This leadership group was supported by a large paid staff. On the other hand, the ANC was a decentralized organization. It created more than 500 local chapters (*Territorials*) throughout the region and even abroad and professional-interest-based groups (*Sectorials*). Each of these chapters had its own board and regular meetings. The local chapters provided an opportunity for the 40.000 paying members (as of 2015) and registered volunteers to participate in the organization's decision making. Local chapters had some autonomy, which meant that they could decide in which actions of the organization they would take part and whether they wanted to organize actions independently at the local level. Most members of the National Secretariat were elected through the local chapters, thus connecting the central and local structures of the organization.

Both organizations had in common that they organized their contentious actions in what their organizers called campaigns (*campanyes)*. Campaigns represented bundles of different collective actions that were connected through a common theme or message and that extended over a determinate period of time. Due to this structuring, it made more sense to consider the organizing processes of entire campaigns rather than single actions (see chapter on research design). Between 2012 and 2017, both organizations engaged in a range of different campaigns. I focus here on the Ara és l'hora ("Now is the time") campaign which was jointly organized by the two organizations for the informal referendum on November 9, 2014. This campaign consisted primarily of

> macro-events, mass demonstrations and symbolic performances that would attract participants form across Catalonia, as a means to communicate, raise awareness and gain salience, employing a more protest-oriented campaign in a context of apathy and defiance of the rule of law by the Spanish elites. (Della Porta et al. 2017, 78)

The major protest event of the campaign was the Diada on September 11, 2014, when participants formed a giant "V" on the streets of Barcelona. This was accompanied by many smaller protest events, but also diffusion of messages in the media and on street stands. In the Ara és l'hora campaign, both organizations relied less on traditional media outlets such as newspapers and TV stations, but increasingly on ICTs and messengers applications in particular. This allowed them to operate independently of editorial lines and establish a direct communication with their supporters. Finally, both Òmnium Cultural and ANC engaged in direct lobbying, holding meetings with the pro-independence parties.

Overall, the campaign consisted of persuasive and contained actions with very low levels of disruptions. Muriel Casals, at the time president of Òmnium Cultural, called the independence

movement the "Smiling Revolution" (*La Revolució dels Somriures)*. Activists often dubbed themselves as *gent d'ordre* (literally "people of order") or *gent de pau* ("people of peace"), because of the movement's peaceful and orderly repertoire of action. Also the preparations of these actions were well-coordinated and orderly. From the analysis of the empirical data, five steps in the organizing process of the campaigns were identified.

The first step in the campaign was to establish a working group or a committee, which was responsible for taking the central decisions and carrying the load of the preparatory work. Each organization formed a group of volunteers and professionals but also a joint committee to coordinate the process. Òmnium Cultural organizer Beatriu emphasized the need to include "people with different skills" in the committee, also hiring people from outside the organization. Second, the preparations of the campaign started with "establishing a story," as Òmnium Cultural staff member Alex said. This meant clarifying what the central message of the campaign was. The slogan "Ara és l'hora" created a sense of urgency for the right to self-determination. The goal was to promote the referendum on independence and maximize turnout for the vote. Organizers also had think about how to develop narratives and frames in line with the slogan, and how they would be received in a given context. Third, just like any larger campaign, Ara és l'hora had to obtain resources. For ANC and Òmnium, which both had a large and growing paying membership, this did not represent a particularly great obstacle. In addition to membership fees, money was raised through selling merchandising material. Fourth, the campaign committee developed a calendar for the campaign. As mentioned above, the campaign consisted of a series of events (*actes*): for example public talks, street gatherings, and massive performances. Every event required its own material preparation. Depending on the type of action, speakers had be contacted, stages built, and messages sent out. Fifth, the campaign was also implemented at the local level. As mentioned above, the ANC in particular had strong roots in neighborhoods and small towns, organized as territorial sections. Many of these local chapters did the grassroots work of the campaign with weekly stands in the streets (*parades*), where they talked to interested citizens and distributed leaflets all across Catalonia. The leaderships of both organizations tried to mobilize the local level as much as possible. This included not only passing materials and resources to the territorial sections, but also synchronizing frames, narratives, and events with the Catalan level.

These five steps emerged from the empirical data. They resemble the model of the organizing process proposed by Rucht (2017). Given that the analysis was based on representational data the five steps are not a fully exhaustive list of preparatory activities. Interviewees likely omitted more mundane activities that they took for granted. The five elements should be considered overlapping phases rather than independent sequential steps. The organizing process resulted in a campaign

that was crucial in mobilizing the Catalan population for the 9-N referendum (Della Porta et al. 2017). The success of the organizing process made Ara és l'hora a blueprint for all following campaigns, as Òmnium Cultural organizer Beatriu explained.

> And this campaign [Ara és l'hora] worked super well. Through this learning process, we have applied it to all campaigns afterwards. Not only pro-independence campaigns, but also from Lluites Compartides to Demà pots ser tu, which are campaigns with more social content.

Ara és l'hora was obviously not the only campaign in the period from 2012 until 2017. But Beatriu's statement suggested that it can be considered representative for the ways in which ANC and Òmnium Cultural organized protest in this period of normal secessionist politics. Their repertoire of action was characterized by massive symbolic performances which were planned and prepared in a meticulous organizing process. Over these years, as both organizations increased their membership and staff, organizers improved this process and their contentious capacity. In this way, the two organizations became the most important civil society actors of the independence movement and the main drivers of contentious action.

This is only part of the picture though. The massive protest actions by ANC and Òmnium Cultural represented only the tip of the iceberg of contentious activities in the period from 2009 to 2017. There was a large number of smaller, often local protest actions in this time, which were harder to trace systematically through qualitative data. These protests were often organized by two categories of actors that I have described in the previous section: the local networks that emerged from the wave of referendums and the independentist Left. The data suggested that these actors organized protests differently from the professionalized, structured, and often very vertical ways of Òmnium Cultural and ANC. Interviewees highlighted the emphasis on deliberative decision making, open assemblies, and volunteer work. This form of protest organizing was closely connected to the tradition of Catalan left-wing movements, some interviewees said.

In their research on the secessionist cycle of contention until the 9-N, Della Porta et al. (2017, 70) found that pro-independence "mobilisations were characterised by a focus on horizontality, democratic decision making and inclusivity." This was certainly true for smaller protests organized by local networks, the independentist Left, and (to some extent) the ANC, who all championed prefigurative ways of protest organizing. However, the preceding discussion on the Ara és l'hora case shows that there was another, more dominant mode of protest organizing: organizing large campaigns focusing on mass protest involved very structured and often top-down processes that were carried by the professional staff of ANC and Òmnium Cultural.

Despite the successful mobilization of Òmnium Cultural and ANC, the 9-N referendum in 2014 did not have any binding effects. In the end, the referendum was organized by volunteers and was termed a "participatory process" without legal value. Afterwards, the main focus the secessionist conflict shifted to the parliamentary and electoral arena, but debates about another, this time binding referendum would soon reemerge, as I show in the next chapter. The remainder of the present chapter tackles the level of organizational practices.

3 ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT

Practice theorists, like ethnomethodologists, have emphasized that social life is always already ordered. The structured character of practices lies in their routinization. Reckwitz (2002, 255) stressed that "social fields and institutionalized complexes – from economic organizations to the sphere of intimacy – are 'structured' by the routines of social practices." Similarly, Giddens (1984, xxxi) emphasized the role of routines in the structuration of societies, because they provide "transformation points in structural relations." However, it would be a misconception to understand practices as rigid repetitions that give rise to stable systems of a Parsonian type. In fact, practices are subject to change, they "emerge, persist and disappear as links between their defining elements are made and broken" (Shove, Pantzar, and Watson 2012, 21). Neither does it imply that *all* human action is inherently ordered, nor that order can exclusively arise through routines. This is precisely the point where organizational theory comes in: organizing represents a *deliberate* and *decisive* structuring of social action. If organizing represents "an attempt to order the intrinsic flux of human action" (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, 570), then it refers to deliberate efforts to produce, alter, or even break down the routine order of practices. This means that practices are not simply the invariable result of routinization, habitualization, and learning, but they can be actively shaped by practitioners.

However, it must be stressed that organizing is a practice itself, too: it exhibits routine patterns, requires practical knowledge, and is recognizable to a community of practitioners. In this sense, organizing is not a force that is located outside of the field of practices, but represents a *specific* kind of practice. Organizational practice "anchors" (Swidler 2001) other practices in that it regulates the relationships between their bodily, mental, discursive, and material elements.

In this section, I describe four organizational practices in the Catalan independence movement: public assemblies, instant messenger use, deliberation, and directing. Of course, these four practices do not represent a comprehensive picture of all organizational practices in the independence movement. One could write an entire book on each of these practices, but the descriptions presented here are necessarily synthetic.

The four practices relate to two important dimensions of organizing, which I have mentioned in the conceptual chapter: communication and decision making. On the one hand, the practices of public assemblies and instant messenger use are part of the communication side of organizing. Other communicative practices would be writing emails and making phone calls, but they were far less prominent in the data. On the other hand, deliberation and directing constitute the decision-making side of organizing. Another decision-making practice that came up in the data was voting, but deliberation and directing were more relevant. Table 3 provides an overview of these organizational practices.

Table 3: Dimensions of organizational practices in the independence movement.

Communication	Decision
Public assemblies	Deliberation
Instant messenger use	Directing

These dimensions speak to two different strands in organization theory: the communication-as-constitutive (CCO) approach to organization (Cooren et al. 2011; Fairhurst and Putnam 2004; McPhee and Zaug 2000; Schoeneborn, Kuhn, and Kärreman 2019) on the one side, and the "Luhmannian" approach putting decision at the center (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 2019b; Haug 2013; Luhmann 2011; Seidl and Becker 2006). However, I want to stress that the two dimensions are not intended as a generalizable typology in which all organizational practices must fit. The dimensions emerged as categories from the empirical material and help to analytically make sense of how organizing works in the independence movement.

The two strands of organization theory set the broad scope for the analysis of practices. They provided a sensitizing frame for which practices to look for. However, the four practices as such emerged inductively as grounded theory from the empirical data. I coded observations, interviews, and documents to find categories of communication and decision-making practices (see chapter on research design). What I present are *generalized* accounts of these practices. This means that these descriptions cover many empirical observations in different organizational contexts over time. As such, they are distinct from the other empirical descriptions in this dissertation, which all refer to a specific period of time.

The repetitive character of practices means that they are relatively robust over time. This suggests that the four practices described here are likely to work in the same ways throughout normal and intense times. This does not mean that practices are rigid routines. They are flexible

ways of doing things – no single performance of a practice is identical. Also, the accounts are located at a fairly high level of abstraction. How they look "in practice" will depend to some extent on timing and organizational context.

What changes over time is how activists *combine* certain practices at given times. Organizing requires both communication *and* decision making. But practices can also be combined within the two dimensions. For example, activists often use both face-to-face communication and digital means at the same time (Kavada 2010). The four practices are part of the organizational *repertoire* of the independence movement. From this repertoire, activists choose and combine different practices at different times, resulting in different textures of the field of practice. The next four sections describe each of the practices. The final section shows how activists combined these practices in normal times of conflict.

3.1 Public Assemblies

In the literature, an assembly has been described as a large meeting that lets participants to engage in some "side involvement" with other participants (Goffman in Haug 2013: 710). Only recently, meetings, gatherings, and assemblies have received increased scholarly attention in social movement studies. A meeting is defined as a temporary gathering of at least three people in which communication is oriented to some common business (Boden 1994, 90–99; Haug 2010, 80, 2013, 709; Schwartzman 1989, 7). As such, the meeting has a double character "as event *and* structure, and as actor *and* space" (Haug 2013, 710). I suggest meetings can also be viewed as *practice*. Translated into Reckwitz's (2002) terms, there are certain ways of *doing* meetings, which combine cognitive, bodily, and emotional elements. Drawing on the empirical material, I identify nine elements of public assemblies in the independence movement.

First, like any kind of meeting, public assemblies, are "by their very nature, talk. Talk, talk, talk and more talk," as Boden (1994, 82) puts it. Second, public assemblies involve participants gathering physically in the same space and engaging in face-to-face communication. Third, these spaces must be open and accessible, giving a public character to the assembly. Fourth, participants normally do not speak whenever they want, but turns of talk are facilitated by one of the participants. Fifth, the assembly follows an agenda which defines the main talking points. Sixth, the main points of the discussion are collected in the form of meeting minutes. Seventh, the assembly and its agenda are prepared and announced by some of the participants. Eighth, public assemblies as practices are not one-time events, but are performed repeatedly, normally in a fixed rhythm (e.g., weekly, bimonthly, or monthly) that does not preclude extraordinary assemblies. Ninth, the tasks of facilitation, preparation, and minute-taking rotate among members from one

meeting to another. Table 4 displays the nine features of the practice that emerged from the analysis of the interview data.

These elements emerged from the interview data. They represent an abstract account of the practice of public assemblies in the Catalan independence movement. Not every one of these elements might necessarily be part of every assembly (as a single performance), nor did every interviewee mention every component of the practice. The series of elements could also be further expanded. Some interviewees mentioned emotional care among participants, reflexivity on how to debate, and relations to other meeting settings, especially committees, but none of them placed them at the core of the practice.

Table 4: The practice of public assemblies in the independence movement.

Element	Description
Communication	Multiparty talk
Co-presence	Face-to-face communication in a common space
Openness	Public announcement and accessible setting
Facilitation	Assignment of turns of talk by a participant
Agenda	Pre-defining points of debate
Minute-taking	Recording of main talking points
Preparation	Planning and announcing the assembly
Rhythm	Periodic repetition of the assembly, e.g., weekly
Rotation	Alternation of responsibilities among participants

Many of the elements of the practice of public assemblies can also be found in other types of meetings. What sets public assemblies apart from other kinds of meeting practices? First, openness is crucial to this specific practice. At least theoretically, people from the outside should be able to join and participate in the assembly. Second, there must be some degree of internal order to the assembly in the form of facilitation. Turns of talk cannot be fully self-allocated. Third, communication must take place face-to-face in physical co-presence. This excludes all kinds of online meetings.

These features distinguish the practice of public assemblies from other meeting practices, many of which were also called "assemblies" by the interviewees. There were four examples in the data.

First, an interorganizational meeting was called "assembly" at times, but it is based on organizational membership and therefore not open to all activists. Second, national meetings of organizations were often called assemblies. This is the setting where local sections of those organizations or different groups with the same affiliation meet once or twice a year. These might be open for outsiders to attend, but decision making is based on organizational units. Third, some organizations or groups called themselves "assemblies" – most prominently the ANC. They might have open assemblies, but usually they are limited to members. Finally, some interviewees spoke of "online assemblies," which are different because they lack face-to-face contact. Also, they very likely lack the minimal degree of openness, because they are not publicly announced. In sum, not everything that was called "assembly" in the data actually referred to the narrow kind of practice that I described before.

Interestingly, the size factor mentioned at the outset of this section did not seem to bear much importance empirically. Interviewees did not describe assemblies as necessarily large meetings, except for one instance, where an interviewee criticized a CDR for maintaining facilitation in a small assembly. Instead, there were some references to the challenges posed by large assemblies, as participation can be limited and facilitation is harder until the point where a large assembly might become unviable. How do public assemblies work in practice? Consider this passage from an interview with a young activist called Ruben:

> I: Was the assembly very regulated? How did it work, with turns of talk and all that?
>
> R: Yes, well, in the beginning, in 2013 and 2014, we were only a few and we hadn't learned anywhere how to be politically active, so we had to learn how to do it. So basically we used turns of talk, no? The forms of facilitation, and well, there are different committees that divide the tasks. Everybody put themselves in a committee or a concrete task and then in the assembly the person who would coordinate and facilitate the assembly would be the one in charge of assigning turns of talk and collecting the contents in the minutes. Yeah, these kinds of tasks. Then, after some time, when more people joined and we were more people, we became more gender-balanced, there were guys and girls, it was more diverse. So we started to see that sometimes in the assembly participation was a bit unequal. This is where we started to work on dynamics in the assembly, such as discussing things in small groups first and then with everyone in order to facilitate participation from everybody. Thus, we have a collective, which is not very regulated now, or rather, we have some informal norms of how we work for what concerns participation and the respect towards those who want to speak. We do have a guideline that every assembly has. An agenda and that's always the same.
>
> I: So it's the group of facilitators [grupo dinamizador] who prepares?
>
> R: That's it. Yes, there are two committees that are responsible for each aspect of the group and we always try to facilitate the managing – if there is an internal conflict or if

> somebody's uncomfortable with something or any type of confrontation, we work that
> out very openly and give it a lot of attention so that the group is always cohesive.

This quote from the interview with activist Ruben should sound quite familiar to both activists and students of social movements and meetings in general. It points to some of the elements of the practice described above: an assembly as a debate with facilitated turns of talk, which is open to new participants. It is prepared by some of its members and has an agenda and minutes. Beyond these features, there are two further aspects that highlight the *practice* character of public assemblies: informality and learning.

First, the passage from the interview stresses the role of informality in the assemblies. While Ruben said that they had guidelines and an agenda, he also stated that they had "some informal norms of how we work for what concerns participation and the respect towards those who want to speak." This points to the "practical consciousness" (Giddens 1984) that participants have. Not everything is made explicit and written down as rules, but much is left to the practical knowledge of the participants of how to *do* an assembly.

Second, this kind of practical skill and knowledge of how to do an assembly is not readily available, as the interview shows. Ruben described how in the beginning they had no prior activist experience and had to *learn* how to manage their assemblies: how to prepare the agenda, how to facilitate turns of talk, and so on. He also recounted how the activists, after some time, encountered problems in the form of gender imbalances, and how they adapted their practice in response. This shows that the skill and knowledge necessary for public assembly have to be *practiced* over time.

Finally, the piece of talk from the interview with Ruben is also interesting because it leaves unmentioned one feature that is commonly associated with assemblarian practices: deliberative decision making. When studying social movement assemblies, most of previous research has focused on the dynamics of democracy, and on consensus and deliberation in particular (Della Porta and Rucht 2015; Haug 2015; Haug and Teune 2008; Polletta 2002). Readers will have noticed that I have not made any references to these elements. Although there is a tight connection between assemblies and deliberation, both conceptually and empirically, I treat them as analytically different for now. The reason is that I would like to show how activists break and reestablish this connection over time. Before elaborating on deliberative practices in section 3.3, I describe the use of messengers in the next section.

3.2 Instant Messenger Applications

In the past decade, activists around the globe have increasingly made use of information and communication technologies. Social movements have relied on different kinds of digital media for mobilizing constituents, building a collective identity, framing grievances and issues, as well as organizing themselves. The Catalan independence movement is no exception to this phenomenon. In the interviews, organizers mentioned the usage of social media such as Twitter and Facebook, as well as more classic forms such as emails and websites. Above all, interviewees highlight the importance of instant messenger applications (IMAs). CDR organizer Xavi, for example, described the role of messengers in communication and media use as follows:

> A lot of WhatsApp – a *lot* of WhatsApp, a lot of Telegram, like really a lot. I would say, by order it would be WhatsApp and Telegram, they were "steaming." Then Twitter, and then other networks, like Facebook or whatever and I would say that the traditional media were lagging behind

Instant messengers are used primarily through mobile phones, which have become a key technology for protesters because of their versatility, allowing for communication with other activists, authorities, and the wider public (Neumayer and Stald 2014). Instant messaging, like any other communication technology, can be used for an infinite variety of purposes. It is not my intention to draw a comprehensive picture of all their potential uses in social movements, but to focus on their role in organizing, which became apparent throughout the interviews. In particular, I highlight three features of IMAs that structure their affordances: level of (perceived) security, directionality, and accessibility. Then I turn to how pro-independence organizers exploit them for organizational purposes.

Activists in the Catalan independence movement use three IMAs: WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal. The applications work in similar ways, but differ to some extent with regard to three properties. The first is the perceived level of their security. Although by the time of the research, all of these services offer end-to-end encryption, activists perceive them as offering different standards of protection. In an interview, Òmnium Cultural organizer Beatriu told me that some years ago the organization was working primarily with emails, but at the time of 1-O episode organizers were using Telegram instead. When I asked her about this shift, she emphasized the safety of Telegram in contrast to WhatsApp:

> I: How did it go, this technological change from emails to Telegram?

R: Well, I think it was very natural, because there was a time when we were using WhatsApp, but only briefly, because we saw that it was not a very safe network. It was not a safe channel, there could have been leaks really easily. And Telegram is a bit more secure.

This reflects a general pattern throughout the interviews. WhatsApp is generally considered the least secure, while Telegram and Signal in particular are considered safer. During the 1-O episode of contention, many organizers made the transition from WhatsApp to Telegram or Signal.

Second, the applications offer different *directionalities* of communication, i.e., unidirectional, bidirectional, and multidirectional. For activists, and organizers in particular, the crucial function of IMAs is that they allow creating group chats with several hundred participants. These group chats are used by organizers in two different ways. On the one hand, many group chats allow for multiparty communication. In other words, any participant can send their message in the chat without any restrictions. All three applications offer this multidirectional form of communication. On the other hand, organizers use group chats as one-way tools. They create groups with a single sender and multiple receivers who cannot send messages to the group. The group chat functions basically as a news feed, which is an affordance that was particularly appealing to organizers in the 1-O period. Activist Oriol from the interorganizational platform in Fastiada described a meeting where organizers decided to use digital technologies to prepare the defense of the voting stations:

So what we proposed and what was accepted was, in the first place, to create a communication channel, which obviously had to be Twitter, Facebook, but also a more direct messenger channel. So what happened here and in many other places is that WhatsApp did not allow to create lists for diffusion, only groups. Hence, we had to use a tool that was much less popular, which was Telegram. Because it allowed to make lists with a single sender, or four or five and as many recipients as you want. But of course, with the problem that Telegram in that moment was not a tool that people were familiar with, neither installed nor for communication. But well, what we proposed was basically a direct channel.

Telegram was the perfect tool for one-way communication and diffusion of information, but it had the problem that it lacked popularity. Oriol went on to tell that they tried to overcome this issue by telling people on other media platforms explicitly how to download and install the app.

Third, access to these messenger groups differs. Basically, the group can be open or closed. In part, access depends on the features of the IMAs. Users can only join WhatsApp or Signal groups if invited by the group administrator either via their phone number or a link. On Telegram, users can search for open groups and join them directly. However, openness and closure depend mostly on the decisions of organizers who run the group chat. This includes a range of different cases: based on membership in a group or organization, being part of a network, or completely open. Access can also be rectified based on behaviors of the participants in the chat. Thus, empirically

the issue of access is more complex than a binary open or closed. Moreover, it is closely related to how organizers want to use the chats, i.e., what practices they are part of. Many interviewees stressed the role of IMAs in organizing. When I asked organizer Berta whether IMAs make organizing easier, she responded enthusiastically:

> R: Yes man, it's wonderful to have these technologies now! Of course, you can send information in such a fast way – if only we had had them in previous battles!

Instant messengers facilitate communication by creating a common forum for activists – the group chats can function like virtual meetings. Most importantly, IMAs allow for fast communication among organizers, which was instrumental in contentious performances that require quick reactions, such as the 20-S. Òmnium Cultural organizer Beatriu described the use of IMAs for their organizing and campaigning as "revolutionary." At the same time, she stressed that it was a "learning process" for the organization how to use them effectively. The same goes for organizer Quim describing the Telegram use in the CDR:

> R: No, hmm, we had to put some norms like "please, Telegram is to communicate." It's not for debate. It's not for discussion […] This took a lot […] People have learned how to use Telegram the same as they have learned to be in the assembly. And now it works.

This shows that the advantages of IMAs are not readily available to activists, but the skill to use them properly must be practiced and acquired over time. In the next section, I describe the practice of deliberation in the independence movement.

3.3 Deliberation

The third organizational practice in the independence movement I describe here is the practice of deliberation. Deliberation, as it emerged from the interview data, refers to overcoming conflict or disagreement through the exchange of arguments, narratives, or testimonies to reach a consensus.

Previous research has revealed the role of deliberation in many progressive social movements, such as the global justice movements (Della Porta 2009a; Della Porta and Rucht 2015), the Spanish indignados (Della Porta 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2014; Nez 2012), and the French nuit debout protests (Felicetti and Della Porta 2018). The Catalan independence movement was found to endorse deliberative democracy in its framing during the 9-N referendum campaign (Della Porta et al. 2017).

In the interview data, deliberation as a practice emerged through two sets of codes. First, interviewees referred frequently to internal debates. This signaled both disagreement but also discussion to overcome that disagreement. Second, organizers from different organizational

contexts, but in particular from left-wing groups, stressed the importance of consensus decision making. These elements and the connections among them were fairly abundant in the data. There was rich evidence of disagreements, debates, and consensual decisions. However, interviewees almost never called this practice deliberation. They would refer to this process as consensus decision making, or democratic or participatory practice. Or, in fact, they would call this practice assemblarian. It is true that deliberation occurs first and foremost in assemblies, but I have argued that is necessary to analytically distinguish the practice of assemblies from the practice of deliberation. Let me elaborate on its elements.

First, in all interviews, organizers reported instances of debate and discussion among activists. Debate can happen at various levels: at the movement level, in an organization, between organizations, in meetings, in emails, or in private conversations. Interviewees use the term to describe two related things. On the one hand, debate means that there is a minimum of disagreement. It describes a situation where there are different proposals, positions, or ideas. On the other hand, this disagreement is not just a matter of mental states or isolated opinions, but it becomes manifest in the interaction among activists. Interviewees referred to the debates as exchanges of arguments, narratives, or testimonies.

Second, interviewees not only described the debates, but also highlighted the need to overcome disagreement and find a consensus. Many groups in the independence movement champion consensus as the preferred mode of decision making. SEPC organizer Irene, for instance, stressed that "it's true that sometimes there are intense debates, but we always come to a consensus, to an agreement." For CDR activist Jordi, consensus was essential in the organizing process:

> Of course, it needs time, because the assemblarian movement – well it is difficult, it takes a lot to reach an agreement and there are opinions here and there, etc., etc. and until there is no consensus for a concrete action and we see that we can't do it, then we don't do it. It is that simple, be it for security, for visual appearance, for everything.

In this quote from the data, Jordi highlighted the need for consensus in the CDR, but also how difficult it is to reach it at times. How do activists manage to overcome disagreements? In the interviews, organizers reported that it is important to discuss openly and to make arguments clear. Some stressed that it requires active efforts of all participants to accommodate. When asked about how to maintain the group in the face of conflict and tension, CDR activist Gabriel said the following:

> It works because there is always people who mediate. There is always people seeking a middle ground between two confronted positions. This way, the assembly always finishes in peace.

In other words, deliberation means an interactive effort to reach agreement in the face of conflict. This requires skill and knowledge, which are acquired through learned experience. Just like the practices of assemblies and messenger use, there are informal, often tacit norms structuring deliberation. These are not readily available to activists, but have to be "developed with experience," as Gabriel put it.

Of course, consensus is not the only means to settle disagreement: in the data, there was also evidence about other solutions, such as voting, exit (of some participants), or silencing dissent. Conversely, consensus need not always be the result of deliberation. Moreover, as other researchers (Haug 2015; Urfalino 2010) have pointed out, consensus only represents the closure of the decision-making process. Hence, focusing on consensus alone would miss essential parts of the practice.

Deliberation in the independence movement happens in and across different settings. First, like organizing in general, deliberation can occur inside, between, or even outside organizations. Who deliberates in which context obviously is of great importance for how the practice looks empirically. The pieces of data shown above came from the CDRs, where the practice of deliberation was widespread, but it could also be found in other organizational settings. Yet, the interview data did not allow reconstruction of a comprehensive picture of deliberation in the independence movement. Second, as mentioned before, deliberation is generally tightly connected with the practice of public assemblies and other sorts of meetings. An instance of this connection is the fact that interviewees sometimes called deliberative practices "assemblarian." However, there was also some evidence in the data on online deliberations, for example in the BxR group. Third, deliberations happen across time. They can be long or short; they can occur in one stretch or scattered over a period of time.

Finding consensus through deliberation is highly organizational. It reduces complexity, because it consists in a move from several positions among participants to a common one. This means discarding other options and committing to a single line of action. Thereby, deliberation orders other movement activities. However, it is not the only way to reduce complexity. In the next section, I describe the practice of directing in the independence movement.

3.4 Directing

Despite the important role of deliberative practice described in the previous section, the empirical data also contained rich evidence on another practice that almost could not be more opposed to ideas of deliberative democracy: telling other people what to do.

From the data, four codes emerged as the basis of this practice. The Spanish codes were "dar una consigna," "dar una instrucción," "dar una directriz," and "dar una orden." The first three translate roughly as giving "directives" or "instructions," while the fourth is quite literal for "giving orders." Although the binding character of the terms varies, interviewees employed them fairly interchangeably. This is why I subsumed them under the practice which I call *directing* or giving *directives*. Directing simply means that organizers tell other people what to do. To describe this practice more in detail, I provide some empirical illustration. The following quote is from an interview with activist Gabriel who participated in the preparation of the defense of the voting stations. I asked him whether there were organizers coordinating the participants:

> I: Were there people who were coordinating, like "you do this, you do that" or was it different?
>
> R: Yes, maybe for a question of character. There were many people much more prone to give orders and other were more – felt better to receive them, simply knowing "OK, what do I have to do? Good!" There were a couple of people who were very leaderish, but also very open in the sense of "we have to protect our school" and in any moment "if we have to close the door we close it, if we have to put ourselves in front of the door we have to be fast." Maybe there was a profile of people, related with their character.
>
> I: What kind of people were they?
>
> R: Older probably, with an – with life experience we could say, no? They weren't young people. In my school it was older people who spoke well, knew how to communicate, and were convincing.
>
> I: And that was respected.
>
> R: Yes, yes.
>
> I: there was nobody who–
>
> R: –without being rude, without being a person like "This like this." No, no. "We have to do this, because of course like this we know–" "OK, let's go, bam!" – "OK, the team for the voting tables." A bit more like this.
>
> I: There weren't people who were saying "who are you to tell me?"
>
> R: No, no, no.
>
> I: or who were saying – (.)

R: Well, sure there were suddenly people who nobody knew who they were and who wanted to be involved in the organizing. So we asked "listen, did you come at four in the morning, do you know how this works?" – "OK, no, no, no" – "well we got this, there's no need – if you want to vote, OK, but we have figured out the organigram already."

This account paints a picture that is very different from the deliberative practice described in the previous section. Instead of arriving at a common decision through discussion, some people simply tell others what do to. This is the minimal description of the practice of what I call *directing*. Let me elaborate on some of its features. First, of all, directing is a relational practice; it cannot be performed by individuals in isolation. It establishes a relationship between those who direct – which I will call directors – and those who are directed.

Second, directing other people means to exercise power. However, it refers to a relationship where those directing other activists do not have coercive means to actually impose their will on them. Interviewees sometimes speak of "giving orders," but these orders require the compliance of other participants, rather than disobedience. This is why I prefer the label *directing* over the more coercive-sounding *ordering*. The latter also exists in the independence movement, in particular in the professionalized organizations ANC and Òmnium Cultural. Their employees can be forced into action through sanctions. Apart from these contexts, and in particular outside the boundaries of organizations, organizers depend on the voluntary efforts of other participants (cf. Andrews et al. 2010).[27]

Third, while directing does not involve coercion, it does not mean that directing cannot rest on some sort of formalized authority. SMOs delegate decision making to boards of directors and other forms of "organized power" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011), which often direct other participants. However, the two should not be equated. Activists who hold formal authority in social movements might still seek deliberation with other participants. Conversely, even activists who do not occupy a formal role might direct others at times.

Fourth, the narrow practice of directing is closely related to the notion of leadership – but it should also be distinguished from it. Indeed, one could rush to conceptualize the relationship of directors and directed as leaders and followers. This also becomes apparent in the interview, as Gabriel described the people who were directing the defense of the voting station as "leaderish." And in fact, a big part of what leaders do is to direct their fellow activists.

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[27] This is why directing is a form of "soft" power, which is "based on arguments and/or the appeal to experiences and/or emotions by the use of narratives or symbols" (Haug, Rucht, and Teune 2015, 38). In this regard it is actually quite similar to deliberation, which is also a form of soft power. However, deliberation is fundamentally based on the *exchange* of arguments, whereas directing represents a unilateral form of communication.

However, the concept of leadership is broader than the narrow practice of directing. Ganz (2010, 527) defined leadership as "accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty." Rather than resting on formal authority or inherent qualities of the leaders, leadership should be understood as a "set of practices related to one's own part of the work as well as that of a collective" (Ganz and McKenna 2018, 189). This line of research focuses on what leaders *do* instead of what they *are*. Also in the interview, Gabriel shifted the attention from the qualities of leaders (older, experienced) to what they did and in particular to *how* they communicated (convincing, without being rude). But leaders do much more than direct other people. For instance, Ganz and McKenna (2017) described five types of leadership practices: relationship building, narrative, strategy, structure, and action. All of these can involve directing, but it is not a necessary part of them.

3.5   Weaving the Texture: Combining Practices in Normal Times

Activists in the independence movement employ a broad variety of practices to organize contentious action. Within the broader field of practice, I have identified and selected four basic organizational practices: public assemblies, instant messenger use, deliberation, and directing. However, organizers rarely use these practices in isolation, but *combine* them. Theoretically, there are four mixed types combining different practices:

- Deliberative assemblies
- Directed assemblies
- Diffusion of directives
- Messenger deliberations

These four types combine different forms of communication and decision making. First, the most typical association is between deliberation and assemblies: activists overcome their disagreements and find consensus by debating face-to-face in a public space. But there are also other possibilities. As I show in chapter 8, public assemblies can be used by organizers to give instructions to other activists. Directing can be combined with the use of instant messengers. Fourth, activists can use instant messengers to deliberate in group chats.

Beyond these simple combinations of two practices, more complex connections are possible. For example, activists often integrate face-to-face and online communication (Kavada 2010). Some groups in the independence movement deliberate in public assemblies but use messengers as a supporting practice to share documents (for example agendas and minutes) for these assemblies. Conversely, some interviewees mentioned assemblies for preparation of the diffusion of directions through messengers. From these complex combinations of the four basic practices arises what I

call, following Gherardi (2012), the *texture* of organizational practices. While the four practices represent relatively stable constructs, their combinations, and thus the texture of practice, are more flexible. Combinations can change over time and also according to the organizational context.

It was difficult to precisely trace organizational practices for the different sectors of the independence movement for the entire period from 2012 until 2017. However, there was some evidence in the data about which of these practices were more or less common in this normal time of the secessionist conflict. As I have described in section 2 of this chapter, there were two major modes of protest organizing. On the one hand, ANC and Òmnium Cultural prepared mass protests in long and detailed preparations. Deliberation was an important decision-making practice in both these organizations. These deliberations took place among leaders in the Boards of Directors or the Executives of both organizations. Deliberation was often combined with voting, which was less relevant for interviewees though. Messenger applications were important to diffuse decisions as directives to the local and sectorial levels of both organizations. The ANC also used deliberative assemblies in the Secretariat and at the local level. In both organizations, these practices were embedded in a professionalized formal organizational structure, which regulated the use of these practices. On the other hand, the groups and organizations of the independentist Left used these practices in both formal and informal ways. The most important organizational practice in these groups were deliberative assemblies. As mentioned above, interviewees from the independentist Left emphasized the importance of assemblies as a participatory decision-making space. Of course, some organizations had leadership groups that used directing, but this was less frequent. In general, directed assemblies and diffusion of directives were rather uncommon textures of practice in this normal time of conflict.

4 CONCLUSION

In a number of regions across established democracies, significant parts of the population support secession from their respective host states (Álvarez Pereira, Portos, and Vourdas 2018; Sorens 2005). However, support for independence does not always correspond with the emergence of a secessionist movement. The reason is that "even when popular desires for autonomy or independence emerge, they do not automatically translate into political action. Individuals must overcome the collective action problem to organize secessionist movements" (Sorens 2012, 7). In spite of this fundamental insight, most of the existing research on secessionist movements has focused on their public expression, as I have shown in the previous chapter. The present chapter has addressed this gap and revealed the organizational capacity of the Catalan independence

movement in what I have called "normal" times of secessionist politics. It has done so along three dimensions: organizations as entities, organizing as a process, and organizational practices.

The first section has focused on the organizational infrastructure of the independence movement. Catalan secessionists have been quite successful at establishing a proper movement for independence both in civil society structures and contentious actions. Building on early risers such as the PDD, a network of civil society organizations has emerged after 2009. At the local level, civic networks solidified with the wave of unofficial referendums throughout the region. After 2012, the movement was dominated by two SMOs: ANC and Òmnium Cultural. These organizations experienced massive growth and professionalization until 2017. Around these two poles, a network of smaller organizations formed, mainly from the independentist Left.

The second section has shed light on protest organizing processes in normal times. ANC and Òmnium Cultural focused on massive symbolic street performances on the one hand. I have focused primarily on the case of the Ara és l'hora campaign for the 9-N referendum in 2014. The campaign was prepared in a meticulous and detailed process. ANC and Òmnium Cultural were able to collect financial and human resources to achieve massive turnout for the campaign. There were also a number of smaller protests at the local level, which were difficult to capture on the basis of the qualitative data.

The third section has described organizational practices in the independence movement. First I have provided a generalized account of four selected practices: deliberation and directing as forms of decision making on the one hand, and public assemblies and messenger applications as forms of communication on the other hand. These descriptions emerged from the empirical material and are not tied to a specific period of time. They can be read as abstract models that are relatively stable over time. At the same time, they can be adapted to specific contexts and combined in different ways. Second, I have described the concrete combination – or texture – of these practices in normal times of the Catalan secessionist conflict. Previous literature highlighted the role of prefigurative organizational practices in the movement (Della Porta et al. 2017). This is certainly true for the independentist Left and local networks that emerged from the wave of unofficial referendums, which championed more horizontal forms of protest organizing through deliberation and open assemblies. However, this chapter has shown that, after 2012, ANC and Òmnium Cultural mainly used deliberation at the leadership level and relied more on directing. Both of these practices were embedded in formal and professionalized structures. This texture of practice served as a basis for the meticulous and professionalized preparatory processes mentioned above.

In short, there were two primary modes of protest organizing the normal period from 2012 until 2017: On the one hand, leadership and professional staff played a major role in the long and structured processes of ANC and Òmnium Cultural. On the other hand, leftist organizations and small networks relied mainly on deliberative assemblies to organize local protests.

This overview of the secessionist cycle of contention provides the basis for the more analytical chapters that follow. It has introduced the historical context, the main actors, and events in the territorial conflict, and how it escalated into intense contention after the announcement of the 1-O referendum. I have described how collective actors organized protest during the normal times of secessionist conflict in Catalonia. This description serves as a point of comparison for the analysis of protest organizing during the 1-O episode, which follows in the subsequent chapters.

Beyond its purposes within the present study, the chapter has demonstrated why the Catalan independence movement could be considered an ideal case of an organized secessionist movement in the time between 2012 and 2017. The movement was based on a solid and diverse organizational infrastructure, which involved both large professionalized organizations and smaller loosely structured groups. This structure may have been a key to the movement's success: it distinguishes the Catalan case from other movements that exclusively rally around a single organization or party and from movements that are only loosely structured and do not feature any formal organizations at all. This heterogeneity allowed the movement to use the advantages of professionalized organizations without fully depending on them. In addition, the movement relied on a variety of organizational practices. The various movement actors have also known to translate these structures and practices into action. In this view, the diverse and consolidated organizational dimension has not only been key to the movement's success but also made it an example for other secessionists around the world.

PART THREE: INTENSE TIMES. THE EVENTFUL 1-O EPISODE OF CONTENTION

Chapter Six

CONTENTION, STRATEGY, AND THE 1-O REFERENDUM

On June 9, 2017, the president of the Catalan Generalitat, Carles Puigdemont, gave a long-awaited press conference. It took Puigdemont only two minutes to announce a referendum on Catalonia's independence, which would take place on October 1 of the same year. Despite its briefness, the statement had far-reaching connections in both its past and future. On the one hand, it represented a condensation of a long struggle of the independence movement for Catalan sovereignty, which I have described in the previous chapter. On the other hand, the statement kicked off an unprecedented contentious episode between the independence movement and the Spanish state. In this chapter, I turn precisely to this phase, which I call the *1-O episode of contention*. I describe how Puigdemont's announcement shifted the secessionist conflict from "normal times" to "intense times".

The October 1 referendum is at the heart of this intense episode. Referendums are broadly defined as "popular votes on bills before they become law" (Qvortrup 2018, 1). As such, they represent an "opportunity for electors to participate in a decision making process by voting on an issue more or less specific and determined" (Uleri 1996, 2). However, researchers have pointed out that the "concept of referendum refers to a wide range of institutions that give rise to a variety of political interactions" (Setälä 2009, 4), and therefore "the 'referendum' label includes a variety of situations and usages which bear only a superficial similarity to one another" (Smith 1975, 294).

Scholars of direct democracy have studied referendum mechanisms, outcomes, campaigns, and, in particular, the relationship between direct and representative democracy (Setälä and Schiller 2009). However, referendums have barely been linked to contentious politics, as Della Porta et al. (2017) have lamented. This chapter connects the October 1 referendum to the larger secessionist cycle of contention. It examines the double role of the referendum as a strategic device used by secessionists to advance their claim and as an opportunity that sparked secessionist contention. This is why I call the 1-O a *contentious* referendum.

The next section explores the contentious and unusual character of the 1-O referendum in comparative perspective, drawing on the previous literature. The second section describes how the

strategy to hold a binding and unilateral referendum emerged after the movement had abandoned this idea for some time. This includes the campaigns of the two major SMOs. The third section addresses how the announcement of the referendum kicked off an unprecedented episode of contention. It examines three types of actions: those of the Spanish state, secessionist institutional action, and secessionist protest action.

1 THE CONTENTIOUS 1-O REFERENDUM

Referendums on independence are a specific type of referendum. They are sometimes included in the broader groups of ethno-national referendums (Qvortrup 2012, 2012) or sovereignty referendums (Mendez and Germann 2018). Scholars have compared the practice of independence referendums across countries and time (Mendez and Germann 2018; Qvortrup 2012, 2014b; Requejo et al. 2019). Part of this literature has been interested on procedural matters, e.g. voter registration, majority requirements, or question wordings (Qvortrup 2014b; Rocher and Lecours 2017). Another focus has been on the proliferation of independence referendums over time. Qvortrup (2014b, 63) noted that until 2011 independence referendums "have come in waves." In particular after the fall of the Soviet Union, these referendums have become more common than before. The increasing number of independence referendums thus coincides with the "age of secession" (A. E. Buchanan 1991; Griffiths 2016). Despite this proliferation over the last 30 years, independence referendums are still rare events (Lecours 2018; López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020). Table 5 (on the next page) provides an overview of the referendums worldwide in the last 10 years.

Independence referendums are thus outstanding occurrences. Only 14 have occurred in the last ten years around the globe. One reason is that territorial sovereignty generally represents an extremely valuable good to nation states, who are thus reluctant to put the secession of regions under scrutiny. Very few states have constitutional rules regarding self-determination of substate units (López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020). Most referendums on independence are thus *unilateral*, i.e. they are held by regional authorities without the consent of the host state. One recent example is the 2017 referendum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, which occurred without an agreement with the Iraqi government (O'Driscoll and Baser 2020; Sumer and Joseph 2018).

Table 5: Referendums on independence 2011-2021.

Region	Host state	Year	Turnout %	Yes Vote %
South Sudan	Sudan	2011	97.6	98.8
Puerto Rico	USA	2012	78.2	5.5*
Sint Eustatius	Netherlands	2014	45.4	0.4*
Catalonia	Spain	2014	N/A	80.76
Scotland	United Kingdom	2014	84.6	44.7
Crimea	Ukraine	2014	83.0	97.5
Donetsk oblast	Ukraine	2014	74.9	89.8
Luhansk oblast	Ukraine	2014	75.0	96.2
Kurdistan	Iraq	2017	72.2	92.7
Catalonia	Spain	2017	43.0	90.2
Puerto Rico	USA	2017	22.2	1.5*
New Caledonia	France	2018	80.6	43.3
Bougainville	Papua New Guinea	2019	86.9	98.3
New Caledonia	France	2020	84.6	46.7

*multiple questions and/or responses

Sources: Requejo et al. (2019); Centre for Research on Direct Democracy (https://c2d.ch/)

In a comparative perspective, the rareness of independence referendums makes the 1-O referendum an interesting case to study. Even among independence referendums, the 1-O is a unique case, as López and Sanjaume-Calvet stressed:

> Both the 2017 unilateral referendum and its repression were extremely unusual events in a liberal democracy. In fact, there is no record of similar cases in this context. In the most similar situations in which secessionist parties obtained a regional parliamentary majority and a mandate to hold an independence referendum, Quebec and Scotland, the parent state allowed for *de jure* referendums to occur and secessionist leaders did not call for a *de facto* referendum. (López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020, 13)

The 1-O was an outstanding referendum, because of the interactions between secessionist challengers and the host state were so different than in other cases. Few secessionist movements in established democracies have had enough support to pursue binding referendums on independence. When secessionists have had the capacity to organize referendums, host states have

either sought an agreement with them (the UK with Scotland) or chosen to ignore challengers (Italy and the Padania referendum). The 1-O was exceptional because secessionist pushed for a unilateral referendum and the host state *actively* tried to prevent that referendum.

The few existing studies on the 1-O have underlined the role of the secessionist and counter-secessionist action as an explanation for this unusual event. López and Sanjaume-Calvet (2020) argued that a combination of rational action and strategic culture (see next section) explained the behaviors of Catalan secessionists and the Spanish governments. In their view, both challengers and authorities responded to the preferences of their constituencies. Ferreira (2021) claimed that the referendum unfolded in this unique way, because both the regional and the central government sides stuck to previous political choices. Whereas secessionists had promised independence, the Spanish government had reiterated its firm opposition. Both sides had already dedicated too much political capital to their course of action and were unable to depart from it. Building on this body of research, section 2.1 of this chapter describes how the idea of the 1-O referendum emerged.

The studies by López and Sanjaume-Calvet (2020) and Ferreira (2021) focused primarily on the motivations of institutional actors (regional governments and parties) when calling for referendums on independence. Secessionist contention only plays a minor role in the two articles. In contrast, Della Porta et al. (2017, 2) suggested that referendums on independence represent formidable opportunities for civil society actors to forward their claims in campaigning for one of the choices in the referendums. Secessionist movements may employ referendums as instruments to mobilize citizens around territorial grievances, put pressure on the host state, and, eventually, achieve independence (Della Porta et al. 2017, 31). The authors coined the notion of *referendums from below*.

> We have defined them as referendums that are promoted or at least see a large commitment by civil society actors – other than the traditional intermediary institutions of representation (for example, unions, parties, church and so on) or governments. (Della Porta et al. 2017, 2)

Della Porta et al.'s approach to independence referendums differed from writings in research on direct democracy, which often regarded referendums as elite-driven mechanisms. Empirically, they categorized the 9-N in Catalonia and the 2014 referendum in Scotland as referendums from below.

The present chapter combines the insights of these previous studies by seeing the October 1 as a product of the interactions between the host state, the regional government, and extra-institutional secessionist contention. This builds on an earlier contribution by Letamendia (2018), who suggested that the 1-O must be understood as a combination of *vote*, *mobilization*, and *repression*.

I suggest the 1-O referendum should be understood as a *contentious referendum*. The adjective *contentious* refers to two properties of such referendums. First, contentious referendums are contested. Their legitimacy is not recognized by all parties concerned by the referendum. The Spanish state, unionist parties in Catalonia (Ciutadans and PP), and large segments of the Catalan population did not accept the 1-O referendum as legitimate. Second, contentious referendums are part of an episode of contention. As I show in this chapter, the 1-O referendum was accompanied by a series of different protests: street rallies, occupations, marches, non-violent resistance, and strikes.

What follows from this concept is that contentious independence referendums can be approached both as an outcome and a driver of secessionist conflict. On the one hand, they represent strategic tools that are used by secessionist challengers hoping to make a decisive step toward independence. On the other hand, independence referendums also represent opportunities for civil society actors to mobilize and can thus spark secessionist contention.

The remainder of this chapter reflects both sides of the October 1 referendum. Section 2 focuses on how secessionist challengers, both institutional and non-institutional, pushed for a binding referendum as a means to advance their goals. As a result of this strategizing process, Carles Puigdemont announced the 1-O referendum on June 9, 2017. Section 3 shows how the announcement of the referendum escalated the secessionist conflict. It describes the 1-O episode of contention as a triple interaction of Spanish state actors, the Catalan autonomous institutions, and secessionist civil society actors.

2 THE ROAD TO OCTOBER 1. THE REFERENDUM AS A STRATEGY

2.1 The Return of the Referendum Strategy

The existing literature has sought to understand the occurrence of independence referendums from different angles. Some studies have treated referendums as strategic tools. López and Sanjaume-Calvet noted that independence referendums are

> used by political actors involved in territorial crisis for various purposes in different institutional and legal contexts, even without a clear legal framework as a mechanism to implement an electoral mandate on sovereignty issues through political agreements (e.g. Scotland, 2014; Quebec 1980, 1995); as a way to reinforce the legitimacy of unilateral independence demands (e.g. Kurdistan, 2014), as a legitimation of a de facto status quo (e.g. Crimea 2014) or as a combination of objectives. (López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020, 11)

The authors described two theoretical approaches for studying the political use of independence referendums. First, following a rational choice approach, Qvortrup (2014a) proposed a *competition proximity model* to explain under what conditions ethnic and nationalist groups call for referendums. In the model, the decision to call for a referendum is a function of the competition (political, military, or electoral) the initiator faces and the proximity of the median voter to the initiator's policy position. In other words, secessionist actors are more likely to pursue a referendum on independence when they face competition and feel that their policy represents a majority of voters. Second, Coppieters (2010, 239) highlighted the role of strategic culture instead of rational action. He argued that decisions to employ referendums on independence "are made not on the basis of formalized doctrines of past secessionist conflicts but with the help of individual historical experiences." In this perspective, the experience and memory of previous territorial conflicts impact how a host state treats secessionist challengers and vice versa.

Whereas Qvortrup's model and Coppieters's cultural argument provided rather general approaches to independence referendums, other authors focused on more specific strategies. Cortés Rivera (2020) theorized four benefits that secessionists can gain from independence referendums. First, the referendum "transfers power away from political leaders to include citizens and from the central government to the territory under dispute" (Cortés Rivera 2020, 2). Second, when a concrete date for the referendum is announced, the government of the host state can no longer ignore the matter. Third, secessionist can frame the referendum as their right to decide, "placing the central government in the difficult position of publicly denying these rights" (Cortés Rivera 2020, 2). Fourth, the referendum campaign helps mobilizing the identity of the secessionist community. The first three of Cortés Rivera's points are benefits that secessionist may gain vis-à-vis the host state. The fourth refers to the local population. Likewise, Lecours (2020, 144) noted that a "central aim of secessionist actors during an independence referendum campaign is to convince members of the minority national community of the desirability of secession." These studies underlined that independence should not be merely regarded as neutral decision-making mechanisms to democratically settle secessionist conflicts. Rather, they showed that referendums themselves may be employed as strategies to advance secessionist claims.

Catalan secessionists have been using civil-society-initiated referendums to advance their independence claim since the beginning of the secessionist cycle of contention in 2009. Neither the local referendums nor the 9-N were binding referendums. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, these referendums can be considered *facultative initiatives*, because in addition to non-binding they were not constitutionally mandatory, pro-active, and initiated by civil society (Altman 2011, 8). In retrospective, the 1-O might seem as a logical continuation of the local wave of

referendums and the 9-N, as pushing the secessionist claim one step further and attempting a binding vote on independence. In Altman's terms it would have meant holding a *facultative plebiscite* on independence: a pro-active, top-down, and binding vote.

However, this reading of the events represents a shortcutting of the most recent history of the secessionist struggle, as my data showed. Interviewees pointed out that in fact both the regional government and the independence movement had abandoned the idea of another referendum after the 9-N. It was only after the 2015 elections that the strategy to pursue another, this time binding referendum emerged – rendering everything prior "just gymnastics," as one interviewee called it. In this section, I illustrate how the idea to hold the 1-O referendum emerged.

In the early phase of the pro-independence cycle of contention, there had been only little confrontation with the Spanish state, which mainly chose to ignore the efforts of the independence movement. When faced with opposition by the state, secessionists decided to avoid open conflict and give in, such as in the preparations for the 9-N referendum in 2014. The politics of secession played out in rather contained fashion. This changed substantially in 2015, when regional elections in Catalonia were held. Pro-independence parties tried to frame the vote as a *de facto* referendum for independence and committed to an 18-month process of unilateral secession from the Spanish state in the case of electoral success (Martí and Cetrà 2016). Before the election, CiU disbanded. The smaller partner Unió Democràtica de Catalunya chose to leave the coalition, which had lasted 35 years. The other partner, Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya, formed a coalition with long-time rivals ERC instead. The new coalition, called *Junts pel Sí* could not obtain a majority of seats in the Catalan parliament and needed the votes of the CUP to form a government. Despite a majority of seats for these parties, secessionists moreover failed to win the popular vote (Orriols and Rodon 2016). In the inaugural session of the legislature, the CUP denied incumbent Artur Mas the necessary support to be voted in as regional president, mainly because Mas had been accused of corruption. Finally, a suitable candidate was found in Carles Puigdemont, previously mayor of Girona. A few months later Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya dissolved and was refounded under the name Partit Demòcrata Europeu Català (PDeCAT).[28]

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[28] In 2017, the PDeCAT was part of the Junts per Catalunya (JxR) coalition for the December 21 election. In 2020, Junts per Catalunya was established as a proper political party under the leadership of Puigdemont and ran in competition to the PDeCAT in the 2021 regional elections. Even most of the interviewees had trouble keeping up with these splits and mergers in the post-CiU era. Most of them referred to the PDeCAT and Junts per Catalunya simply as "Convergència." Or, as interviewee Oriol jokingly said: "Convergència i Unió – or whatever they are called at the moment."

Shortly after the 2015 election, the independentist majority in the Catalan parliament passed a motion to start secession from Spain. The Spanish Constitutional Court quickly suspended the motion, which meant that the unilateral strategy promised before the elections had reached an impasse. The ruling of the Court and the tumultuous election episode sparked a new debate within the independence movement about how to proceed further.

Several interviewees stated that the idea of another referendum, this time with binding effects, was brought up by the CUP in the discussion. Initially, the proposal was met with both support and opposition within the movement. Interviewee Gerard, for example, said that the referendum was "something that the movement had already abandoned" at that point. In his view, it was a position of Catalunya en Comù back then. Among secessionists, in contrast, "there was a little bit of 'what are we doing here?'" Also ANC organizer Judit said that "after Puigdemont won [the parliament vote], it was like 'let's see what happens.'" Also within the ANC's leadership, there was a group demanding another referendum. Another part of the leadership was opposed to that strategy, arguing that the only option would be a unilateral declaration of independence. The leadership solved this internal debate by consulting the ANC membership. An internal poll was carried out, asking whether the ANC should demand the government to call for a referendum. The referendum option clearly won the vote and the ANC as an organization officially pronounced itself in favor as well. Subsequently, both the CUP and the ANC but also other actors pressured the government to pursue this strategy. The CUP even threatened to withdraw their parliamentary support for the 2017 budget of the autonomous community, which would have meant an early ending to Puigdemont's tenure.

After surviving a vote of confidence in the Catalan parliament on September 28, 2016, Puigdemont changed his original course and vowed to call a referendum on independence in 2017. The announcement ended the debate and the movement rallied around the referendum strategy, as expert interviewee Ivan explained: "When Puigdemont said he would do it, everybody aligned with this idea." This was a common thread throughout the interviews. Organizers highlighted that the goal to hold another referendum was shared among all movement actors in the year before the 1-O. Or, as CDR organizer Sergi put it: "For the 1-O, it was important that all strategies converge in one." This also meant to table other discussions, as interviewee Berta pointed out:

> Then, the models? About the models, the people will decide. I know already what model I want for my city, for my country, but maybe another person wants another one. Well, this is democracy, right?

Thus, overall, there was not a lot of strategic debate within the movement in the year before the 1-O. The strategizing was done and the goal was clear and tangible, which allowed movement

actors to concentrate their efforts on campaigning, organizing, and mobilizing. Also, all sectors of the movement pursued the idea to hold a binding referendum resting on an agreement with the host state, like in Scotland or Québec. Òmnium Cultural initiated the Pacte Nacional pel Referèndum, a campaign to gather signatures demanding an agreement between the Catalan institutions and the Spanish state. However, it soon became clear that this would not be possible. Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy declared repeatedly that he would not agree to a referendum in Catalonia and that he would be willing to take all necessary steps to prevent a unilateral referendum organized by the regional institutions. In the face of such strong opposition from the Spanish state, it became unclear to most activists how the referendum strategy would play out in practice. This did not alter the strategy, however. In the words of ANC organizer Berta, the goal was still clear: "to make the referendum work." The Catalan government tried to negotiate an agreement until the last moments, but decided, in September 2017, to carry out the referendum against all legal and institutional obstacles. This would require a massive mobilization by the Catalan pro-independence civil society to occupy and defend the voting stations against police intervention.

I have traced here how the Catalan independence movement went through a strategizing process after the 2015 regional elections that resulted in the announcement of the 1-O as a binding but unilateral referendum. Although the referendum strategy built on previous actions and frames, in particular the previous referendums and the related right to decide, it was the product of an extensive debate among several movement actors and the regional government. There were some differences in how the referendum was framed by the movement actors in their respective campaigns, as I show in the next section.

The referendum strategy was an important frame for the independence movement as the secessionist conflict escalated from normal times to the intense 1-O episode. As I show in the next chapters, the referendum strategy crucially shaped the ways in which the secessionist movement organized protests. Before the 1-O, the referendum strategy as a shared frame played an important role facilitating the organizing processes. Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos (2019, 9) pointed out how this frame functioned:

> The 1-O referendum campaign allowed Catalan secessionist activists to give priority to the fighting of specific, smaller battles and to set more easily attainable goals, such as preventing the police from entering polling stations, and actually succeeding in holding the vote.

The goal was clear to organizers and activists, which reduced internal conflict, required less deliberation, and allowed to organize protests swift fashion. But the 1-O also marked the logical

endpoint of the referendum strategy as frame around which the movement could unite. The contested character of the referendum resulted in different interpretations of the event, which made protest organizing after the 1-O much harder. I discuss these dynamics much more in detail in chapter 10. The next section turns to referendum campaigns of Òmnium Cultural and ANC respectively.

2.2 Contentious Campaigning

Mobilizing citizens for a referendum typically unfolds in *campaigns*. As Kriesi (2011, 11) observed, "direct-democratic campaigns typically give rise to the confrontation between two opposing camps." This was not quite the case in any of the referendums discussed here. As mentioned in the previous section, the local referendums and the 9-N were promoted exclusively by the pro-independence camp and not accepted by those who oppose secession. The demand for a vote was met with opposition by the Spanish government who rejected any binding referendum on independence in Catalonia. Interviewees reported that much of the campaigning efforts before the 1-O actually aimed at reaching a binding referendum in the first place, reclaiming the "Right to Decide" (*Dret de Decidir)* as a normative foundation (cf. Della Porta et al. 2017). However, the referendum was not only a normative commitment but also a strategic consideration. As I show in this section, there were two ways of embedding the referendum in the strategic context. These were represented by the campaigns of ANC and Òmnium Cultural, respectively. First, I describe these campaigns and then I turn to their organizing process.

The ANC portrayed the vote as the crucial step towards Catalonia's independence. The organization's Yes campaign (*Campanya del Sí*) was focused on arguments for secession from Spain. For the ANC, as an organization that was founded for the goal of independence, this framing was a continuation of previous campaigns. The campaign involved the typical repertoire of action that was already employed for the Ara és l'hora campaign: spreading arguments for independence through social media, leaflets, and stands in the street; massive performances such as the Diada; lobbying with representatives.

Other movement organizations argued that the goal of the referendum was not so much independence itself but self-determination. Òmnium Cultural, for example, mobilized for its *Democràcia* campaign. In the interview, organizer Beatriu underlined the differences in how the movement actors framed the referendum. She claimed that Òmnium Cultural was

> the first one to say "the referendum is not about Yes or No. It doesn't matter whether Yes or No wins, the important thing is to vote, that the people of Catalonia can express themselves in a legal vote." Jordi Cuixart was the first one to say "this is not about independence, this is about democracy."

Whether they were the first ones to emphasize democracy is debatable, since self-determination as an expression of democracy already had a tradition in Catalonia before the Òmnium Cultural campaign (from the PDD to the previous referendums). Other actors also framed the referendum primarily in democratic terms as well. The CDRs in the days before the referendum emerged primarily to guarantee the voting process and less as a means to fight for independence. On September 27, the group BxR put up an enormous banner claiming "Love Democracy" at the Naval Museum in Barcelona. Also the AMPAs and the campaign Escoles Obertes used the democracy frame to mobilize for the occupation of the voting stations. Framing the referendum as democratic self-determination meant putting normative principles in practice, but it was also a conscious strategic decision. This became evident in the interview with Isabel, who at the time was part of Òmnium Cultural's professional staff.

> Here the ANC and us, we divided roles. The ANC and Òmnium, we have the same final goal, but very different ways of seeing the path. We said "well if the ANC exists and already talks about [independence], then the function for Òmnium is speaking to those who we believe no one is speaking to."

"Speaking to those who we believe no one is speaking to" meant launching a message that the campaign was not about independence but about democracy. Framing the event in this way had two advantages in her view. First, as the quote showed, the democracy frame had a stronger appeal outside the pro-independence camp. It was designed as a message for those sectors of the Catalan population opposed to outright independence but in favor of self-determination. Second, the democracy frame drew its strength from its normative underpinnings. Or, as Isabel put it: "Everybody has to agree about democracy."

In short, ANC and Òmnium Cultural "split the roles, ANC did the Yes Campaign and we did the Democracy Campaign [...] the same strategy, different areas," as Isabel said. This meant that in contrast to the Ara és l'hora campaign described above, the respective referendum campaigns for the 1-O were organized separately by the two organizations. Taking into account the differences in how the two organizations work, the empirical data suggested that the organizing processes were fairly similar. As mentioned before, Ara és l'hora served as a blueprint for these campaigns. Interviewees did not report any major changes to this scheme. ANC and Òmnium Cultural mostly stuck to the established processes and practices and relied on their enormous organizational capacity. This allowed them to prepare and plan two impactful campaigns, whose organizing processes started in the summer before the referendum, but extended well into the 1-O episode of contention. In the next section I describe this contentious episode and how it intensified the secessionist conflict in Catalonia.

3   DYNAMICS OF SECESSIONIST AND COUNTER-SECESSIONIST ACTION

The announcement of the 1-O referendum by Puigdemont in early June 2017 changed the contentious politics of secession. Until this point, both challengers and the host state mostly employed a contained repertoire of action. After the 9-N referendum, and especially after the 2015 regional elections, institutional politics dominated the conflict. Puigdemont's push for a binding, and if necessary unilateral referendum triggered a shift from institutionalized and contained interactions toward disruptive contention.

In this section, I turn to the episode of intense contention that unfolded during the second half of 2017, which is at the heart of this inquiry into secessionist collective action. I focus on 15 occurrences from three categories of action: five major actions by the Catalan autonomous institutions, five secessionist contentious actions by civil society actors, and five actions by the different actors of the Spanish state. Of course, this an abstraction from the vast number of contentious instances that took place over this period of about two months (on selection criteria, see chapter 3). Some of them can be read as representative for actions of the same category. For instance, in addition to the intervention at the Department of Economy on September, there were a couple of smaller searches throughout the month. The Catalan Generalitat was also undertaking more than just five maneuvers in the period of study. In similar fashion, I only focus on the five most important secessionist contentious performances. Table 6 on the next page provides an overview of these actions.

At the heart of the episode was the referendum on October 1, because all other occurrences were tightly connected to it: the prior actions were either aimed at facilitating or preventing the referendum, while the subsequent actions were direct or indirect consequences of it. But the 1-O was more than just a referendum. Rather, the 1-O was a complex array of action in itself. Drawing partly on Letamendia (2018), who suggested that the 1-O must be understood as a combination of *vote*, *mobilization*, and *repression*, I disaggregated it into three components: the institutional side of the referendum (i.e. the administration by the Generalitat and the vote itself), the intervention to prevent the vote (by the Spanish state), and the efforts to "defend" the vote from interference (by the civil society actors of the independence movement).

In the remainder of this section, I examine the actions performed by each actor category, starting with those carried out by the Catalan autonomous institutions, followed by Spanish state action, and finally, the contentious performances of the secessionist civil society actors. I devote much more attention to the last category, because these performances represent the cases for the next chapter on how secessionist movements organize collective action.

Table 6: Key actions in the 1-O episode of contention in 2017.

Date	Contentious Action	Action type
June 9	Referendum Announcement	Institutional Secessionist
September 6	Law 19/2017 on the Referendum	Institutional Secessionist
September 7	Ruling against Law 19/2017 by the Spanish Constitutional Court	Spanish State
September 11	Diada Demonstration	Secessionist Contention
September 20	Operation Anubis by the Spanish Civil Guard and Police	Spanish State
September 20	Protests against Operation Anubis	Secessionist Contention
September 22 – October 2	Occupation University of Barcelona	Secessionist Contention
September 29 – October 1	Defense of Voting Stations	Secessionist Contention
October 1	Referendum on Independence	Institutional Secessionist
October 1	Intervention in Voting Stations by National Police & Civil Guard	Spanish State
October 3	General Strike	Secessionist Contention
October 10	Suspended Declaration of Independence	Institutional Secessionist
October 16	Imprisonment of the "Jordis"	Spanish State
October 27	Declaration of independence	Institutional Secessionist
October 27	Application of article 155	Spanish State

3.1 Pushing for Independence: Institutional Action by the Catalan Generalitat

First, identifying starting points for any kind of temporal sequence is always an arbitrary yet necessary endeavor to avoid infinite regress. In contrast to Kriesi, Hutter, and Bojar (2019), who chose government policy proposals as the starting point in their analysis of contentious episodes, I used an action of a challenger as the point of departure. This choice was motivated by the focus on the 1-O referendum as an unusual attempt at unilateral secession in an established democracy. On June 9, 2017, the president of the Generalitat, Carles Puigdemont publicly announced to hold

a referendum on October 1 of the same year. While preparations for the vote were already underway, there was very little contentious activity over the summer of 2017.

Second, only when the Catalan parliament reconvened after their summer recess, the confrontation between secessionists and host state became more intense. A crucial move was the adoption of a legal framework that encompasses one law ("Law 19/2017 on the Referendum on Self-Determination") and two decrees (139/2017 and 140/2017) by the parliament. The Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination was passed in a controversial parliamentary session on September 6, when the unionist parties (PP, Ciutadans, and PSC) left the plenary before the vote (Letamendia 2018). The main provisions of the law included the formation and appointment of an Electoral Commission (Sindicatura Electoral de Catalunya) for the referendum, the question on the ballot ("Do you want Catalonia to be an independent state in the form of a republic?") and the response options ("Yes" or "No"), as well as the electoral roll (all persons with the right to vote in the elections to the Catalan parliament as well as Catalans abroad). The decree 139/2017 represented the official call for the referendum, and the decree 140/2017 regulated all the administrative details. It delegated the power to carry out the Law on the Referendum to the Electoral Administration of the Generalitat.

Previous research pointed to the central role of the independence movement in initiating and organizing the local referendums (Muñoz and Guinjoan 2013) and the 9-N referendum in 2014 (Della Porta et al. 2017). The 1-O referendum was different, because it was organized by the Catalan Generalitat. In the case of a positive outcome, Puigdemont pledged to declare independence. Thus, in order to maximize the legitimacy of the referendum, it had to be organized top-down by state institutions. On paper, it reads like the Generalitat organized everything. While the legal framework was an important reflection of the institutional provision, the *de facto* organization was different than laid down in the law.

The central problem was that the capacity of the autonomous institutions to organize a legitimate and valid vote on independence was threatened by repressive action by the Spanish state. Over the course of the first half of 2017, the Spanish government repeatedly stated to do everything to prevent a binding referendum. When Puigdemont officially announced the referendum in June, it was clear that a regular referendum would be difficult to organize as long as separatist leaders reclaimed its binding character and committed to declare independence in case of a positive outcome. Hence, simply repeating the 2014 referendum was not an option. Consequently, many activities had to be clandestine from the beginning to minimize legal consequences for political leadership and organizers.

The central preparatory task was the purchase and distribution of ballot boxes, which was realized through semi-clandestine networks instead of official channels. This process is well documented in the book *Operació Urnes* (Operation Ballot Boxes) by the journalists Laia Vicens and Xavi Tedó (2018). In my own data base, interviewees frequently referred to the book and confirmed its content.

In May 2017, before Puigdemont officially announced the referendum, the Catalan government published a document stating that it wanted to buy ballot boxes for "autonomous elections, referendums, and other types of citizen participation." Subsequently, the Civil Guard entered into firms interested in the procurement and the High Court of Justice of Catalonia opened an investigation against the Governance Department of the Catalan government. Only a month after the procurement, the call was officially renounced. However, Puigdemont declared: "Don't worry: On October 1, there will be ballot boxes" (cited in: Vicens & Tedó, 2018; all following translations from the book are mine). Puigdemont's statement would prove true, because civil society actors had taken over the purchase of the boxes.

Already in March, Lluís, a life-long independentist, but always an activist in the background, had started a plan to purchase ballot boxes and distribute them secretly, which was called "Operation Ballot Boxes." The goal was to circumvent the prohibition to buy the containers officially. It is unclear whether Lluís initiated Operation Ballot Boxes on his own or was asked by the Catalan government,[29] but in any case, he had contacts with the government (Vicens and Tedó 2018, 25). Thus, when Puigdemont tried to calm the debate after the failed procurement, he was most likely aware of the semi-clandestine activities.

The book and my interview data suggested that Operation Ballot Boxes was carried out mostly by private individuals with little government support through a pyramidal and semi-clandestine network. In several steps, these private individuals ordered 10.000 ballot boxes in China, had them shipped to the port of Marseille, and brought them secretly to Catalonia by hundreds of trips by car. Operation Ballot Boxes represented a complex and particular type of collective action that was crucial for the preparation of the referendum. The success of the operation became a remarkable outcome given the constant threat of Spanish state intervention. This was only possible because of two elements of the organizational process. First, the purchase and distribution was taken over by non-government actors. As mentioned before, there was no evidence in the data on whether this was a deliberative decision by the Catalan government or a private initiative.

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[29] The exact phrasing of the book is that Lluís "was chosen as the logistic coordinator of Operation Ballot Boxes" (Vicens and Tedó 2018, 19), which suggests that it was not his idea.

Moreover, there was little evidence on how the operation was planned and designed in its beginning. In any case, the take-over by civil society actors allowed the operation to be carried out despite the paralysis of Catalan institutions by state repression. Second, the operation was organized largely in clandestinity. In the book and in the interviews, organizers on all levels of the operation told that they constantly feared that the ballot boxes could be intercepted by the Spanish police forces, leading them to take a series of precautions. In particular, they generally did not share information with any outsiders. Also within the operation, communication was limited between the different levels: "You would only know the person from whom you would receive the boxes, but not from whom they had received them," interviewee Eduard explained.

The referendum – as an institutional and administrative mechanism – can be regarded as the third action of the Generalitat in the contentious episode. As in regular elections and referendums, the Generalitat assigned a "responsable de la administració" (RA), a public servant who oversaw the voting procedure in each station. In addition, each voting station normally consisted of two voting tables with a ballot box each – some smaller stations only had one table and box though. For each table, the Generalitat appointed a president and two members. However, in many cases the regular procedure was impeded by the intervention of police and judicial action. During a raid in September, the Spanish police confiscated most of the notices that were supposed to inform people of their duty in the voting stations the day of the referendum. Also, it seems likely that many people who were informed did not show up because of fear of penal consequences. This is why in many cases the independentist mayors, local parties, and associations were looking for volunteers to carry out these tasks instead. They approached public servants and trustful members of their own ranks. Often, it was the RAs who received the ballot boxes from the local coordinators. The actions of these officials on the day of the referendum must be understood as institutional action and should be distinguished from the defense of the voting stations, which I describe below.

After the 1-O, the Catalan government was caught between a rock and a hard place: On the one hand, the positive vote in the referendum technically obliged the leadership to declare Catalan independence. In the following days, SMOs and media pundits put pressure on the Catalan government to execute the Law on the Referendum, which demanded the declaration of independence within 48 hours of a Yes vote. On the other hand, the Spanish government made it clear that any further move towards independence would be followed by more repression against the leadership. Faced with this dilemma, on October 10, Puigdemont declared independence – just to suspend it within less than a minute. Finally, the Catalan parliament did celebrate a vote on independence on October 27 – but at that point the Spanish government had already started the

process to apply article 155 of the Spanish constitution. Thus, the declaration never had legal consequences, and Puigdemont and other politicians left Catalonia after the declaration of independence to avoid legal prosecution.

3.2 Counter-secessionist Action by the Spanish State

During summer 2017, there were only a couple instances of state action against the referendum. Only after the approval of Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination on September 6, Spanish state repression intensified. That very same day, the Civil Guard carried out a raid to search for ballots in the printing firm Indugraf near Tarragona, and three days later in the newspaper El Vallenc, but in both cases they came up empty-handed (Vicens and Tedó 2018, 76–77).

The first major action against the referendum occurred on September 7, when the Spanish government under Mariano Rajoy took the Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination to the Constitutional Court. The Court suspended the law immediately, while also explicitly warning the public servants of the regional government and the 948 Catalan mayors that they would face personal juridical consequences if they participated in the preparation of the referendum. The suspension was followed by a series of related actions, which I subsume in this category. For instance, 712 of these mayors were cited by the attorney general on September 13 for alleged collaboration in the organization of the plebiscite (Giménez and Gunzelmann 2019). At the same time, the Constitutional Court notified media outlets that they might face fines if they published advertisements for the referendum.

The second blow against the referendum preparations was Operation Anubis on September 20 (20-S). The Spanish police had already carried out more raids at printing houses in different cities throughout Catalonia, for example seizing 45.000 envelopes from the firm Unipost in Terassa (Vicens and Tedó 2018, 79–81) some days before. But the 20-S represented the peak of repressive action against the preparatory process of the referendum. On that day, the Spanish National Police and the Civil Guard carried out 41 raids and 14 arrests in Catalan public institutions (Giménez and Gunzelmann 2019). Most notably, in the morning, the Civil Guard entered the Catalan Department of Economy in Barcelona, confiscated documents, and detained Josep Maria Jové, one of the most important civil servants in the department (Vicens and Tedó 2018, 84). Police forces also attempted to search the headquarters of the CUP without a warrant, but were prevented from doing so by protesters who occupied the entrance of the building. Furthermore, police confiscated another two million ballots in a small town in the Vallès. Finally, three cruise ships with about 5.400 riot police arrived in Catalonia. Two of them docked in Barcelona, another one in Tarragona (Giménez and Gunzelmann 2019).

Third, on the day of the referendum, the three police corps present in Catalonia acted against the realization of the referendum. The Mossos d'Esquadra closed around 140 voting stations (Guinjoan and Rodon 2017a), but had the order not to intervene if there were more than 50 people present in the building. The largest and most violent part of repressive actions was performed by the Spanish National Police (mostly in Barcelona) and the Civil Guard (in mid-size and small town), who managed to close about a hundred voting stations (Barceló 2018). Apart from places where prominent politicians were supposed to vote, the choice where to intervene appeared to have been quite random (Guinjoan and Rodon 2017b). Facing resistance from protesters in many places, the police used rubber bullets and batons to enter the voting stations, physically remove voters, and confiscate the ballot boxes (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019).

After the referendum, legal repression against the autonomous institutions and the independence movement intensified. On October 16, the leaders of Òmnium Cultural and ANC, Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez were charged with rebellion and sedition for calling the protest on September 20 and arrested. On October 27, the Spanish senate voted in favor of applying article 155 of the Spanish constitution which supposed the temporary suspension of Catalonia's autonomy and snap regional elections. The application of article 155 marked the end of the 1-O contentious episode and a shift back to institutional politics, but not of the overall cycle of contention. The next section turns to the contentious actions of the independence movement during the 1-O episode.

3.3   Secessionist Contentious Action

September 11: The "Diada del Sí"

The first large contentious performance in the 1-O episode of contention was the manifestation on September 11, the National Day of Catalonia. About a million people gathered in two of Barcelona's largest avenues, Passeig de Gràcia and Carrer Aragó. The protest in the two intersecting streets formed an enormous plus sign, which stood for positivity, but also as a symbol for the "majority" of independentism in Catalonia. Thus, generally, the 2017 edition of the Diada was not any different from those staged in other years: a sea of flags, festive atmosphere, and participation from all sectors of the independence movement. In short, it was a massive, yet contained and strictly choreographed contentious performance. The only difference was that it was part of the larger *Yes* campaign by the ANC, demanding not only that the – at this point already prohibited – referendum would be held, but also the vote for the pro-independence side.

September 20: Protests against police actions

In the data, there was evidence on three protest actions in response to the repressive action by the Spanish police and Civil Guard against the referendum preparation on September 20. The first one took place at the Catalan Department of Economy. In the morning, the Civil Guard entered the department to search for documents related to the institutional and administrative preparation of the 1-O referendum. In response, Òmnium Cultural and ANC called for a peaceful protest outside the building to "defend our institutions." They improvised a concert and talks at a nearby square to entertain people during the protest. During the whole day, about 40.000 protesters impeded the exit of the police officers from the Department, who ultimately had to escape the building through a rear exit. At night, Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart climbed a car of the Civil Guard to calm down the protesters.

The second action took place at the headquarters of the CUP. Police forces tried to search the headquarters without a warrant. The party called for a protest outside the building, which successfully prevented the police from entering. While these two instances are well documented, there was a series of smaller contentious actions. Interviewees reported a third instance. In Sabadell, for example, a high civil servant of the Catalan government was detained by the Civil Guard. There as well, people gathered outside the building, but in this case to prevent the police from exiting the detainee's home.

What these three instances had in common is the use of massive gatherings of people outside of buildings to obstruct police actions. As such, the 20-S represented a departure from the contained type of performance such as the Diada toward more disruptive forms of contentious action. Activist Pere described this shift as follows:

> Although there is no beating, it is the first day where people put their bodies to defend a political idea. It's the first day they say "you're not going to come out from the police operation. Because I've put my body." There is no beating, but if there had been, the same thing would have passed [as on October 1]. It's the change of mentality, no?

He called this change in mentality the emergence of a "revolutionary conscious," which drove people not just to demonstrate, but to employ disruptive tactics against police action and defend their autonomous institutions. The shift toward more disruptive action became even more evident on the day of the referendum itself, when activists mobilized to defend the voting stations against the intervention of the Spanish state.

September 22 – October 2: Occupying the University of Barcelona

Two days after Operation Anubis and the protest against it, the student platform Universitats per la República (UxR) called to occupy the historic building of the University of Barcelona in Plaça Universitat. UxR had been campaigning since summer to politicize the Catalan youth. Occupying the university was not instrumental for the platform itself or the referendum. Rather, the idea of the occupation was to maintain the level of mobilization until the referendum. In addition, the occupied campus served as a headquarter to launch demonstrations and host events but also to engage with local, Spanish, and international media. This was successful, as pictures from the occupation made it to the front page of the New York Times. Finally, it was also used to store material for the referendum, e.g. ballots, but also campaign material. UxR organized various activities every day of the occupation, for instance concerts with popular music groups such as Txarango, or a talk with Julian Assange via Skype. On September 28 and 29, 80.000 students participated in a strike and manifestation called by UxR. Interviewees reported that during the weekend of the referendum, there had been less participation at the occupation, as organizers had called most students to go home to their neighborhoods and villages and defend the voting stations – I describe this large-scale action in the next section. On October 2, the day after the referendum, the occupation ended.

October 1: Defending the referendum – occupation and resistance

What made the 1-O referendum so exceptional was the confrontation in the streets of Catalonia. On the one hand, the Spanish government directly intervened, sending police forces to stop the referendum. On the other hand, civil society actors of the independence movement made an enormous mobilization effort to guarantee that citizens could cast their vote. In this section, I describe the latter as a set of contentious actions that have become known by the shorthand expression "defending the referendum." There were 2.305 voting stations in total, but interviewees provided a global view on the defense. As a contentious performance, the defense of the voting stations has three main components:

- Occupation of the voting station one or two days before the referendum (in most cases)
- Gatherings inside and outside the voting stations (in all stations)
- Nonviolent resistance to prevent the police from entering the voting station (only where police intervened)

First, in some instances (e.g. in Fastiada, Sabadell), town halls provided organizers the keys to the voting stations. Also, in other cases (Hospitalet de Llobregat, Sant Antoni), organizers were in contact with individuals who, worked at the place that would serve as voting station (e.g. schools or cultural centers) and had keys. Where keys were available, there often were no calls for occupation (Fastiada and also in some small towns) and people just gathered on the morning of the referendum instead. Similarly, the ANC did not call to occupy the referendums, but just to concentrate outside of the buildings.

Nevertheless, on Friday, September 29, people throughout Catalonia started occupying voting stations, many of them public schools. Although my data did not provide a comprehensive overview of the voting stations in Catalonia, my estimate is that a large majority of voting stations were occupied - sometimes even when a key was available, and in many cases very consciously against the recommendation of the ANC. Some schools were occupied only on Saturday. According to the law, schools can be open for the weekend if extracurricular activities were organized, which was the case in most places.

Second, in all the stations, occupied or not, organizers, activists, and ordinary voters gathered inside and outside of the voting stations from 5am in the morning on October 1. In many places, turnout was massive with long lines forming already before the opening of the voting stations at 9am. The idea was to use nonviolent resistance to prevent the police from entering by forming human barricades to obstruct the entrances. In many cases, participants reported that, in addition to forming human walls, activists constructed material barricades to stop or slow down the police. In one voting station in Girona, activists formed a car cordon, which seemed to have been effective in deterring the police. In Tarragona, a van was used to block the road to the voting station. In one of the Hospitalet voting stations, participants used trash cans to block access to the voting station. Others tried to barricade the entrance from within, even with chairs and tables of the school, and banks.

It was decisive that enough people were present in all the voting stations for two reasons. On the one hand, activists knew that Mossos d'Esquadra had orders not to intervene if there were more than 50 people. On the other hand, the numbers were important for effective resistance against the Spanish National Police. Thus, people had to be distributed more or less evenly across voting stations. This required communication and coordination between the voting stations. In a few cases (Fastiada, Sabadell), there were deliberate efforts dedicated to this task. Organizers formed headquarters and had informants in each voting station to keep track of the numbers of attendants. Organizers in the headquarters could then pass on instructions which voting station could send people to other stations. Some organizers even used cars to move people from one

station to another. In other stations, information was exchanged through the networks and channels of the involved associations. But this occurred more on an ad-hoc basis in many places. Ordinary participants realized that there was an imbalance between two or more voting stations and stayed at the least attended to help defending it. However, there was little evidence in the data on which of these patterns was widespread and whether the coordination was effective or not.

Third, in most of the voting station mentioned in the data, there was actually no police intervention. Interviewees only mentioned clashes between police and protesters in six voting stations. In five of them, organizers, activists, and ordinary voters defended the college using nonviolent resistance. Despite these efforts, police forces were in all cases able to enter the building. However, activists hid the ballot boxes and in none of the described instances the police was able to confiscate them. In one case, the director of the school unilaterally decided to open the doors for the police to avoid violent confrontations. After the police interventions, the hidden ballot boxes were brought back and the voting continued. Generally, most of the clashes occurred in the morning and around noon, while the afternoon was relatively calm. It seems that in most cases, voting stations were open regularly until 8pm. However, there were a couple of cases where a premature closing was at least discussed, for fear of a police intervention. Interviewees reported on instance in which the voting stations were closed early.

October 3: Shutting down the country

Interviewees refer to the actions on October 3 (3-O) as "general strike," but in fact it was an *aturada de país*, which translates as "country shutdown" and goes beyond the labor-related elements of a strike. The 3-O was a threefold contentious performance: first, there was a massive strike in the work place. Second, large street demonstrations and marches took place. Third, activists blocked railways and highways throughout the country. These actions were performed in response to the police violence on the 1-O. The 3-O was the largest general strike in Catalonia since the end of the Franco dictatorship and involved participation from all sectors of the independence movement and even beyond. The empirical data illustrates these contentious actions in five examples.

First, in the Clot neighborhood of Barcelona, activists cut the Avinguda Meridiana, which is one of Barcelona's largest avenues and passes just by the neighborhood. Then activists went picketing at the neighborhood's Mercadona supermarket, which did not allow its workers any strike. Afterwards they went to protest at the station of the National Police in the nearby Verneda neighborhood. For this action, they coordinated also with the CDR Verneda. The demonstration involved the protesters sitting with their backs to the police station and staying in silence for about

ten minutes. From there they marched to the railway Meridiana-Aragón to meet other CDRs and headed to Plaça Catalunya for the main picket line.

Second, in Sabadell, activists marched from each neighborhood to meet in the North of the city. Turnout was massive, and interviewees described the 3-O as the largest protest in Sabadell in a long time.

Third, in Fastiada, activists met for a picket line at Mercadona and then blocked a highway near the town. They also called for a protest in the main square of Fastiada at noon. However, as the action on the highway took longer, the organizers arrived late to the protest in the center. In the meantime, people had already started protesting by themselves, as Oriol explains:

> And when it was time to return to the center, we decided to send someone ahead to set up the thing already. It turns out that it got out of hand [...] like, a lot of people, all the center full of people and people were doing whatever- like they started to march by themselves. They started the demonstration and did the route they wanted. The trigger was only having said "demonstration at 12" and so people gathered at 12 and did the demo and went ahead to wherever they wanted.

It appears that the protest almost went out of control, as people were marching to the North of the city where the quarter of the Civil Guard was located. However, as the organized arrived at the protest, they were able to redirect the march and avoid confrontation with the police forces.

Fourth, in Barcelona during the day, a false rumor spread that UxR had called for a protest in Plaça Universitat. Suddenly, 150.000 people showed up in the square. They also called to occupy a square in the center of Barcelona, but it failed because ANC and the political parties called everybody to go home after the strike.

Fifth, people even mobilized in small towns and villages such as Montanya and Caldes. In small town Montanya, the 3-O was a large event with more than 3.000 people in the streets, which organizers describe as one of the largest protests since the dictatorship. Activists cut a nearby highway. In Caldes, activists joined a protest in a nearby small town were the police had intervened to protest against violent repression.

4 CONCLUSION

When Carles Puigdemont announced his intention to hold a referendum in 2017, the relative equilibrium between challengers and the host state changed dramatically. In this chapter, I have traced how the strategy to pursue a unilateral referendum emerged and how this move intensified the conflict and led to an unprecedented period of contention.

The chapter shows that the October 1 referendum was not a neutral and purely institutional decision-making mechanisms. Referendums are usually initiated by secessionist challengers as a

decisive step toward independence. In their work on the 9-N and the Scottish referendum on independence, Della Porta et al. (2017, 31) held that these referendums were "used as means to promote citizen mobilisation and involvement around territorial claims and, eventually, gain independence." My empirical material supports this view. Interviewees highlighted that October 1 did not represent an exogenous opportunity for the movement, but was actively created and used a tool. Although many movement actors framed it as a democratic process, the referendum was a fundamental instrument to advance secessionist aims at the same time. Hence, independently from the politics of the campaign and the vote, holding a referendum in itself can be understood as a contentious performance (Tilly 2008).

Referendums are ideal tools to display public support for independence as they follow a logic of numbers. Della Porta et al. (2017, 30; see also Qvortrup 2014b, 60) pointed out that "referendums are widely regarded as an adequate instrument – probably the most adequate – to give both internal and external legitimacy to independence claims (that is, towards both indigenous civil society and the international community)." Referendums, even when non-binding, are thus more than just "populist placebos" (Altman 2011). They are what are perfect Tilly (2004, 4) called "WUNC displays:" they demonstrate worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment.

Despite these strategic benefits, the emergence of the referendum strategy before the 1-O suggests that secessionist challengers do not employ referendums out of purely rational calculations of costs and benefits. Repertoires of action are not a toolbox from which movement actors can simply pick and choose. Rather, movement strategies are the result of debates among many actors in which frames, expectations, and norms play a crucial role.

The chapter has also revealed that the 1-O referendum was the result of a triple interaction between the Spanish state, the Catalan institutions, and secessionist civil society actors. Whereas the previous literature has either prioritized government interactions (Ferreira 2021; López and Sanjaume-Calvet 2020) or civil society actors (Della Porta et al. 2017), I have provided a full account of these interactions. This has shown that secessionist collective action and strategy was a product of institutional and movement action. The Catalan autonomous institutions called for the referendum and provided its administrative and legal framework, whereas the main SMOs Òmnium Cultural and ANC campaigned and mobilized for the referendum. These actors have cooperated to coordinate these two strands of secessionist action.

However, the 1-O also sparked a shift from institutional to contentious action. The Generalitat in particular was paralyzed by Spanish repression after the 20-S. In response, emergent groups took over the initiative and organized the defense of the referendum and the general strike on October 3. In short, secessionist collective action became deinstitutionalized. Comparing the

performances of the independence movement in this episode over time, it becomes clear that there was a repertoire shift from contained to disruptive action without escalating into violence (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019). Furthermore, there was a change from the massive street performance of the Diada to the mobilizations on September 20 and October 1, which directly confronted police action against the referendum, and then to the general strike on October 3.

This transition from institutional to contentious action underlines the contentious character of the 1-O referendum. Its announcement triggered a rapid succession of interactions between secessionist challengers and the host state. The push for a binding referendum escalated the secessionist conflict and supposed a transition from the normal times described in the previous chapter to the intense 1-O episode of contention. This transition from normal times of secessionist conflict to the phase of intense contention puts forward the central research question of this dissertation: How did the 1-O contentious episode transform protest organizing? The next chapter approaches this question by showing how the five different contentious performances were organized by secessionist civil society actors.

Finally, the 1-O episode of contention did not come to an end on October 3. The collective actors of the independence movement continued to mobilize their followers. On October 10, thousands of secessionist activists gathered in the streets expecting to celebrate an independent Catalan republic, but were massively disappointed after Puigdemont's suspended the declaration of independence. A week later, they took the streets again to protest the arrest of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez the day before. Only after the application of article 155 on October 27, the level of mobilization decreased. Since article 155 supposed the dissolution of the Catalan parliament and anticipated regional elections, the focus of the secessionist conflict returned to the institutional arena. Faced with the threat of losing their majority in the regional chamber, pro-independence parties shifted their attention to their campaigns. Although unionist Ciutadans obtained the most votes in the elections on December 21 (called 21-D), Junts per Catalunya, ERC, and the CUP were able to hold on to their majority in the parliament. Article 155 and the election campaign made it obvious that the 1-O referendum as an attempt to unilaterally pursue independence had failed.

Chapter Seven

ORGANIZING SECESSIONIST PROTEST IN INTENSE TIMES

Protests have become so familiar that they seem an everyday feature of contemporary politics. The same could be said about secessionist contention in Catalonia. Demands for independence have become a central characteristic of Catalan politics. Between 2012 and 2017, collective actors such as ANC and Òmnium Cultural, student associations, left-wing organizations, and local grassroots groups staged a great number of contentious performances. Not only protests but also organizational structures, processes, and practices of the movement became normalized over this period of time. However, neither protest nor its organization remains stable over time. Scholars have shown that protest comes and goes in waves, tides, or cycles (Beissinger 1996, 2002; Koopmans 2004; Tarrow 1989, 2011). The organizational dimension of social movements sometimes undergoes profound transformations, too.

In 2017 Catalan secessionists challenged the Spanish state by calling for a unilateral referendum on independence. The announcement of the referendum triggered a dense sequence of interactions between civil society actors, the regional institutions, and the Spanish government. Secessionist action became more contentious and disruptive. I have called this condensed series of occurrences between September 6 and October 27 the *1-O episode of contention*. This contentious episode represented a shift from normal to intense times of the Catalan secessionist conflict. The intensification of the conflict poses a fundamental question: how did activists organize secessionist contention in the 1-O episode of contention?

Existing research on organization in social movements tells us very little about this question, because it has not been particularly sensitive to the cyclical dynamics of contentious politics. Hence, there are no clear theoretical and empirical expectations with regards to this question. Still, in chapter 2, I have theorized three mechanisms that may shape protest organizing in intense times of contention. First, activists are more likely to face actions from their opponents, because the level of repression normally increases during intense times (Tarrow 2011). Thus, organizers must include opponent actions into their plans and preparations. Second, intense times often involve unexpected events, which is why organizers face greater uncertainty when organizing protest

(Wagner-Pacifici and Ruggero 2018). Third, intense times suppose dense sequences of occurrences. Activists must often act quickly and have less time to organize collective action (Della Porta 2018). These three mechanisms suggest that protest organizing becomes much more difficult in intense times than in normal times. However, their precise impact is hard to discern on a theoretical level.

The independence movement repeatedly managed to mobilize massively to defend the referendum and the autonomous institutions, and to push its own representatives to take action toward secession. From the stream of continuous contentious activity, I have selected five cases of protest action: the Diada on September 11, the protest on September 20, the occupation of the University of Barcelona, the defense of the voting stations on the weekend of the referendum, and the general strike on October 3. I have already described these protest actions in the previous chapter. This chapter turns to the "backstage" of these protests and explores how they were organized. The next sections provide analytical narratives of their organizing processes.

1   FIVE CASES OF PROTEST ORGANIZING IN THE 1-O EPISODE OF CONTENTION

1.1 Organizing the Diada

The first major protest in the 1-O episode was the massive street demonstration on the National Day of Catalonia, called La Diada, on September 11. As I have described in chapter 5, the Diada had been organized by the ANC since 2012 and turned out massive numbers of protesters each year. In the interviews, ANC organizers pointed out the enormous amount of time and preparatory work that went into the Diada each year.

The organizing process of the 2017 Diada was not substantially different from those during what I have called "normal" times of the Catalan secessionist conflict. In fact, the organizing process started before the start of the 1-O episode. Organizers reported that the ANC dedicated almost half a year to the preparation of the Diada. Just like in normal times, the Diada was meticulously planned and prepared in a long and complex process. The detailed plan for the protest required a variety of preparatory tasks. For instance, every local chapter of the ANC was responsible to prepare a stretch of the street where the demonstration happened. ANC Organizer Carme described the details of these preparations as follows.

> You have to understand that the hardest work of the summer is to organize the demonstration. No? So in this stretch [of the street] you have to organize a team of volunteers, the have to go see "their" stretch. We speak with all the businesses in that stretch, we let them know there will be a demonstration, that they have drinks that they- whether they let us use the bathrooms- we mark on a map if there are pharmacies, water fountains, the subway exits. We visit the stretch, we look at all the places that could be

potentially dangerous. Then we secure them off. Oh, I don't know, we decorate our stretch. Every local chapter is in charge to decorate their stretch. Then there is the design of the protest. The shirt is provided by the national ANC, but for every stretch there is a local chapter in charge. Normally that is a chapter from Barcelona. And they host a chapter from outside Barcelona. A district from the Maresme or whatever. And then we do it together and the work we have is to sell t-shirts and that is a lot of work, selling t-shirts.

This quote shows the level of detail ANC organizers dedicated to the Diada protest. This level of detail required an enormous amount of preparatory work, especially because of the massive scale of the protest. As in previous years, organizers expected a turnout of more than a million protesters on two of Barcelona's largest streets: Passeig de Gràcia and Carrer Aragó.

The complexity of these preparations was organized in a streamlined process. Five features of the organizing process stand out. First, the Diada was planned and prepared primarily by the ANC as a single SMO, although it was endorsed and supported by many other organizations such as Òmnium Cultural. Thus, there was less interorganizational work necessary and no negotiations about the place, slogan, and timing of the demonstration. The organization also provided for both material and human resources that were necessary to achieve the level of detail. Second, the decisions in the process were controlled top-down by the leadership of the organization. There was a clear division of labor between the national leadership and the local chapters. The centralized decision making and division of labor made it easier to allocate the preparatory tasks. Third, ANC organizers benefited from already having organized the Diada for several years in a row. Interviewee Carme pointed out that over the years, they had accumulated a lot of experience and were "professionals" now. She underlined that this routinization made the preparatory process a lot easier. Fourth, while the Diada was one of the largest protests in Europe, it was also a contained performance. It did not involve any confrontation with authorities, police, or other opponents. Fifth, and finally: the ANC invested a lot of time into preparing the Diada – which of course made the organizing process a lot smoother.

Although the Diada was the first major protest that occurred after the secessionist conflict began to intensify, it had to be understood as a continuation of previous normal modes of protest organizing. The detailed and meticulous preparations resembled closely the organizing processes before the onset of the 1-O episode. As such, the Diada came close to the model proposed by Rucht (2017), but the difference was that the Diada required almost no interorganizational effort. Rather it represents an exemplary case of organizing *inside* a single organization. As such, the organizing process seemed typical for many of the contained and routine protests of a movement society (Meyer and Tarrow 1998).

1.2 Organizing the 20-S

The protests on September 20 were very different than the Diada demonstration just a couple days before. On the morning of the 20-S, the leaderships of Òmnium Cultural and ANC received news that the Civil Guard had entered the Catalan Department of Economy to search for documents related to the referendum on October 1. The leaders quickly decided to call for a protest outside the Department building. To illustrate this condensed preparatory process, I quote at length a passage from the interview with Beatriu, who was one of the members of Òmnium Cultural's board of directors at the time. She described how the decision was taken by the organization's executive committee, which consisted of the president, the three vice presidents, the treasurer, and the secretary.

> R: Well look, on the morning of the 20-S. Hmm, we knew that the Civil Guard was entering the Department of Economy. Somebody heard it on the radio or a party member told someone. And so we discussed it on Telegram like "look this is happening, what we do?" – "do we call for a demonstration?" and so on. Then we sent a WhatsApp message, because we already had this channel in place – "Call for Democracy" – Over "Call for Democracy" we called people to the streets and we send it the same morning over Telegram as well. Thus, the responsible person send this over WhatsApp to our followers.
>
> I: And who on the Board of Directors decided this? How did you decide where and when?
>
> R: That's not easy [to answer], I suppose this should have been an issue for the executive committee, I don't remember anymore, but everyday decisions – o rather for the functioning of the entity and short-term things, that's for the executive committee. So when there is something, some relevant issue, we say "Okay, fine, but we have to communicate this to the Board" and then we pass the word to their [messenger] group so that everybody is up to date. Surely it must have gone this way: In the executive committee we decide to call the people to the Department [of Economy] for what our president is on trial. And so I believe we decided to tell the board of directors "look in the next moments, we are going to send a WhatsApp message to call people to protest. Spread the word!" So informing the Board, but the decision is from the Executive or rather it's the order it executes, taking the most frequent decisions.

This quote from the interview provided an account of how Òmnium Cultural made the decision to call for a protest in response to the police intervention in the Catalan Department of Economy. Òmnium Cultural called the protest jointly with the ANC. In the data, there was a very similar passage in the interview with ANC organizer Judit, who stated that it was "an emergency" and that they had to "react quickly." Beatriu and Judit thus described an organizing process that was very different from the one of the Diada. There were three properties of the process that stood out in the analysis. First, and as stated above, the organizing process was extremely condensed. Instead of meticulous planning of every detail of the demonstration, there was only a short

discussion and a call for protest on the very same day of the police intervention. This finding is not surprising, because the protests were called as a reaction to Operation Anubis. Second, the preparation of the 20-S protest was organized in top-down fashion, even more so than the Diada. As the quote above showed, in Òmnium Cultural, the decision was made only by the Executive Committee, which is the smallest circle of the organization's leadership. Third, messenger applications played a central role in the process. The organizers did not even bother to meet in person, but made the decision through a Telegram channel. Then, the call was spread rapidly through messenger channels. Turnout was massive with 30.000 protesters showing up at the demonstration called by Òmnium Cultural and ANC and endorsed by many smaller organizations. At the same time, there were many small protests throughout Catalonia, for instance in Sabadell against the detention of a high-level civil servant. Interviewees witnessing these protests described them as quick reactions to the police interventions.

1.3 Organizing the Occupation of the University

Two days after the 20-S, students occupied the historic building of the University of Barcelona. The occupation lasted until October 2 and was organized by the platform Universitats per la República (UxR). The idea of UxR was first put on the table by some former members of the student organization Sindicat d'Estudiants dels Països Catalans (SEPC) in April 2017 and was formed as an interorganizational youth platform. It included representatives from the SEPC, ERC's youth organization Joventuts d'Esquerra Republicana (JERC), the Assemblea de Joves per la Unitat Popular (AJUP), and the Joventut Nacionalista de Catalunya (JNC), the youth wing of the PDeCAT. Later also a representative from Arran joined.

Already at the beginning of September, organizers started calling for open assemblies to mobilize people for the idea of UxR. In mid-September they staged a couple more formal events to present UxR to the media. On September 21, there organized a big event at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, which is another university in Barcelona. The organizers decided from one day to the next, in light of the 20-S, to use that event as an occasion to call for the occupation of the historical building of the University of Barcelona in Plaça Universitat. Interviewee Ester described this process as follows.

> The rhythm of things was- they'll have told you already and I don't want to be repetitive, but it was that almost from one day to the other we thought that tomorrow we would set up an occupation. So- but this event at the Autonomous University was planned before. But as things became heated, we decided we would use the event to, hmm, use it as an amplifier to call for the occupation the next morning, which was a Friday. [So at the event at the Autonomous University] we called the masses to occupy the historic building of the University of Barcelona.

The day after the event at the Autonomous University, about 3000 students gathered to occupy the historic building of the University of Barcelona without consent of the university's administration. One of the first tasks for the organizers was to negotiate with the chancellor – primarily about the spaces which they were tolerated to occupy. The occupation required a lot of mundane organizational work, Ester explained.

> So we were taking very well-organized turns for security, like "from this hour on, no one can enter," putting measures that no one could enter. Then, all sorts of things, cleaning shifts, and then- because people outside really liked what we were doing, shop owners from the neighborhood were bringing us food and we had like a- I don't know what this is called in Spanish
>
> I: Say it in Catalan.
>
> R: Well an *inventari*- an inventory. A list with the food that we had. It was all very organized.

Cleaning shifts, guard duties, and food distribution are not the only things that needed to be managed; activists also coordinated the production of political material such as placards, putting up an information stand outside the university, reaching out to other actors of the independence movement, etc. This shows that the occupation, because of its duration, required a more continuous organizing process that was interwoven with the contentious action itself. In contrast, time to prepare the occupation was rather short, as it was called from one day to another. Apart from the call itself and the negotiation with the chancellor, the organizers did not mention any specific steps or phases, but described the organizing as a permanent managing of the occupation.

One explanation for this form of description might be that the single phases in the process and their sequence were routine to the organizers. In fact, it was not the first time that they occupied the university, as organizer Pere explained when I asked about the process in the interview.

> I: So the occupation in this moment- at the university, how did you organize it?
>
> R: Well, I have occupied the university several times already. Probably three times already and this was the fourth time. But I'll tell you this one and the other three don't have anything to do with each other. Just like any other youth protest that we did before and we did after.

Pere's response described the organizing of the occupation as routine, as not particularly worth elaborating about. Nevertheless, the statement also highlighted that the 2017 occupation was different from all previous occupations in normal times. The mobilization achieved a much larger turnout than other occupations. Most importantly, both Ester and Pere reported in their interviews

that the organizing process was exceptional. Normally, student activists organized occupations through deliberation in open assemblies, as I have described in chapter 5. In contrast, the quick preparation as well as the continuous management of the occupation was controlled by the small leadership group of UxR. Although there were frequent open assemblies in the occupation, the organizers hold that no substantial decisions were made. Moreover, the leadership had full control over material resources (such as money, food, campaign material), which they received from ANC and Òmnium Cultural. Thus, the organizing of the occupation developed mainly as a top-down process steered by a small group of student organizers. This was very different from previous modes of organizing and was justified by the organizers with the prevalence of strategy (see chapter 10) and the fear of repression (see chapter 11).

1.4 Organizing the Defense of the Voting Stations

The defense of the voting stations was by far the most complex contentious action among the twelve cases that were studied for this dissertation. First of all, what has been called the defense of the voting stations actually was not a single protest action, but consisted of three elements: occupations of the voting stations, public gatherings to obstruct access to them, and non-violent resistance in those places where the police did intervene. I have mapped these actions in the previous chapter.

Second, the defense of the voting stations was geographically complex: The referendum was supposed to be held in 2305 voting stations. Sometimes there was coordination between several voting stations of an area or neighborhood, but organizing processes for entire cities such as in Sabadell or Fastiada remain the exception. Normally, each voting station organized its own defense. Hence, there actually was no *single* defense of the voting stations. For the analysis, this presented the problem of great geographical variation with regards to the preparatory activities. Each voting station could potentially organize in a different way. Nevertheless, I encountered a point of satisfaction quite early in the data gathering process. Despite selecting interviewees from a variety of organizational and geographical backgrounds, their descriptions of the local organizing processes were all fairly similar. Some minor differences aside, the preparation and planning of the defense of the voting station looked quite similar in most places. Hence, when I refer to *the* defense of the voting stations in the singular, I mean an abstract account of the shared features of many single processes.

The third feature that made the case so complex was the fact that it was not organized by a single pre-existing collective actor. The referendum and its administration were institutionally facilitated, but the defense was not. In fact, some interviewees (e.g. Alex and Roger) suggested that

the defense was not in the Catalan government's interest, because any casualties could have been blamed on the Catalan authorities. Furthermore, the two large SMOs ANC and Òmnium Cultural were instrumental in the campaign for the referendum and previous contentious action, but they had no significant impact on the defense of the referendum. On the contrary, the ANC merely suggested to gather outside the voting stations with ballot in hand, but neither to occupy the voting stations nor to interfere with the police intervention. But, then how was it organized?

The 2.305 voting stations were the focal points of the organizing processes. Moving to the local level represents a "downward scale shift" (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019; see also McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 2011) with respect to previous organizing processes, which were located mainly at the regional level. The local level served as a space of encounter for organizers from existing parties and organizations but also allowed to accommodate non-partisan neighbors and participants without any previous political experience. Interviewees describe the series of encounters as "open spaces," "unitary spaces," or "neutral spaces" not affiliated with any collective actor. Some of these emergent groups started meeting already a year before the referendum, but they limited themselves to campaigning for the referendum and to mobilizing citizens to vote. As interviewees reported, the idea to defend the voting stations only came up later. Before summer 2017, a proposal to form platforms for the referendum circulated in the CUP. However, the idea that it might be necessary to occupy voting stations, obstruct access to them, and resist the police intervention only appeared in mid-September and in particular after the 20-S. This was when many of the existing campaign platforms adopted the name *Committee for the Defense of the Referendum* (CDR) and new ones emerged specifically with the goal to defend the voting stations. Others did not adopt the name at all, for example Girona Vota.

The primary organizational task was to keep the voting stations, which in most cases were public schools, open for the weekend. Of course the easiest way to achieve this was to obtain the keys, which was why organizers tried to cooperate with the principalships of many schools, but it appears that many were reluctant to hand over the keys because of potential legal consequences. In many cases, the CDRs and other emergent platforms found that parent organizations, the AMPAs (Associació de Mares i Pares d'Alumnes), had already organized to occupy the voting stations. The AMPAs were arguably the pre-existing actors which had most influence on the organizing process. Some of them acted on their own, others followed an initiative called Open Schools (Escoles Obertes), which was launched a couple of days earlier, as organizer Lluís from an AMPA in Gavà explained:

> I: And so how was the preparation of these activities?

R: Totally improvised. Like, without any type of preparation, simply when- when the Open Schools proposal came out, which I think was on Thursday, well, we decided in the AMPA "what should we do, do we open, do we not open? Do we organize something or not?" And that was it, it was that simple.

The AMPAs used a loophole in the law stating that public schools could not be closed for the weekend if extracurricular activities for children took place. Thus, many AMPAs organized "marathons" for playing cards, ping-pong, and other activities on Saturday, September 30, which was the day before the referendum. For instance, Lluís and the Gavà AMPA organized to play parchís, a popular board game, calling the activity "Parchís for Democracy." Lluís described the organizing process as a quick reaction to the Open Schools proposal, as evidenced by the following extract from the interview.

I: Do you remember the discussion in the AMPA? How did you decide this?

R: Four messages. Like, there was not a lot- there wasn't even time. There wasn't even time, it was Thursday already. And it was organized very super remotely and super fast, because no- everything was done in a hurry, we just said "we do it or we don't do it" and then we were talking about it a little bit. Four telephone calls later, we were like "look, ok, we have to do it" – "Ok, we're gonna do it" – "That's it, we're doing it."

Lluís and his fellow organizers did not have a long discussion and did not even meet in person. Over phone and messenger, they decided to rapidly organize an activity for children on the weekend. Now it cannot be inferred from the data that this process was typical for all AMPAs. Possibly some of them took more time to discuss the potential risks and opportunities involved in organizing the activities. But given the little time left until the weekend, it seems likely that Lluís descriptions applied to most processes. In any case, interviewees reported the AMPAs were decisive in keeping the voting stations open for the weekend.

Despite the short time available for the preparatory process, the above account shows that the defense of the voting stations was in large a product of meticulous organizing. Nevertheless, there was some evidence about contentious actions during the 1-O that were not part of the plan. Here, I briefly discuss five actions that in some of the voting stations occurred in an ad-hoc fashion: the composition of organizing groups, the hiding of ballot boxes, the resistance to the police and the construction of barricades, the redistribution of voters, and the closing of voting stations.

First, some interviewees stressed that the informal groups managing the voting process as well as the defense of the voting stations on the day of the referendum were formed spontaneously. In most stations, these groups featured voting officials, the RAs, organizers from the CDR or other

organizations, party representatives, and other volunteers. Often, these people did not have any contact before, as organizer Berta explained.

> We were two RAs. Then for each ballot box there were- I don't remember if they were three or four voting officials. And then there were volunteers organizing the people, I don't know, maybe there were about 15.
>
> I: And how was this group formed?
>
> R: Hmm we didn't know each other, or rather we did know each other, when we saw each other some of us recognized each other. Because Girona is about a 100,000 inhabitants, very small, but hmm we didn't know we would be there. Like, I only knew one of the voting officials and I knew who would open the school, which wasn't necessary because it was occupied, but the rest [of the people], we didn't know each other.

This type of answer was more frequent in responses to the question how activists coordinated on the day of the referendum. It appears that in many voting stations, organizers did not have any connection and worked together spontaneously.

Second, some interviewees reported that activists spontaneously decided to hide the ballot boxes when the police arrived that the voting station (for instance in Girona). In most stations, however, it appears that there was a previous plan for this. Organizers had checked the building for good spots to hide the boxes or arranged for escape plans.

Third, in those places where the police forces intervened, the resistance was sometimes spontaneously managed. In Sabadell for example, activists drove the police out of the voting station after they had stormed it. In other cases, activists spontaneously constructed barricades depending on what was available to them in that moment. For instance, in a voting station in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, the use of containers to build a barricade was a spontaneous idea by organizer Enric. He described giving instructions to the participants about where to put them and what to do in case the police would arrive.

> I: When the police arrived, how did people coordinate the action? How did you decide what to do?
>
> R: Right there on the spot. In Situ. What you do if have a bit of spirit- people put themselves to lead or direct something

In another voting station in the outskirts of Girona, for example, ideas for actions such as defending the voting station with a vehicle cordon arose in a group chat in a messenger application. There was no formal process, not even meetings for these decisions. In a voting station in

Tarragona, it appears that some of the actions (gathering, barricades, monitoring) were decided on the spot, but there were also organizers giving instructions.

Fourth, the allocation of voters to the stations was also spontaneous. There needed to be a minimum amount of people in every station to be able to defend them. The redistribution of voters among voting stations occurred to some extent instantaneously. In part, because voters had some room for self-allocation. For example, interviewee Quim told that when he and his family realized that there were less people at a nearby voting station, they went there to vote and subsequently stayed to defend the station. Interviewees Sergi and Dolors also reported that in some stations in Girona the redistribution was not planned ahead, but was managed by organizers spontaneously.

Fifth, in Fastiada the closing of the voting stations was a unilateral and spontaneous decision by organizer Pasqual, who had received information that police vans were parked a few kilometers outside the city. Thus, Pasqual gave instruction to each voting station to look for a place to hide the ballot boxes. Then, as tension seemed to be rising, Pasqual decided to close the voting stations at 6 pm and called all participants to gather at the Ateneu, which was an important cultural center in the town. Even there, they expected the police to arrive and had all people leave the Ateneu, who then gathered in the main streets in the center of Fastiada. This was also not only a decision to simply close the voting stations but also against resistance and nonviolent action against the police.

The illustrated five pieces of evidence of spontaneous actions in the data suggested that spontaneity was limited to isolated instances in a couple voting stations. No overall spontaneous pattern emerged from the data. In contrast, as the previous analysis of the preparatory process has shown, most of the actions were the result of planned and deliberate organizing. I will discuss the relationship between spontaneous and planned action in the final section of this chapter.

1.5   Organizing the 3-O

On the day after Operation Anubis, the trade unions CSC-Intersindical, Confederació General del Treball (CGT), and Coordinadora Obrera Sindical called for a general strike after the Spanish police forces had carried out Operation Anubis in several Catalan government institutions. Thus, there were some preparatory activities before the 1-O. In Sabadell, for instance, the first meeting of the CDR on September 26 was also a meeting for the strike committee for the 3-O, where also the Confederació Nacional del Treball and CGT trade unions were present.

However, the 1-O referendum completely changed the scenario. The night of October 1, the so-called Table for Democracy (Catalan: Taula per la Democràcia), an interorganizational platform

which comprised ANC, Òmnium Cultural, the Catalan sections of the largest Spanish trade Unions Confederación Sindical de Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) and Unión General de Trabajadores (UGT), as well as the employers' associations Petita i Mitjana Empresa de Catalunya and Cecot called for an *aturada de país*, which translates as "country shutdown" – the goal was to completely paralyze the Catalan economy. Hence, the labor-related elements of the 3-O were organized primarily at the regional level and resulted from a coordinated effort between pro-independence organizations, trade unions, and employers.

In contrast to strike action, most of the protest actions and disruptions were prepared at the local level by the emergent CDRs in response to the police violence on the day of the referendum. In many neighborhoods, towns, and villages, activists who had defended the voting stations on October 1 met the day after to reflect on the referendum and to discuss possible reactions. Organizers used the WhatsApp and Telegram channels that were already in place for the defense of the voting stations to call for open neighborhood assemblies or prepare contentious actions directly through these channels.

For instance, already the night of the referendum, CDR organizers in Barcelona's Clot neighborhood called for an open assembly of all the neighbors on October 2 as a sort of "strike committee." The next day, there were 200 people in the square to prepare the strike on October 3. Participants had a lot of work-related questions (workers' rights to strike, the provision of minimal public services), but the discussion quickly shifted towards ideas for protest actions in the neighborhood, as organizer Carles explains:

> And then there were other people who said "Ok, we're going to go on strike, we have to paralyze everything, but what are the goals, where are we going, what are we going to do?"

They planned three actions: a picketing line at a local Mercadona supermarket, a silent sit-in at a police station, and a march to the main protest in the center of Barcelona.

In Sabadell, too, there was an open assembly on October 2. Organizer Joana told that there was a lot of indignation among participants about the violent repression of the previous day, but they also discussed the strike action in the neighborhood on the following day. They talked about the concrete actions, the route of the march and making banners:

> Well in that assembly, we didn't do much more than saying "Ok, we start from here and we go down this road and that one-" well, we informed the CDR coordinators in Sabadell about the route in order not to run into other neighborhoods .We focused on a particular area and that's it. There wasn't much more.

In the interview, Joana stressed two things about the 3-O preparations. On the one hand, she described it as relatively easy to organize, because people were motivated to participate. On the other hand, the strike preparations that were made previous to the 1-O had become obsolete and turned into organizing a protest:

> Hmm there was not a lot to prepare for the strike. Because- everybody was willing to go on strike. I think it was one of the strikes that required the least preparation because- we talked about it a bit on the 26th, but we forgot about it and the strike organized itself. Because people saw it was a strike against repression. [...] it was very easy to organize because it wasn't the organization of a strike. Properly speaking, it was the organization of an enormous protest.

This shows that the assemblies on October 2 were an important moment for activists to gather and reflect upon what happened the day before and how they would respond. Although Joana pointed out the ease of the preparations, they also needed to take place in an extremely short time frame. Another example in the data came from CDR organizer Josep, who described that participants in small town Caldes were angry and wanted to protest, to cut highways, to do slow marches, to strike and halt the country. Yet, they only had very little time available:

> but of course, coordinate that from one day to another, well- we didn't have anything prepared and so we said "on October 2 we're not doing anything, but on October 3 yes, we we'll do whatever we can do to mobilize the country," but of course, it was a spontaneous thing.

Through WhatsApp and Telegram the organizers in Caldes received information from other towns were the police had intervened. Finally, in the assembly they decided to go to another small town to support the protest against police violence there.

Not all platforms and CDRs called for open assemblies though. In Fastiada for instance, only organizations and parties had a meeting on October 2 to reflect on what happened the day before and what needed to be done. There was the idea to strike and paralyze the country on October 3. The concrete plan they had was to make a picket line at the town's Mercadona supermarket and then cut the highway near the town. The local PDeCAT did not even participate in the meeting, and Òmnium Cultural, ANC, and the local Esquerra Republicana group also did not support the action because of fear of repression. ANC and Òmnium just called for a protest in the afternoon. Esquerra Republicana in the end did mobilize some people over WhatsApp, but the main promoters in Fastiada were the CUP through the CDR. Subsequently, the CDR was more a label to mobilize protesters rather than a proper interorganizational platform.

Some of the actions described in the previous chapter were the result of decisions made on the very day of the 3-O. As people mobilized massively, some of the protest developed their own dynamic. In Fastiada, for example, organizers had called a protest at noon, but arrived late because they were still blocking a nearby highway in the morning. In the meantime, participants had already started marching. Similarly, the UxR organizers were caught by surprise by the protest in Plaça Universitat after a rumor had spread that UxR had called for the protest. Organizers Ester told that they "didn't have anything to put at the head of the march," so they improvised and took one of Òmnium Cultural's "Democracy" banners. Then they decided spontaneously to march to the Catalan parliament. In the afternoon of October 3, the UxR organizers also met with the leadership of Òmnium Cultural who suggested them to put up an occupation on the same day. ERC's youth organization JERC were undecided about the action, which delayed the decision-making process until later at night. Although they had resources at hand, the occupation never really took off, which interviewees blamed on the timing.

All things considered, the 3-O was originally called as a strike in response to the 20-S, but took on another meaning after the referendum. Thus, many of the preparations had taken place in a relatively short time frame. While the strike was primarily called by actors at the regional level, much of the protests and disruptive actions were organized at the local level. Open assemblies on October 2 served as the primary setting to prepare contentious actions. These assemblies were called by the emerging platforms that had been instrumental in the defense of the voting stations. Interviewees reported that participants showed enhanced readiness to protest, which made the preparations easier, but also led to some spontaneous actions during the 3-O.

Contentious action did not stop after the 3-O of course – activist continuously organized small and large protests to challenge the Spanish state and to put pressure on their own representatives to declare independence. I have focused here on the organizing processes of those protests that were highlighted as most important by interviewees. This section has provided a thick yet condensed description of these five processes. The remainder of the chapter discusses the properties of these processes more in detail, but I first turn to the relationship between spontaneous and organized protest in the 1-O episode of contention.

2   SPONTANEOUS AND ORGANIZED ACTION IN INTENSE TIMES

Intense times of contention are sometimes characterized as chaotic. Early research in social movement studies saw contentious action as the product of spontaneous dynamics instead of previous planning and preparation (Blumer 1951). This view has long been challenged in social movement studies. As I have discussed in the conceptual framework of this dissertation, writers

such as Charles Tilly (1978, 1986, 1995), John McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1973, 1977) criticized the view of social movements as spontaneous and highlighted organized and rational action instead.

The analysis of the 1-O episode of contention mostly supports this view. The description of the five cases in this chapter has revealed the amount of organizational work that organizers in the independence movement put into the preparation of protest. Even as secessionist conflict intensified, organizers dedicated much time and effort to plan contentious action that would fundamentally challenge the Spanish state.

This does not mean that everything went as planned during the 1-O episode. Despite the often painstaking preparations, practically all cases other than the Diada exhibit some degree of spontaneity, that is actions "which were not planned, intended, prearranged, or organized in advance of their occurrence" (Snow and Moss 2014, 1123). I have described many of such instances above: for example, the protest that was not planned by the UxR organizers, or the demonstration that went ahead without the CDR in Fastiada on October 3. In particular for the defense of the voting stations, the data offered rich descriptions of spontaneity, for example Xavi's story of resistance to the police intervention in Sabadell.

> The police managed to enter [the voting station], they closed the door, and I don't know how, but they [activists] managed to hide the ballot boxes [before], I don't know how they did it, if they threw them out of the window and fetched them later. And the police didn't know what to do "we haven't found the ballot boxes, we're staying here". Then, there started to generate- the people, let's say, started to react. Like, at first, there is the typical dynamic, they get kicked out and people start saying "damn, fuck it" and people get angry, things starting to heat. So they formed a sort of human wall, which advanced and advanced and advanced, and in the end, they throw the police out. The images are quite spectacular, if you search for them, you it's gonna blow your mind.

The CDR in Sabadell had put a lot planning into the defense of the voting stations, but the passage shows how a protest can still "get out of hand:" during performances, situational dynamics sometimes produce spontaneous lines of action. This suggests that the 1-O episode was a product of both organized and spontaneous collective action. However, none of the five contentious performances analyzed here occurred in a purely spontaneous manner – there was always some degree of prior preparation.

At the same time, the findings suggest that the distinction between spontaneity and organizing is not always clear-cut. First, in some of the cases, there is a very fine line between spontaneous action and quick preparation. This can be illustrated with examples from the data. In the section on the role of the AMPAs, I have quoted organizer Lluís describing the occupation of the school in Gavà as "totally improvised. Like, without any type of preparation," which suggests that it was

a spontaneous action. At the same time, however, he did mention preparatory activities: making telephone calls, discussing the slogan, creating a Twitter account. He said it was "organized very remotely and super fast." How to make sense of this apparent contradiction? Polletta (1998, 2006) argued that activists often qualify protests as spontaneous to describe them as bottom-up popular initiatives. In her work on social movements in the US, she found that "spontaneity denoted independence from adult leadership, urgency, local initiative, and action by moral imperative rather than bureaucratic planning" (Polletta 1998, 138). The use of spontaneity as a strategic framing was certainly at play in many of the descriptions by Catalan activists. However, the data suggested that there was a different pattern. Interviewees often described *short* organizing processes as spontaneous or improvised. Thus, organizers simply had an understanding that is different from the narrow concept developed in the first section of this chapter. What interviewees described as *spontaneous* might be, analytically speaking, a case of quick organizing.

The primary example of this subclass of processes is the 20-S: within a couple of hours after the police intervention in the Department of Economy, Òmnium Cultural and ANC staged a protest responding to the action. From an analytical point of view, it does not qualify as spontaneous, because it was decided prior to the action. This narrow understanding of spontaneity might be conceptually sound, but it raises other theoretical issues. It renders spontaneity an extremely rare type of phenomenon in which decision and action are temporally coincident. Thus, it depends very much on the temporal boundaries of decision and action (cf. Wagner-Pacifici 2010).

Second, in some cases the preparation of a contentious action can be shorter than the duration of the contentious action itself. Take the occupation of the university for example. As I have described above, UxR decided from one day to the other to call for the occupation during a protest at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Yet, the occupation itself lasted ten days. Rather than a long preparatory process, an occupation requires continuous management: organizers meet and meet again, make decisions, react to events, and plan how to continue to performance. Analyzing such a type of action in terms of spontaneity and organizing is extremely difficult and would require dividing the occupation in its different components. Again, understanding spontaneity and organizing depends very much on the temporal boundaries of contentious action and preparatory action. Leaving aside the question of spontaneity, I now to turn to the comparison of the five organizing processes.

3 UNDERSTANDING PROTEST ORGANIZING IN INTENSE TIMES

When comparing the five organizational processes described above, one can immediately discern a stark contrast between the preparations of the Diada and the other four contentious performances. ANC organizers had started organizing the Diada before the onset of the 1-O episode. It was prepared in a long process in a single organization, in which organizers meticulously planned the contentious performance in all its details. The suspension of the referendum by the Spanish Constitutional Court a few days earlier did not change any of that plan. The 2017 Diada was thus organized very much like in previous years. It represented a continuation of normal organizing into the 1-O episode of contention.

In contrast, the other four protests that followed after the Diada were organized very differently from those organizing processes in normal times. There were also significant differences between the four cases. However, the comparative analysis revealed that protest organizing in those four cases exhibited a specific pattern, which I simply call *organizing in intense times*. In this section, I discuss this mode of protest organizing.

A first feature that distinguished the four organizing processes from modes of protest organizing was their length. While it took the ANC about half a year to prepare the Diada, the other cases were organized within a couple of weeks, days, or hours. In the conceptual chapter, I have theorized the role of time pressure and opponent action in intense times. The interview data partly confirmed these mechanisms. For example, when the Spanish Civil Guard entered the Department of Economy, there was simply no time for long and detailed preparations. ANC and Òmnium Cultural needed to react as quickly as possible. Another example is UxR's call to occupy the University of Barcelona, which was also related to the 20-S and took advantage of a protest event the day after. Even when protest was not organized in reaction to a specific occurrence, activists invested very little time in the preparations. Interviewees suggested this was because they wanted to take advantage of already scheduled events such as the referendum itself or the general strike on October 3 and because they wanted to maintain the level of mobilization and keep participants engaged. But interviewees also suggested that there was no real need for longer preparations, because the overall strategy was clear.

3.1 Organizing beyond Organizations

In the conceptual framework, I have suggested that it is important to distinguish between organizations as entities and organizing as process, using the latter as the unit of analysis to understand how activists plan and prepare contentious action. In this perspective, protest organizing may take place inside, outside, or between organizations.

Focusing on the role of organizational structures in the five organizing processes again reveals some important differences between the Diada and the other four cases. The Diada was almost exclusively organized by the ANC, which mobilized material resources and a large number of organizers. The ANC put a large part of its time and effort into organizing the Diada. The organization also provided established routines and procedures, since it had prepared the Diada several times before. Thus, in the Diada case there is a close connection between organizing and organization. In all the other cases, protest organizing process took place *beyond* organizational boundaries.

First, much of the organizing processes in the 1-O episode took place *between* organizations rather than within their boundaries. This took different forms. First, in some instances, the existing organizations merely cooperated. The decision to call for the main protest against Operation Anubis on September 20 was taken by ANC and Òmnium Cultural separately, but followed by a coordination between the leaderships of the two organizations. Second, organizations joined forces and created an interorganizational platform. This new organizational structure sometimes served as a basis for organizing several performances, for example UxR. Platforms were also purposefully designed for single contentious performances, as was the case of the up-scaled CDR in Sabadell or the nameless platform in Fastiada. Often, however, interorganizational platforms, e.g. the Table for Democracy, served as a more permanent space of encounter and only occasionally for the preparation of contentious performances. These two types of processes, cooperation and platform building, were essential for organizing contentious actions in a multi-organizational social movement field.

Second, activists also organized contentious action *outside* of the limits of established organizational structures. The prime example is the case of the defense of the voting stations on October 1. While most organizers were members of pre-existing organizations and political parties, the role of these organizations in the preparation was limited – except for the local AMPAs, which organized many of the occupations of the voting stations. Neither of the large SMOs, ANC and Òmnium Cultural, organized the defense of the voting stations. As mentioned before, the ANC only mobilized for people to gather outside the voting stations, but not to occupy them or to resist the police intervention. Organizers and activists gathered in meetings and assemblies in neighborhoods and villages throughout Catalonia, creating spaces of encounter that were outside the boundaries of existing organizations and parties. With the support of messenger applications and Twitter, organizers managed to coordinate the required tasks for the occupation and defense of the voting stations.

Previous research has suggested that these forms of organizing are more prone to spontaneity. Snow and Moss (2014, 1128) suggested that "nonhierarchical movements value and often rely on impromptu contributions by participants," and therefore "are more likely to produce unplanned actions and dynamics." The analysis presented here somewhat supports Snow and Moss's assertion, because the defense of the voting stations, which had the lowest implication of hierarchical SMOs, also involved the highest degree of spontaneous action. There was no formal organization controlling the action through rules, procedures, and sanctions. However, as pointed out before, spontaneous actions were limited to singular clashes with police in some voting stations. This makes the defense of the voting stations a curious case of collective action: How was it possible to prepare the defense outside the boundaries of established organizations? I have already pointed out some of the features of the organizing process here, but I devote more attention to this puzzle in the next chapter.

The comparison between the Diada and the other cases suggests that protest organizing transcends organizational boundaries in intense times. One might conclude that organizations prepare protests "on their own" in normal times, whereas activists are more likely to work together across organizational boundaries in intense times – even outside formal organizations. However, this inference appears to be overdrawn in a broader perspective. Of course SMOs also collaborate and form platforms in normal times. Vice-versa, some organizations might keep preparations within their boundaries in intense times, too.

3.2   From Deliberation to Directing

The 1-O episode of contention not only impacted the structural and process levels of the organizational dimension of the movement, but also the organizational practices within these structures and processes. As I have described in chapter 5, deliberation was an important practice for many collective actors in the independence movement in normal times. Groups in the independentist Left and the ANC employed deliberative assemblies for communication and decision making. This changed fundamentally in the 1-O episode of contention. The data suggested that instead of deliberation, organizers employed directing much more frequently. This was most visible in two examples: the ANC and the student platform UxR.

First, in the months before the 1-O referendum, some organizational practices at the national level of the ANC changed. During this time, the ANC was part of the *Estat Major*, which was a committee in which the Catalan president and vice president, the leaders of the three pro-independence parties, as well as the presidents of Òmnium Cultural, and the AMI participated. For the ANC, President Jordi Sànchez took part in the meetings of the committee. My data did

not reveal very much about what was discussed or decided in the Estat Major, but it became clear that it had an important coordinating role between the Catalan government, the independentist parties, and the major civil society associations. The ANC's National Secretariat had delegated the power to negotiate this line to its president Jordi Sànchez. This meant a departure from usual practice within the organization. Organizer Emma, who was part of the leadership at that time, described this as follows:

> In some way, the ANC *is* assemblarian, but in the last year, well it stopped being it in the sense that decision had to be made quickly. And, moreover, in small committees. Imagine we explain October 1 to 77 people [of the national secretariat], who then explain it to 77 more, then it's inevitable that the issue comes to light […] So we understand that in this moment the decisions had to be differently, not in an assemblarian way.

This quote highlights that the ANC in normal times worked in an *assemblarian* way – it is called *Assemblea* Nacional Catalana after all. In chapter 5, I have already explained that interviewees used the term assemblarian not just to describe the narrow practice of assemblies, but that it also carries connotations of deliberative and participatory democracy. I have called this combination *deliberative assemblies*.

The piece of data also shows that the ANC deviated substantially from its normal practices and "stopped being" assemblarian in the time around the 1-O referendum. Instead, decisions were taken by the smallest circle of leaders. This suggests that there was a shift in the relationships of organizational practices: from a texture that involved a close connection between deliberation and assemblies to more directing and closed meetings. Of course, this change did not come without tension, as Emma went on to explain:

> This produced conflicts, because you don't do it in the assemblarian way and suddenly a lot of information is not passed on and you don't really know what you're doing. At least I felt a bit useless during this time. Like, ok, I'm wasting my Saturday morning, because they just say to me that they can't tell me anything.

Emma stressed again that, decisions were not taken in deliberative assemblies during this time, but primarily by the leadership of the ANC. The two quotes also reveal the lack of transparency in this unusual mode of organizing. Even the members of the National Secretariat did not receive full information about what the leadership was discussing with the political parties and the Catalan government in the Estat Major. This shattered the trust in the political parties but also in the ANC leadership. Enric, who also was a member of the national secretariat at the time, asked a rhetorical question in the interview.

> How do I tell people to have trust in [the political parties]? The people won't have trust. In the moment I tell them this, they will stop trusting me.

The less transparent and less assemblarian mode of organizing caught many mid-level organizers between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, the ANC leadership was asking them for confidence, and on the other hand, their constituencies were holding them accountable.

These findings suggest that in the time before the 1-O referendum, there was a transformation in the texture of organizational practices in the ANC. In normal times, the ANC combined deliberation and open assemblies, but during this period of time, there was a larger emphasis on directing and closed meetings. This created a lack of transparency within the organization and was met with conflict. The quotes from both Enric and Emma were prompted by the question "how has the 1-O changed the ANC?" implying that the interviewees understood them as major changes and not just some side development. At the same time, this highlights the importance of these shifts in the organizational practice for the interviewees.

The second example for the shift from deliberation to directing is the organizing process of the occupation of the University of Barcelona. The occupation was organized by the student platform UxR, which was the idea of some experienced young activists who had been organizers in the student union SEPC and the left-wing youth organization Arran. This group of unaffiliated organizers brought together the leaderships of the SEPC and the JERC, the youth wing of ERC. The platform also included representatives from Arran, the AJUP, and the JNC, the youth wing of the PDeCAT.

During the occupation of the University, the platform called for open assemblies. However, as interviews with the former leadership of the platform shows, there was no deliberation in these assemblies. Organizer Ester, for example, states that the assemblies were "super prepared." While the leadership kept in the background, rank-and-file members of the SEPC and the JERC "knew what they had to say." In this way, the outcome "was always as it had to be." According to organizer Pere, there was no decision making in these assemblies:

> There was a little bit of debate, but we cut it quite a bit. Without being rude. You have to know how to cut a debate delicately or to table it for the next day […] if one member would be like "no, because," then we would cut them "shut up, because we're acting in the interest of the country, this needs to work well." Like this you silence internal dissent.

The organizers would make concessions to some extent, but if a controversial issue came up, they would have the debate silenced immediately. Hence, deliberative practices were basically absent from the open assemblies in the preparation and managing of the occupation of the University of Barcelona. In this regard, the case was very similar to the defense of the voting stations (see

chapter 8), but there was a crucial difference: the UxR organizers actively suppressed deliberative practices, whereas there was no evidence for that in defense of the voting stations.

Instead of open assemblies, the interview data showed that the leadership group of UxR had a strong role in the organizing process. Ester described that it was the leadership group of the platform who took the decisions:

> In the end we decided what kind of activities we would do, which ones not, and so on. We were quite few, 10 or 12. Among them there some which represent the SEPC and the JERC most of all, but the others we were independents who didn't represent anybody in reality.

The important decisions were taken within the leadership group, who directed the occupation with the help of activists from the member organizations of the platform. Moreover, the leadership controlled all the necessary resources, from campaign material such as flyers, posters, and paint to food and money. All in all, Pere admitted that the "occupation […] was remotely controlled top-down. It's true. I'm sorry, but it's true." When activists tried to hold open assemblies, the leadership tried to manipulate debates in order to maintain control over the occupation. Ester even claimed that this "false democracy" was key to the success of the occupation.

UxR was a new platform that emerged in the months before the 1-O referendum. Hence, it is difficult to speak of organizational change in this case. Nevertheless, from the interviews with Pere and Ester, it became clear that the top-down mode of organizing, which limited decision-making to the leadership group and placed emphasis on directing, was not usual practice. Most of the organizers of UxR came from organizations of the independentist Left, such as SEPC and Arran, which championed deliberative practices.

Deliberation had been an important organizational practice in the independence movement in normal times. Organizations in the independentist Left had relied on open deliberative assemblies. The ANC had combined deliberative assemblies with deliberations in their leadership group. This changed dramatically in intense times. These two examples show that deliberation as a practice became less important during the 1-O episode of contention. Instead of deliberation, organizers in the ANC and UxR made decisions in small circles and relied much more on directing in protest organizing processes.

3.3 Four Mechanisms in Intense Times

The time around the 1-O referendum represented a highly contentious episode. It was a period of constant mobilization and confrontation between the independence movement and the actors of the Spanish state. Organizational processes and practices in this intense time differed very much

from previous normal times of conflict. Organizing processes were much shorter, took place between or outside organizations, and involved more directing than deliberation.

In the conceptual chapter of this dissertation I have theorized three mechanisms that may impact protest organizing in intense times: opponent action, uncertainty, and time pressure. These three mechanisms were recognizable in the empirical material. First, interviewees stressed the role of opponent action in intense times. In September 2017, Spanish state actors intensified repressive action against Catalan government to prevent the referendum (see chapter 6). Opponents acted more often and more directly against civil society actors too. Intense times thus created a need to organize protest in response to these actions. Second, opponent action created uncertainty. In the weeks before the 1-O, the Catalan autonomous institutions were paralyzed and it was unclear whether they had the capacity to organize the referendum. In a similar vein, ANC and Òmnium Cultural seemed stuck in their repertoires and practices from normal times. This created a climate of uncertainty to which organizers responded and started to take the defense of the voting stations in their own hands – outside the boundaries of the established organizations. Opponent action and uncertainty also led to more directing in these processes. Organizers feared repression, which is why they often shared crucial information only within small leadership circles. Directives to larger masses were limited to essential information and decisions. Third, interviewees highlighted the necessity for quick organizing under time pressure. In the piece of data quoted above, Emma stressed that "decisions had to be made quickly." The prime example was the protest on September 20, which was organized by the leaderships of ANC and Òmnium Cultural only within a couple of hours. In the intense 1-O episode, there was simply no time for deliberation with large assemblies. Instead, organizers made decisions in small groups and communicated them to other activists through directing.

Finally, the data suggested there was a fourth mechanisms, which was not theorized beforehand. The features of protest organizing in intense times described here – shorter processes outside and between organizations with less deliberation and more directing – can all be linked to the existence of a common goal among activists. In September 2017, the diverse actors of the independence movement were united by a single aim: to realize the referendum on independence on October 1. On the one hand, interviewees suggested that there often was no *need* for deliberation and extended organizing processes, because the goal was clear to everybody. On the other hand, some interviewees described how the shared goal was used to silence dissenting voices within the organizing process. Pere, for example, explained that the occupation of the university was successful

> because there was a very clear common goal, which is October 1. When you have a common goals, you can tell people – in the short run – "put your social demands on hold, your left-wing, your right-wing demands, your vegan demands, your feminist demands, put it on hold, because there is a common benefit in the short term."

This suggests that vertical forms of organizing – for instance the unusual combination of public assemblies with directing – were more easily accepted by activists, because there was a common goal. The goal "defending the referendum" was clear and tangible in the near future. Movement strategy as a mechanism also carried a normative component. It becomes clear from the quotes I have shown here that organizers put them forward as justifications for less deliberative and participatory practices of organizing. As such, they should be put in a narrative perspective and handled with care. Interviewees also highlighted the limits of directed organizing. Organizer Pere stated that "of you course you cannot do this indefinitely […] It can only be a short period of time and for a real, tangible goal, you know?"

In short, the specific texture of organizational practices can be related to four mechanisms that were at play during the intense 1-O episode: opponent action, uncertainty, time pressure, and strategy. These mechanisms led to more directing and less deliberation in the organizing processes.

4 CONCLUSION

On September 7, the Spanish Constitutional Court suspended the Law 19/2017 on the Referendum on Self-Determination, which had been approved only the day before by the Catalan parliament. This ruling put the 1-O referendum and its preparation in jeopardy. It created a climate of uncertainty in the independence movement and provided the legal basis for the repression against civil society actors, who increasingly needed to act under time pressure. But the referendum also represented a shared goal around which the movement could rally. In the previous sections, I have shown how these four mechanisms impacted the ways in which movement actors organized secessionist protest in the 1-O episode of contention.

However, the first protest was not any different from normal times of secessionist conflict. The ANC organized the Diada in a meticulous and elongated preparatory process. The Diada organizing process suggested that there was some resilience, some inertia of the major SMOs. Intense times do not change everything.

After the Diada, however, protest organizing changed substantively. When the Spanish Civil Guard searched the Catalan Department of Economy for documents related to the referendum on September 20, Òmnium Cultural and ANC quickly called for protesters to gather outside the building to obstruct the officers' exit. This was organized by the organizations' leadership without much deliberation over instant messenger applications. The protest on September 20 was a turning

point because it was the first of a series of more disruptive actions. It appeared that the two large associations could draw on their organizational capacity and mobilize and did not necessarily need long preparations.

This impression did not hold up for the 1-O referendum itself. ANC and Òmnium Cultural seemed paralyzed and refused to call for disruptive actions to prevent the Spanish police from intervening in the vote. In response to this void, activists from different backgrounds gathered at the local level to create the CDRs: using a combination of open assemblies and instant messenger applications, organizers directed the occupation of voting stations. The interviewed organizers felt that the Generalitat had lost control of the referendum and that they needed to take care of it themselves. Around the same time, the student platform UxR occupied the historic building of the University of Barcelona. The occupation was also organized through directed open assemblies.

The CDRs mobilized thousands of voters to prevent the Spanish police from entering the voting stations to confiscate ballot boxes. These efforts were successful in most voting stations and the referendum could go ahead. However, on numerous occasions the police tried to force their way through the masses gathered outside the voting stations, leaving almost one thousand people injured. Two days after the referendum, protesters used the occasion of the general strike to turn out massively in the street to condemn police violence. Many public services and private firms remained closed for the day. In short, protest became much more disruptive after the Diada, while its organizing was shorter, less deliberative, and more directed.

In addition, the five contentious performances analyzed here were organized by a variety of collective actors with different organizational forms. In most cases, these actors collaborated in some way or the other. This shows that organizations represented an important factor in the 1-O episode. Nevertheless, the defense of the voting stations was prepared and planned largely outside the boundaries of existing SMOs. This suggests that organizational structures can be an important basis for organized contentious action – but they are not a necessary condition. I tackle this problem in the next chapter on organizing *outside* formal organization.

The chapter shows that protest organizing in intense times differs very much from normal times. Interviewee Ester suggested that the organizing in UxR was "not a moment of […] classic functioning." The quote illustrates perfectly that organizational process and practices in the 1-O episode were a departure from the usual mode of organizing in the independence movement. Most existing approaches to organizational change in contentious politics highlight long-term trends such as technological change, oligarchization, radicalization, or moderation of movements. In contrast, this chapter has revealed how volatile protest organizing can be. When interactions between challengers and the host state intensify, organizational practices and processes may

transform substantively within a couple of weeks. The 1-O referendum as the central event functioned as a catalyzer for this development.

Finally, Ester also pointed at the limits of directed and quick organizing. She said in the interview that it "worked well, but it has a lot of limitations. It works well only [when applied] moderately in the long run." It is far from certain whether all the changes I have described in this chapter were reversed after the 1-O episode of contention. The fourth part of this dissertation (chapters 9, 10, and 11) addresses this problem.

Chapter Eight

ORGANIZING PROTEST OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS. THE DEFENSE OF THE VOTING STATIONS

In spite of the long-standing interest of movement scholars in the organizational dimension of social movements, their focus has largely remained on organizational entities and, in particular, formal SMOs (Clemens & Minkoff, 2004; Kriesi, 1996; McAdam & Scott, 2005; McCarthy & Zald, 1973, 1977; Minkoff & McCarthy, 2005). As Dieter Rucht (2017, 1679) has recently pointed out, "few empirical studies were undertaken to demonstrate the actual requirements and processes of organizing protest." In my view, this blind spot has led to an equation of "organized protest" with "protest organized by an organization." But as I have argued in the conceptual part of this dissertation, the process of protest organizing must be distinguished from SMOs as organizational entities. There are cases in which the process of protest organizing does not take place within organizations. Empirical research has found that a large part of organizing takes place at the meso level *between* organizations (Della Porta and Rucht 2015; Diani 2015; Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Haug 2013; Haug, Haeringer, and Mosca 2009). Organization theorists have even suggested that organizing may take place *outside* of formal organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 2019b; Ahrne, Brunsson, and Seidl 2016).

This chapter takes up the latter idea by studying a case of protest organizing outside formal organizations: the defense of the voting stations during the Catalan referendum on independence on October 1, 2017. Neither of the two major SMOs, the ANC and Òmnium Cultural, played any role in the preparations of the protest. In fact, the empirical evidence shows that the ANC hindered the mobilization by calling followers exclusively to gather outside the voting stations and not to occupy and defend them against police intervention. The formal organizations were, using Czarniawska's (2013) phrase, "obstacles to organizing." How was it possible to organize the defense of the voting stations without the support of the existing SMOs?

This chapter explores the curious case of the defense of the voting station as a case of organizing *outside* of formal organizations. I delve deeper into what Brown and Duguid (2000, 95;

cited in: Whittington 2003) called the "internal life of processes." I show that decision-making and communication *practices* were instrumental in the organizing process of the protest. Activists combined public assemblies, messenger applications, and what I call *directing* to prepare and plan contentious action. Outside the boundaries of formal organizations, the skills and experiences of activists played a crucial role in organizing mass protest. Before developing this argument in detail, I elaborate on the puzzle of organizing outside organizations in the next section.

1   THE PUZZLE: WHEN ORGANIZATIONS ARE OBSTACLES TO ORGANIZING

Since the 1970s, social movement studies have been emphasized the importance of organizational structures as a basis for contentious action. In contrast to earlier collective behavior approaches, scholars pointed out the role of social movement infrastructures, most importantly organizations and their resources (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977). SMOs fulfill a series of important functions for social movements: they recruit participants, raise funds and other resources, and create solidarity and identity (Della Porta and Diani 2006, 137). Scholars suggested represent crucial, if not necessary, preconditions for contentious action (Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow 1989; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1986). Tilly (1995, 32) argued that "whatever stress ordinary people may have endured, the critical difference between action and inaction was the extent to which they had become involved in organized movements." Social movements – as a category of action, not as an actor – were regarded as inherently organized, and that meant: based on organizations (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004a, 10; Tilly 2004, 3; Tilly and Tarrow 2015, 11).

The role of the two large formal SMOs (the ANC and Òmnium Cultural) was rather limited in the case of the defense of the voting stations on the October 1, 2017. While the two SMOs had been the main drivers of mobilization for much of the secessionist cycle of contention, they were not directly involved in what arguably represents the peak of contention. In fact, the data show that the ANC hindered the mobilization by calling followers exclusively to gather *outside* the voting stations and not to occupy and defend them against police intervention. Only when the occupations were already under way the ANC did change its stance. Organizer Carme, a member of the ANC leadership looked back on this decision in the interview. When the plans for the referendum were announced, the ANC was part of the Estat Major, a coordinating committee composed of the Catalan president and vice president, the leaders of the three pro-independence parties, as well as the presidents of ANC, Òmnium Cultural, and the Associació de Municipis per la Independència (the organization of pro-independence mayors). These different actors negotiated a common strategy for the referendum, as Carme describes.

> I: Because in the Estat Major, there was only the president?

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R: Of course, that's why. [The Secretariat] had to delegate to him. And well, looking back everything is easy, no? But in this moment, maybe some decisions should have been taken another way. So that role of the ANC the day before the vote would have been a bit, hmm, stronger. Which had been a bit, deluded, because we only called to gather outside. Basically, we didn't know well whether it would be possible to do [the referendum]. Well, now it's very easy to say, but those were difficult moments and a decision had to be made. And I think, as ANC, we didn't make a good choice convening people only outside the voting station with the ballot in hand.

The passage displays a high level of self-critique, essentially saying that, in retrospective, the decision was a mistake. She also makes clear that the ANC's position was influenced by its participation in the Estat Major.

R: What happened is that – since the ANC also participated in the Estat Major, this also conditioned our stance on October 1, which perhaps followed the line agreed between everybody.

The ANC's decision not to call for the occupation and defense of the voting stations was fundamentally shaped by the common line of action that had been agreed upon by the regional government, the parties, and the civil society associations. For the ANC, this process also meant a departure from its decentralized decision making, as the leadership had delegated all negotiating power to its president, Carme explains. The inaction of the ANC had also been noted – and often criticized – by other collective actors. Organizer Joana, for example, describes the situation as follows:

The independence movement paid attention to two major organizations, which are Òmnium and ANC, because of their successful mobilizations. But they have a handicap, which is that there is not a real political participation of the people who go to these manifestations. They have massive turnout, but they do not imply more than standing still in a place for some hours. And these organizations, at the moment of organizing the referendum, together with the government, who had to do it – they can't do it. For legal reasons, basically because their organizations are constantly under attack.

The two major organizations, ANC and Òmnium Cultural, had pushed the secessionist cycle of contention mainly through contained performances such as the yearly Diada manifestation. Yet, in the crucial moment of the referendum, they were paralyzed. As Joana's comment suggests, it was for fear of legal repression that ANC and Òmnium Cultural did not call for the occupation of the voting stations. Moreover, both the two organizations' close links with the regional institutions might have discouraged them from initiating more disruptive actions.

Despite the inaction of the two major pro-independence SMOs, disruptive action *did* occur on October 1. The occupations of the voting stations and their defense against the Spanish police

intervention were no ad-hoc actions either. Although some spontaneous lines of contentious action unfolded on the day of the referendum, there is much more evidence in the data this is of actions that were planned and prepared ahead of time. This presents a puzzle for social movement research: If the defense of the voting stations was neither spontaneous, nor initiated by SMOs, then *how* was it organized?

Existing research has suggested that SMOs as formal and complex organizations are not the only organizational form that can serve as a basis for contentious action. McCarthy (1996), for example, develops a typology of both formal and informal, of movement and non-movement structures, ranging from friendship networks, to churches and unions, to affinity groups, to SMOs and protest committees. These are all *mobilizing structures*, i.e. "those agreed upon ways of engaging in collective action which include particular 'tactical repertoires,' particular 'social movement organizational' forms, and 'modular social movement repertoires," but also "the range of everyday life micromobilization structural social locations that are not aimed primarily at movement mobilization, but where mobilization may be generated" (McCarthy 1996, 141). In general, there has been agreement that *some* kind of social movement structure is crucial for contentious action, as John McCarthy (1996, 141) points out: "Scholars of social movements have come to a quite broad consensus about the importance of mobilizing structures for understanding the trajectory of particular social movements and broader social movement cycles."[30]

Two kinds of mobilizing structures can be identified in the organizing process of the defense of the voting stations. First, I have already described the role of the AMPAs in promoting and planning the occupation of those voting stations that were public schools. They used a loophole in the law, which allowed to maintain public schools open for the weekend if extracurricular activities for the pupils are held. Although the AMPAs generally do not have any links with the independence movement and are largely apolitical associations, they constituted an important link between the public schools as an institutional space and the voluntary mobilizations in the neighborhoods.

Second, while political parties and SMOs (including ANC and Òmnium Cultural) did not play any role in the organizing of the defense, the networks between their members at the neighborhood, small town, and village level represented an important structural basis for the preparatory process. In many cases, they came together with militants from the pro-independence

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[30] In the same volume, Rucht (1996, 185) states that "few social movement scholars doubt that movement networks and organizations have a strong impact on strategies, mobilization, and success".

parties to campaign for the referendum months before the defense of the voting stations was organized. Quite often, this process started with a meeting, as organizer Carles explains:

> R: One year before the 1-O, people from the Neighborhood Association, from other organizations, from the parties, mostly Esquerra and CUP, because Convergència, for participation is a bit weak- a bit weak with people- and so we did a meeting between some of us.
>
> I: When? When was that?
>
> R: One year before the 1-O. It wasn't about the defense of the referendum that day, but- we have to inform the people, the neighbors about the referendum, that it's not about being in favor or against independence, but that it's a matter of voting, of participation, and so on, of democracy. Not the defense, more about the participatory process. And that's what we did.

From these kinds of meetings between local militants of pro-independence parties and members of organizations emerged a network that served as an important basis for the defense of the voting stations. These local networks represent the "embryo" (Interview Gabriel) of the open spaces and encounters appearing in the weeks before the referendum, often under the label CDR. It cannot be neglected that these networks represent an important movement infrastructure, but they are insufficient to explain the defense of the voting stations.

This is a threefold argument. First, the network structures must be distinguished from the CDRs, which represent a different phenomenon. Reducing the CDRs to the networks between activists would miss their distinct character as non-partisan public space. Second, there is no doubt that the CDRs were the most important element in the organizing process. Interviewees stress that without the CDRs, the referendum would not have happened. Third, it would be misguided to describe the CDRs before the referendum as an organizational structure, even just as an "emergent structure" (Killian 1984). If the term mobilizing *structure* signifies "a pattern of more or less stable relationships within and between elements of a larger entity"), with "some degree of regularity and therefore predictability" (Rucht, 2013, p. 170) , then the CDRs *before* the referendum hardly qualify as structures at all. Interviewees describe the CDRs at this point in time as a space rather than as a collective actor. The relationships among activists had not stabilized yet and would change dramatically with the upcoming events. They were still in a process of "organizational becoming" (Tsoukas and Chia 2002).

In sum, the role of movement infrastructures for the defense of the voting stations was rather limited. Neither the two large SMOs, nor the pre-existing activist networks account for the organizing process. Instead, the defense of the voting stations represents a case of organizing

outside organizations. My central claim in this chapter is that communication and decision-making *practices* were instrumental in this particular organizing process. The next section present this argument.

2 ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES IN THE DEFENSE OF THE VOTING STATIONS

The key factor in the organizing process was the emergence of open initiatives for the defense of the referendum at the local level. On the one hand, the CDRs involved experienced organizers from different organizational backgrounds: members of the large associations ANC and Òmnium Cultural; militants from the local branches of the independentist parties PDeCAT, ERC, and CUP; members from youth organizations (e.g., Arran and JERC); and activists from student groups (e.g., SEPC and UxR). On the other hand, the CDRs were not an interorganizational setting, but a neutral space that also included activists from other social movements that defended the right to decide (e.g., militants from Barcelona En Comù or the Plataforma de Afectadas por la Hipoteca), neighborhood associations, as well as many participants without any affiliation or prior activist experience.

The next sections turn to the specific practices in the CDRs in the few days before the referendum of October 1. The next section builds directly on the abstract model of organizational practices, which I have presented in chapter 5. In that chapter, I have outlined generalized accounts of four organizational practices that emerged from the data. On the one side, deliberation and directing as decision-making practices, and on the other side, public assemblies and messenger applications as communication practices. In the next section, I examine how experienced organizers used *combinations* of these practices in the defense of the voting stations. I argue that three of the four practices were key in the organizing process: public assemblies, instant messenger applications, and directing. First, however, I present the most notable finding about the organizing process: the absence of deliberation.

2.1 Consensus without Deliberation

The first remarkable observation about the defense of the voting stations is the almost complete absence of conflict among activists during the preparations. Practically all interviewees answered in the negative when I asked them about tensions and debates in the days before the referendum. Consider the answer of CDR organizer Xavi for example:

> R: No. No, in fact, no. In the beginning, or rather before October 1, and the organization of October 1, conflict was practically absent. There was really a unity of action, which I have seen few times, in organization in general, because usually there always exists

[conflict]. But the truth is there was very little dispute, very little debate, and the idea what had to be done and how was quite clear.

Xavi stated very clearly that there was basically no debate or conflict in the organizing in the CDR in Sabadell before October 1. Instead, there was what he called "unity of action," and what Joana, another organizer from the CDR in Sabadell, dubbed "general consensus:" a common willingness to go ahead and prepare the defense of the voting stations. This pattern was not unique to Sabadell, but it was clearly visible throughout the interview data. The only contrary evidence came from small town Fastiada, where conflicts between organizers from different parties and organizations persisted during the preparatory process (Interviews Oriol, Pasqual). But overall, conflict was absent, as expert Roger summed up: "In this moment, the debate was zero, because we all agreed. We all agreed. For the strategy for October 1, there was no dissidence, no dissent, no discrepancies, and no divergences."

The same applied not only to the preparations, but also to the actions during actual defense of the voting stations; there was no evidence of disagreements among activists and voters. During the tense day of the referendum, the unity described above did not fall apart under the pressure of police interventions. For example, when I asked organizer Carles whether there was any moment of conflict during the defense, he responded: "None. No, everybody knew what had to be done. We already knew for a couple of months that this would come." Virtually all interviewees answered the question about conflict during the defense in the negative. In most cases, there was not even a discussion about what to do.

The lack of conflict is particularly surprising given that both during the preparations for the defense and on the day of the referendum itself, activists from very different backgrounds came together. As Joana pointed out, "there were none of the previous squabbles among these organizations, which do not share their forms of seeing politics. In this moment, there was no conflict between them."

Interviewees had their own explanations as to why this remarkable unity emerged during this short period of time. Organizer Enric, from the ANC, attributed this to the level of trust among activists, Xavi pointed out that the goal of the organizing was very clear, and Joana and Judit suggested that the conflict with the Spanish state created internal unity in the movement. I am not so much interested in the reasons why there was no conflict, but what it tells us about organizational practices.

Simply focusing on consensus, one could rush to conclude that the preparations were ordered by deliberative practice. Deliberation refers to the practice of overcoming disagreement through the exchange of arguments, narratives, or testimonies to make decisions (Chambers 2003;

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Mansbridge et al. 2012; Thompson 2008). Previous research revealed the role of deliberation in many progressive social movements, such as the global justice movement (Della Porta 2009a; Della Porta and Rucht 2015), the Spanish indignados (Della Porta 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2014; Nez 2012), and the French nuit debout protests (Felicetti and Della Porta 2018).

However, the interview data showed that the opposite was the case in the defense of the voting stations: consensus was not the result of activists overcoming disagreements through debate. Joana described an open assemblies that was called by the organizers in Sabadell a couple of days before the referendum:

> R: There were 300 people. I don't think anybody expected so many people in every neighborhood. In another area, and in the center of Sabadell, there were maybe almost 2000. Of course, it's quite difficult. Yes, we had a microphone, and we plugged it in at the civic center which was right there. And we explained what had happened at the assembly before, how it was formed, that we were coordinators, but there could be more coordinator, that it was an assembly and we would decide about the proposal to occupy the schools from Friday on if possible, if not on Saturday. And of course, there were questions, but basically, we were asking these 300 people, "well, how many of you agree to occupy?" And it was the great majority […]
>
> I: So it was more of an informative assembly?
>
> R: Yeah, it was-
>
> I: You didn't make the decision with 300 people?
>
> R: No, no, big decisions were not taken, most of all, because there was a proposal already and that proposal was accepted.

In the case of the CDR Sabadell, the organizers used the public assembly for two things. First, to recruit other activists as organizers (or coordinators as Joana called it) and second, to bring forth a proposal to occupy the voting stations. There was little debate about the proposal; the organizers were merely seeking the consent of other activists. Although much of the organizing was done in public assemblies, activists did not deliberate, as organizer Xavi underlined:

> Because in the end it's what I told you, since the objective was very concrete, very specific, the assemblies weren't deliberative spaces, or like, there was no deliberative element, but rather an element almost as of a transmission belt.

The extract from the interview shows that deliberation was completely absent from the preparatory process. This was a common pattern in the descriptions of the assemblies before the referendum. Interviewees from different voting stations and different backgrounds all reported

the absence of debate and disagreement. Normally, the practices of public assemblies and deliberation are closely connected in social movements, but in the case of the defense of the voting stations, they were not. This shows that the consensus described by the interviewees was not the result of deliberation. Instead, I suggest it is the expression of another practice, which played a greater role than deliberation in the defense of the voting stations: directing.

2.2 Combining Directing, Assemblies, and Messengers

Conflict was largely absent during the process of preparing the defense of the voting stations. This does not mean, however, that the contentious performance was a self-fulfilling prophecy; the organizing still had to be accomplished. From the analysis of the empirical material, it became clear that the practice of what I call *directing* was instrumental in coordinating the preparatory activities.

First of all, directing naturally is a relational practice, because it cannot be performed by individuals in isolation. It establishes a relationship between those who direct – which I will call directors – and those who are directed. Second, directing other people means to exercise power. However, it refers to a relationship where those directing other activists do not have coercive means to actually impose their will on them. Interviewees sometimes speak of "giving orders," but these orders require the compliance of other participants, rather than disobedience. This is why I prefer the label *directing* over the more coercive-sounding *ordering*. Third, while directing does not involve coercion, it does not mean that directing cannot rest on some sort of formalized authority. Social movements delegate authority to steering groups and other forms of "organized power" (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011), which often direct other participants. However, the two should not be equated. Activists who hold formal authority in social movements might still seek deliberation with other participants. Conversely, even activists who do not occupy a formal role might direct others at times. Fourth, the narrow practice of directing is more closely related to the notion of leadership – but it should also be distinguished from it. Indeed, one could rush to conceptualize the relationship of directors and directed as leaders and followers. However, the concept of leadership is broader than the narrow practice of directing. Ganz (2010, 527) defines leadership as "accepting responsibility to create conditions that enable others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty." But leaders do much more than direct other people. For instance, Ganz and McKenna (2017) describe five types of leadership practices: relationship building, narrative, strategy, structure, and action. All these practices may involve directing – but directing is not inherent to them.

In the defense of the voting stations, there was evidence of three instances of directing: first, organizers combined directing with public assemblies, and second, they combined directing with the use of instant messenger applications. Third, directing was also prominent during the actual defense of the voting stations.

First, activists held open assemblies in villages, small towns, and the neighborhoods of larger cities throughout Catalonia in September 2017 with the intention of preparing the defense of the voting stations. In the literature, an assembly is described as a large meeting that allows for some "side involvement" (Goffman in Haug 2013: 710). A meeting is defined as a temporary gathering of at least three people in which communication is oriented to some common business (Boden 1994, 90–99; Haug 2010, 80, 2013, 709; Schwartzman 1989, 7). Openness was crucial to the public assemblies in the organizing process. At least theoretically, people from the outside were able to join and participate in the assembly.

As shown in the previous section, there was not a lot of deliberation in these public assemblies. Nevertheless, they played a crucial role as "transmission belts," as interviewee Xavi calls them, in the organizing process. The analysis of the empirical data showed that organizers used these public assemblies to give directions to other participants. This is why CDR organizer Carles called them "directed assemblies" (*asambleas dirgistas*):

> So I took the microphone and said "Listen people, come here, we need to do this" and I don't know what. There was an idea already. It was a very directed assembly. It was not participatory, because there were many people who had no experience in the topic and, moreover, they were quite nervous. Let's be honest, we were all feeling pretty bad, but we have a bit more activist experience and we have lived through something like that already, no? So it was a bit directed, saying "OK, between 8 and 10 on Friday we have to be here." Those who knew when the ballot boxes would come, we did not share that information, but we said "OK, calm down, we know the ballot boxes will come and we know the person who has them."

This passage from the interview with Carles illustrates how the practice of directing was performed in these open assemblies. Carles and the other organizers were giving instructions to other participants about what to do at what time. Thereby, the directed assemblies ordered the preparatory activities. The directed assemblies represented a peculiar texture of organizational practice. They maintained the core practice of public assemblies (multiparty talk, facilitation, and openness) and were combined with organizers giving instructions to other activists. These assemblies were crucial in the preparatory process, because they provided a space for encounter at the local level. Their public and open character allowed activists from different backgrounds to come together and work on the preparations for the defense of the voting stations. Creating this

kind of organizational setting was of great importance, because the organizing process occurred outside of organizations.

Second, organizers did not only direct through public assemblies, but also through instant messenger applications. Messenger applications were used primarily through mobile phones, which have become a key technology for protesters because of their versatility, allowing for communication with other activists, authorities, and the wider public (Neumayer and Stald 2014). In the days before the referendum, organizers were passing instructions through group chats to organize the preparations of the defense of the voting stations. Telegram was particularly useful for organizers because it offered this kind of communication. Organizer Enric describes how organizers practiced directing through Telegram.

> R: How were these groups born? And who was putting content on Telegram?

> I: Look, this is very easy. Today, with this tool that I have here, which is a mobile phone, if you have a little bit of organization, and you know a little bit of marketing and how to manage this, it's very easy to create a nucleus who gives certain orders, let's say at the head of all of this. And from there, it branches out, it's like pyramid. It branches out and people organize. Everybody knew they had certain freedom, but that some norms needed to be followed. Not because they were written somewhere, but purely because of common sense. Of course, there were coming prepared things. The topic of how to treat the Mossos, not to confront the National Police nor the Civil Guard, to always maintain a peaceful tone. And you notice, that practically, that was the norm in all the videos you can see.

Organizers combined the use of instant messenger applications with the practice of directing to give instructions about preparatory activities prior to the referendum. The transcript also shows how they could diffuse norms about how to behave during the defense of the referendum through the combination of these two practices. The use of instant messengers had the advantage that it could reach a great number of activists in a short time. In some cases, this was combined with the practice of directed assemblies, but in others, directions were given exclusively through IMAs, as Gabriel described. In the Barcelona neighborhood, where he participated, "before [the 1-O], there were no assemblies, it was all through WhatsApp."

Third, directing also played a role in the voting stations itself. Organizers tried to control the protest action by giving instructions to the activists and voters who were gathering in and around the voting stations. Activist Quim, who became a CDR organizer only after the referendum, told that "those who were in charge of the voting stations did give some orders, because from the roof they said 'be careful to get together,' 'now relax,' 'please everybody in a single line,' 'if we shout, you all come here.'" The other participants were "at the orders" of the organizers.

Another example comes from a voting station in L'Hospitalet de Llobregat, where organizer Enric had the idea to use trash cans to block the road access to the building where the voting station was located. In the interview, Enric reported that he directed to the other participants that they "pull them out from where they were and that they put them basically at the extremes of the street." Even if this would not have stopped the police, it would have at least slowed them down. Enric was giving directions: "If they come to take the trash cans, the people who are in line come and put yourselves behind the trash cans and the others stay on the sides." In the end, this would not even be necessary, because the police only passed the voting stations but did not intervene. These two pieces of data illustrate that directing was not only relevant in combination with public assemblies and instant messaging in the preparations, but also continued during the defense of the voting stations.

2.3 Organizational Practices beyond Organizations

The analysis of the empirical material revealed that organizers employed a combination of directing, public assemblies, and instant messaging applications for the preparation of the defense of the voting stations, while deliberative practices were practically absent in the process. Directing, public assemblies, and instant messaging formed what Gherardi (2006, 2012) called a *texture* of practices. In the absence of formal organizations, this texture of practice acquired organizational qualities. The practices structured collective action in two ways: through communication and decision making.

First, both public assemblies and instant messengers established communication flows that are usually found within formal organizations. As mentioned before, public assemblies essentially provided a space of encounter at the local level, which allowed activists from different backgrounds to come together in the squares and streets of neighborhoods and villages. Instant messaging applications had a similar role at the digital level, creating communication channels between organizers and activists. Often the digital and face-to-face levels were interlocked. In many voting stations, activists used both practices at the same time to facilitate communication.

Second, the practice of directing reduced uncertainty about the protest event. Whenever organizers gave instructions to other activists, they were taking a collective decision. For instance, when Enric told other activists where to put trash cans to prevent the police from accessing the voting stations, he excluded other courses of action and thereby organized preparatory activities. This depended on the compliance of other activists. Nevertheless, directing represented a form of (temporary) centralized decision making. Key decisions in the process were taken by local organizers and communicated to other activists through assemblies and messengers. Outside the

boundaries of established formal organizations, directing became particularly relevant, because the activities of activists were not guided by any previous collective decisions.

The three practices ordered the preparatory activities for the defense of the voting stations. Activists made use of public assemblies, messenger applications, and directing. Thereby, they integrated the decision-making and communication dimensions of these practices. Through the combination of these practices, organizers were able to plan and prepare the defense of the voting stations outside the established SMOs.

But practices not only structure collective action, but they are structured *themselves*, too. Practices are not random bundles of activity, but their components exhibit some kind of pattern (Reckwitz 2002; Schatzki 2001b). Ann Swidler (2001, 88) pointed out that practices "are structures in just this sense, simultaneously material and enacted, but also patterned and meaningful, both because they enact schemas and because they may be read for the transposable schemas they contain." Public assemblies, messenger applications, and directing all exhibit some regularity and repetitiveness, which provides practitioners meaningful cues for action.

Organizational practices were thus key in organizing outside formal organizations. However, this was not easily accomplished. Decision-making and communication practices could not simply be extracted from SMOs and applied in unstructured settings. Directing, messenger applications, and public assemblies could be used, because organizers and activists had the necessary experience and skill to practice them without the support of a formal organizational structure.

2.4 Practical Knowledge and Experience

Organizational practices are not a toolbox that is readily available to activists, from which they can simply pick and choose. Organizational practices require knowledge and skill. Organizers must have acquired these skills through learning and experience – they must become practitioners. The case of the defense of the voting stations was no exception, which became clear from the pieces of data cited in previous sections. Organizer Enric, for example said that giving directions through messenger applications was possible "if you have a little bit of organization, and you know a little bit of marketing and how to manage this." This highlights that it was not enough to simply send out text messages over Telegram telling people what to do. It required knowledge *how* to do it. Another example came from Carles' description of the directed assemblies in the CDR prior to the referendum. He admitted that all the participants, including him, were quite nervous, but at the same time he also stressed that they had "a bit more activist experience and we have lived through something like that already." With this experience, the organizers were able to direct the assembly and to create trust among those receiving directions.

Further evidence for the role of experience and practical skill came from the interviews with the organizers of the CDR Sabadell. Joana said that organizing process was not initiated by "three neighbors who say "let's do this," but by activists "with previous political participation." These organizers had experience in other social movements and civil society organizations, for example in the Plataforma de Afectadas por la Hipoteca. Organizer Xavi, who had been involved in different movements before explains the role of experience as follows.

> We had experience to stage assemblies with 300 people every Wednesday. So you prepare a microphone, an agenda in 30 seconds, pa-pa-pa, turns of talk, and I don't know what else. This is an important school of activism as well.

Previous experience in social movements provided Catalan activists with the necessary practical skills to hold public assemblies, use messenger applications, and give directions to other activists. This represented a common thread in many interviews. Organizers emphasized the role of practical knowledge and previous experiences. Because they had *practiced* these organizational skills, they could use them outside of organizational entities.

This shows that the independence movement had experienced and skillful organizers who knew how to organize collective action. But skillful organizers alone were not sufficient for successful organizing. It also required that a critical mass of ordinary participants could be involved in the organizational process. The basic condition was that organizational practices had to be recognizable beyond the small circles of core activists. Participants had an idea what it meant to hold assemblies or to use instant messengers. Moreover, they also possessed some basic skills and knowledge to do these things. Otherwise, communication in messengers and assemblies would have just produced chaos, and nobody would have followed the directions of organizers.

3 CONCLUSION

In the last days of September 2017, it seemed highly doubtful whether the referendum on October 1 could go ahead as planned, as the Catalan government came under political and legal pressure from the Spanish state. One of the largest civil society associations, the ANC, merely called to gather outside the voting stations to protest with ballot in hand in case the police would impede the voting procedure.

In this chapter, I have addressed an important empirical puzzle for social movement scholars. I have described how the independence movement successfully planned and prepared the defense of the voting stations despite the inaction of its two largest SMOs. The most surprising finding was that deliberation was largely absent in the organizing process. Instead of deliberation, organizers used a specific combination of three organizational practices: public assemblies, instant

messenger applications, and directing. The "texture" (Gherardi 2006, 2012) of these practices enabled communication and decision making among activists.

They key finding of this chapter is that communication and decision-making practices structure collective action – even when formal organizations as infrastructures are practically absent. Public assemblies, messenger applications, and directing, also work outside the boundaries of formal organizations. Communication and decision-making practices acquire organizational qualities, because practitioners employ them to reduce uncertainty about the protest event by elaborating plans for collective action. Precisely because practices represent relatively regular and stable ways of action, they work even outside the boundaries of established organizations.

However, this requires practical skill and knowledge from both organizers and activists. Put simply, activists must know *how* to organize contentious action. Skill and knowledge are not readily available to them, but must be acquired through learning and experience. If organizers know how to use the practices at their hands properly, the structural components of organization might become irrelevant.

The findings have important implications for scholarship in social movement studies. Previous research stressed the importance of organizational structures, in particular SMOs, as a basis for contentious action. The role of the ANC in the defense of the voting stations suggests that the importance of formal organizations might not only be overstated – formal organizations may even hinder contentious action. The findings further suggest that the key to organized protest action may lie not so much in structures, but in the practical skill and experience of activists and organizers. The relevance of communication and decision-making practices demonstrates the limits of structural accounts of organization in social movements. This means that social movement scholars should pay more attention to practices.

The chapter also contributes to the literature on organizing beyond organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 2019b; Ahrne, Brunsson, and Seidl 2016) by exploring a case of contentious action. Social movements represent a particularly relevant field for the study of organizational dynamics beyond organizational structures, because of their comparatively low level of formalization. But the findings of the chapter might also apply to other forms of collective action. Decision-making and communication practices may be decisive in any kind of informal setting.

These implication seem particularly important given that both social movement researchers and organizational scholars have lamented the declining role of organization in contentious action and also in society more in general (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011; King 2017; Soule 2013). Understanding organization not only as formal structures but also as practices and processes may highlight the continued importance of organizing.

PART FOUR: THE EVENTFUL TRANSFORMATION OF PROTEST ORGANIZING

Chapter Nine

CONTINUITY, INNOVATION, AND TRANSFORMATION.

ORGANIZING PROTEST AFTER THE 1-O REFERENDUM

October 27, 2017 was an important date in the course of the territorial conflict in Catalonia. On that day, secessionists and counter-secessionists both made another push towards their goals. First, the Catalan parliament voted in favor of declaring independence. The three pro-independence parties approved the motion, the "Comuns" abstained, and PSC, PP, and Ciutadans boycotted the parliamentary session. More than two weeks after Puigdemont's suspended declaration, one could get the impression that secessionists finally had achieved their goal. But it turned out quite different, as organizer Antoni, who was present as an observer at the parliamentary session, told in the interview.

> When I left the parliament and I saw that the building of the parliament still had both the Catalan flag and the Spanish flag, I said "we haven't declared independence, we haven't declared anything. This doesn't have any effect."

In hindsight, Antoni's reading of the symbolic value of the two flags on the building was spot on. When the parliament declared independence, it had already become apparent that the Spanish state would take even more severe measures of counter-secession. The second important occurrence of October 27 was the Spanish senate's vote to apply article 155 of the Spanish constitution. Article 155 suspended Catalan autonomy, discharged the Catalan government, and put the region under direct administration of the Spanish government. Activating the article also dissolved the Catalan parliament and called for anticipated elections in the region. The Catalan government did not actively resist these measures or take any effective steps to implement the declaration of independence.

The two occurrences on October 27 were an important moment in the cycle of contention, because the limits of the Catalan secessionists' quest for independence became apparent and the Spanish state took the most consequential step in its counter-secessionist strategy thus far. October

27 marked the end of what I consider the 1-O episode of contention and the beginning of the contraction of the cycle of contention.

In previous chapters, I have shown that protest organizing during the 1-O episode of contention was fundamentally different from previous normal times of secessionist conflict. In this intense time, the preparatory processes of actions such as the protest on September 20 or the defense of the voting stations were notably shorter and took place mostly between and outside organizations. There was less time for deliberation, and activists were more willing to accept the directions of leaders. In this part of the dissertation, I address a simple, but compelling question: What happened to the Catalan independence movement after the 1-O episode of contention? And, more precisely, how did the ways in which activists organize protest change after the episode? Theory suggests two potential answers to this questions.

First, some institutionalist scholars have suggested that critical junctures, such as the 1-O episode of contention, do not necessarily lead to transformations. Critical junctures represent moments of greater possibility for change, but it is not inevitable. Instead, "re-equilibration" (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 352) can also take place afterwards. Following this idea means that the various patterns of organizing during the intense period of contention were exceptional, and once this phase was over, activists went back to previous modes of normal organizing.

Second, as outlined in chapter 2, historical-comparative sociologists proposed the notion of transformative events (McAdam and Sewell 2001; Sewell 1996a; Wagner-Pacifici 2010), arguing that brief periods of time can have durable consequences. Times of upheaval can lead to what Della Porta (2018) called "sedimentations": radical changes during these intense times stabilize and become long-term outcomes. This suggests that the organizational practices and processes that emerged during the 1-O period were there to stay. In this perspective, the 1-O episode of contention represented not just an exceptional period of time for organizers, but one that transformed protest organizing in the long run.

The analysis of empirical data showed that neither of these hypotheses fully fits the case of the Catalan independence movement. Still, the evolution of protest organizing was somewhat closer to the second line of reasoning. In essence, I argue that the 1-O referendum had transformative effects on protest organizing *beyond* the very episode of contention. However, these transformations were not just continuities of how activists organized protest during intense the 1-O episode of contention. Rather, protest organizing was *further* transformed after October 27. The 1-O referendum was eventful, because it caused a series of mechanisms that led to the contraction of the cycle of contention. These mechanisms are well known in social movement studies: contraction is driven by exhaustion, facilitation, and repression, while a movement goes through

institutionalization and radicalization (Tarrow 2011, 190). In this phase, the size and number of protests decreases as demobilization begins to affect the movement (Koopmans 2004; Tarrow 2011). The analysis of the empirical data showed that these familiar mechanisms were also at play after 1-O episode of contention. Disagreements over movement strategy led to more deliberation and less organizing between organizations (chapter 10). As I show in chapter 11, repression, and counter-secessionist surveillance in particular, had an impact on how activists in the independence movement organized protests after the 1-O referendum. These transformations led to organizational practices and processes that were substantively different from organizing before and during the 1-O episode of contention.

These findings underline the role of events – such as the 1-O referendum – for the course of collective action over time. However, it would be misguided to conceive of events as an experimental "treatment," as a force that is independent from other variables (Sewell 1996b). Anna Grzymala-Busse has warned that "*time* is not simply an independent and self-evident causal force" (2011, 1273 emphasis added). Rather, events acquire transformative power only when they are interpreted as such by political actors (Basta 2018; Wagner-Pacifici 2010). In other words, what matters is how activists make sense of events and how they turn this sense into collective action (Weick 1995; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005). Following this idea, I take an interpretative approach to organizational change, focusing on activist sensemaking and strategizing as the links that underpin the mechanisms between events and organizing. I demonstrate how these mechanisms work empirically in chapters 10 and 11.

Before I turn to the effects of repression and strategy on organizing more in detail, I use this chapter to examine the contentious actions after the 1-O episode of contention and their organizing processes. More precisely, I focus on four cases of collective action: one campaign by each of Òmnium Cultural and ANC, and two protests by the CDRs. The empirical analysis of the post 1-O period also showed that not everything changed. In the second half of this chapter, I demonstrate that there were some important continuities throughout the whole period that was studied. I also show that some innovations during the 1-O episode of contention turned into long-term legacies. Finally, I briefly introduce the four transformative mechanisms that were at play after the 1-O episode of contention.

1 ORGANIZING PROTEST AFTER THE 1-O EPISODE OF CONTENTION

Cycles of contention "usually end with rapid demobilization of most actors, especially those who have challenged and lost" (Tilly 2008, 154). On October 27, the political opportunities for the independence movement dramatically worsened through the ineffective declaration of

independence and the application of article 155. Catalan independence seemed as unlikely as two months before. Catalan secessionist, however, did not give up after October 27, in spite of the increasingly dim prospects of achieving their goal. The end of what I consider the 1-O episode of contention did not suppose a halt of protest action. The secessionist cycle of contention continued to unfold well beyond that date (Della Porta, Gunzelmann, and Portos 2021; Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019).[31]

In the following sections, I describe the trajectory of secessionist contention from the end of the 1-O episode until October 2019. From the continuous stream of contentious interaction, I have selected four cases of organizational processes: the Llibertat Presos Polítics ("Freedom Political Prisoners") campaign by Òmnium Cultural, the Primàries ("Primaries") campaign by the ANC, the 8-N general strike, and the March 2018 protests after the arrest of Carles Puigdemont and other pro-independence politicians.

1.1   Campaigning after the 1-O Referendum

After the arrest of their leaders Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez on October 16, Òmnium Cultural and the ANC both shifted their strategic efforts towards anti-repression (see chapter 10). This included traditional and online media work, advertising and leafleting, and public events, but also legal and material support for their leaders and later for the imprisoned members of the Catalan government. These actions were part of the campaign work of the two organizations.

The day after the imprisonment of Cuixart and Sànchez "was when we decided to do a campaign; we as Òmnium Cultural created the brand *Llibertat Presos Polítics*" (Beatriu). The following piece of data from the interview with Òmnium Cultural organizer Isabel shows how Llibertat Presos Polítics relates to previous campaigns.

> October 16 is the day when they lock up Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart. Here begins a campaign, which is Llibertat Presos Polítics, which coexists with the other campaigns, which are basically Crida per la Democràcia and PNR (Pacte Nacional pel Referèndum). Llibertat Presos Polítics went along the lines of framing the story, of concretizing a bit the Democracy campaign. Concretizing it as a specific case.

In Isabel's view, the campaign Llibertat Presos Polítics was tightly connected to those developed before the referendum. Although the campaign represented a shift in the organization's strategy

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[31] The precise trajectory of the secessionist cycle of contention remains to be determined empirically through protest event analysis.

(see chapter 10), she portrayed it primarily as a continuation of the previous *Democracy* campaign. Moreover, when asked about how the organizational work changed, she stated that:

> Well, in fact, they coexisted, I don't know how to say it. They coexisted, but Llibertat Presos Polítics was much more a story of demonstrations, because the image had a lot of success and you saw all the campaigns where people wore badges and banners of our image. This is part of the amplifier that Òmnium Cultural has. It's a matter of being quick, of getting it right and if you do it well and fast then people make it their own.

Isabel stressed the imagery of the campaign, which became an integral part of the movement's visual language. She did not elaborate about potential differences and changes to previous campaigns, but emphasized their coexistence. This suggested that there was a lot of continuity in the organizational work after the referendum and after the detention of Jordi Cuixart.

Nevertheless, the same interview with Isabel also displayed some differences in the organizational processes of the different campaigns. The following passage from the interview referred to the beginnings of Llibertat Presos Polítics:

> I: Do you remember the beginning of the campaign [Llibertat Presos Polítics]. Did it start right on October 16?
>
> R: Well, on the 16th, we called for a demonstration for the next day. In fact, here [at Òmnium Cultural] we don't usually call for demonstrations that shortly. Only for very concrete things. And here the big demonstration that we called one day for the next overflows as well. This determines how the entity [Òmnium Cultural] works now. The fact of having the president in prison changes everything. This might be different for other [entities], because Jordi Cuixart still is our president.

The campaign started abruptly with a call to protest for the day after Sànchez and Cuixart's arrest. As Isabel told, this was different from previous campaigns. Actually, the campaign start was more similar to the quickly called protest on September 20 (see chapter 7). The quote from the interview with Isabel showed a further difference between organizing the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign and previous campaigns. Namely, the occurrence that led to the campaign – the imprisonment of leader Jordi Cuixart – also had a profound impact on the organizational process of the campaign. After the imprisonment, decision making and communication within the leadership group became much more difficult (see chapter 11). In spite of these difficulties, the campaign was successful in the eyes of the organizers, as Isabel's statement above shows. As Cuixart remained in prison, the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign unfolded way beyond the 1-O episode, and was further developed into other campaigns, in particular Demà pots ser tu (Tomorrow it could be you), which singled out Cuixart as a an activist leader among the other prisoners, who were all politicians. When

the trial against the prisoners came closer, Òmnium Cultural launched its campaign Judici a la Democràcia (Trial against Democracy), which soon became its main focus.

The ANC shifted its strategic focus toward anti-repressive action, too. This included periodical press releases and social media posts about the duration of Sànchez and Cuixart's imprisonment (e.g. "seven months without you – seven months of prison – Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart"), and weekly vigils in front of the town halls of villages and cities of the region.

In the interviews with ANC organizers, one campaign stood out as important for the organization: the Primaries campaign. However, this campaign was not aimed at anti-repressive action. Interviewees reported that the idea for the Primaries originated in a group within the leadership around the newly elected president of the organization, Elisenda Paluzie. Exactly nine months after the 1-O, the ANC's leadership published the following statement:

> With the goal of achieving the maximum numbers of pro-independence mayors, of guaranteeing unity of action and to make the Catalan Republic effective, the National Leadership of the ANC proposes to initiate and promote a process of primaries to select political representatives.
>
> These primaries must form a unitary republican list for municipalities with more the 25,000 inhabitants and guarantee the election of an independentist mayor.
>
> This list will be open to candidates from civil society and parties. The ANC considers this list to favor unity of action, does not divide and promotes the republican value of participation and access to municipal politics, which is indispensable in an exceptional moment.
>
> (ANC Press release 01/07/2018)

The ANC leadership proposed holding primary elections and creating a unitary pro-independence list at the upcoming municipal elections in Catalonia. About a month later, the members of the organization ratified the leadership's proposal, carrying 87.8 percent of votes (ANC Press release 06/08/2018).

The interview data revealed that the organizational process of the Primaries campaign was not different from the campaigns that had taken place before the 1-O referendum, such as the Ara és l'hora campaign. The campaign was meticulously prepared in a couple of months by volunteers and professional staff. However, the Primaries campaign did represent a transformation in the ANC's strategy and repertoire of action. Whereas previous campaigns were aimed at exercising pressure on the host state and the independence movement's elected representatives, the Primaries campaign sought competition with the established parties in their arena. The ANC continued to employ street demonstrations after the 1-O, but the Primaries campaign represented an expansion

of the organization's repertoire into institutional politics. This strategic change came about with the leadership election in March 2018 after which Elisenda Paluzie took charge of the organization.

In August 2018 the ANC started to promote the campaign. Thousands of Catalan citizens registered to vote in the ANC's primaries. In Catalonia's most important municipality, Barcelona, over 10.000 people participated in the primary. The academic and journalist Jordi Graupera won the primary with a large majority, making him candidate for city's municipal election in May 2019. In spite of the broad participation in the process and the support of the ANC's campaign, the candidacy of Graupera in Barcelona and the Primaries campaign as a whole had only limited success. The established pro-independence parties, PDeCAT, ERC, and CUP declined the ANC's invitation to join the unitary list, and ran their own candidates in most municipalities. Graupera's pro-independence platform Barcelona és capital (Barcelona is capital) only achieved 3.74 percent of the vote in the elections and did not overcome the 5 percent threshold to enter the city council. Moreover, the Primaries campaign and Graupera were criticized within the movement. Critics argued that the campaign took away important votes from the established pro-independence parties, which, in the end, were unable to achieve a majority of seats in the election. Ultimately, incumbent mayor Ada Colau of Barcelona en Comù was reelected with the support of the PSC and Ciutadans.

Of course these two campaigns were not the only ones that were organized by ANC and Òmnium Cultural after the 1-O episode. I have selected them, because organizers and experts highlighted them as important and mentioned them more frequently than others in the semi-structured interviews. Other examples of ANC campaigns were Consum Estrategic (Strategic Consumption), which promoted buying Catalan products and supporting Catalan firms, and #makeamove, which was aimed at raising awareness about the secessionist conflict in the international community. On the one hand, these campaigns, as well as the described Primaries campaign represented a diversification of the ANC's strategy after the 1-O episode. On the other hand, the organization's tactics remained largely the same. It was still focused on stands on the streets, media work, public talks, leafleting and advertising, as well as contained protests. The actions of Òmnium Cultural were not limited to the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign either. As described above, Llibertat Presos Polítics was developed further into the Demà pots ser tu campaign; later, the Judici a la Democràcia campaign was launched for the trial against the Catalan prisoners. Interviewees reported that the action repertoire employed in these Òmnium Cultural campaigns was basically the same as before the referendum.

At the process level, the two campaigns were mostly the result of planned and ordered actions, which had been typical for the two major organizations already before the 1-O referendum. The

campaigns were developed and organized within each organization. Both organizing processes relied on the leadership and professional staff of the respective organization, although this was more important in Òmnium Cultural. The ANC, in contrast, relied more on its volunteers in local chapters throughout the region. These features point to continuities in the ways in which the large organizations organized contentious action.

Nevertheless, the detention of the Jordis on October 16 was a shock for both organizations and had an impact on how they organized campaigns of contentious action after the 1-O episode. The consequences of the event for the two campaigns were different, however. Òmnium Cultural decided to continue with Jordi Cuixart as president, which made internal communication and decision making in the organizing process much more difficult. In contrast, Jordi Sànchez resigned as president of the ANC a month after his imprisonment in order to run for Puigdemont's JxCat list in the elections of December 21. While it is unclear if Sànchez's decision to leave the ANC was related to his imprisonment, the data suggested that the election of a new leadership in March 2018 brought about an expansion of the repertoire of action and a shift in strategy.

1.2   November 8: Disruption and Strike

On November 2, the Generalitat's vice president, Oriol Junqueras, and seven other members of the Catalan government were arrested. The day after, the trade union CSC-Intersindical called for a general strike on November 8 (called 8-N). The general strike was framed as a protest against the "impoverishment of the working class" and against a national law adopted in October that would facilitate the relocation of Catalan businesses to the rest of Spain. SMOs such as Òmnium Cultural and ANC joined the mobilization, but in contrast to the 3-O, neither the large trade unions CCOO, UGT, and CGT, nor the employers' associations supported the call. Thus, the CSC-Intersindical was the only trade union to call for the general strike, which made them more known to the public according to organizer Montserrat.

On November 8, thousands of protesters took the streets again. As a contentious performance, the 8-N was very similar to the 3-O in that it was a combination of a strike, a series of demonstrations, and disruptive actions such as highway and railway blocks. However, the 8-N was much smaller in scale, as very few workers participated in strike action. Only in public schools and universities, participation reached about 31.5 percent, as estimated by government sources.

Nevertheless, there was some significant participation in a number of demonstrations throughout the region. At noon, various organizations called for a protest in front of the seat of the Generalitat in Barcelona and its delegations in other towns. At 6 pm, protesters also gathered in front of the region's town halls. Protesters were mainly mobilized through the CDRs, who had

changed their name to Committees for the Defense of the Republic in the meantime. The 8-N was the public presentation of the CDRs as an independent collective actor, and from this moment on they were much more visible in the media. It also represented a turning point in their relationship with the institutions, as Joana explained:

> Until this moment, the CDR fulfilled a function that the government could not take on. But when on October 27 the Republic is not actually declared and the exile begins, all these things start to change and there is a disconnect between CDR and public institutions. The CDRs take their way towards the Republic and the institutions don't.

The CDRs mainly called for disruptive actions. Protesters occupied more than 60 roads throughout Catalonia and cut the high speed railway in Girona. The 8-N thus represented a turn towards mobilization for disruptive action (see also Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019, 8). These actions were prepared by the CDRs in the week prior to the 8-N. In comparison to the 3-O, this gave the organizers a bit more time to plan the concrete actions and also to coordinate with other CDRs. Again, the primary setting for the preparation were open neighborhood assemblies. Some interviewees reported that the attendance at these assemblies rose before the general strike. In Fastiada, for instance, there were about 100 people at the open assembly to prepare the protest. However, interviewees also reported that there was a lot of secrecy in these meetings about the preparation of the 8-N. Activist Quim described this as follows:

> We talked about how to do it, at what time we would meet and everything in a language-hmm, always encrypted. You never speak about highways. You use, well, euphemisms or-the word "excursion" is typical. "We'll do an excursion, we'll do a very slow excursion and then we go for breakfast" and everybody knows what it means.

The CDRs' increasing focus on disruptive actions was accompanied by secretism and counter-surveillant protest organizing (I discuss this more in detail in chapter 11). The CSC-Intersindical did not participate in the preparation of disruptive actions. As organizer Montserrat stressed, the role of the union was the strike in the workplace, not blocking highways and railroads. However, it also became clear that the union was not opposed to the disruptions. Thus, the various actions of the 8-N were prepared by different collective actors (CSC-Intersindical, the CDRs, and ANC and Òmnium Cultural).

1.3   March 2018 Protests

Demobilization affected the CDRs after the 1-O episode, and even more after the 8-N general strike. But there were occasional peaks of protest participation, for example in March 2018. On March 23, judge Llarena opened proceedings against Puigdemont and issued a European arrest

warrant. Llarena also ordered the arrest of Jordi Turull, Carme Forcadell, Raül Romeva, Josep Rull and Dolors Bassa, who had already been detained on November 2, 2017 and released on bail on December 4. On March 25, Puigdemont was arrested by German police while traveling back from Finland to his residence in Belgium.

In response to the arrests, the CDRs mobilized for protests throughout the region. Similar to the 8-N, the March protests included highway and railway occupations. These disruptive actions were carried out by local CDRs. The following piece of data from the interview with CDR organizer Quim illustrated some of these protest actions in Tarragona:

> They detained Puigdemont on March 25, on the 23rd the ministers enter prison again. Dolors Bassa and the others. That day they we called everybody to Plaça Imperial Tàrraco. There, we from the CDR took the reins.

Although the activists were not enough to fully occupy the traffic circle at Plaça Imperial Tàrraco, they managed to block the traffic at its entrances. Then, the CDR Tarragona called to meet at the central government's subdelegation. There, they held an open assembly and decided to block the AP-7 highway, which passes near Tarragona. About 200 activists blocked the highway, but were charged by police. There was also an innovation in the repertoire, as Quim reported in the interview:

> The organization of the CDRs went quite well, because we were able to open very quickly the toll gates in all of Catalonia on the days 23, 24, 25, 25. Then we rested for two days and opened the toll gates again. This was interesting, because opening the tolls was protest the other way round. Instead of blocking the highway to annoy people, we said let's annoy the government by opening the gates. So people see that we do not disturb them […] But when Puigdemont was detained in Germany, we were not just 200 people. We were 4000 people and cut three lanes on different highways.

This piece of data showed not only the innovation in the repertoire, but also the success of the mobilization. Although the arrests of Puigdemont and other politicians occurred in a phase of demobilization, the data suggested that the events led to a spike in turnout. According to organizer Quim, "people were very nervous, […] but there was motivation to mobilize."

Although the CDRs were quick to react, it was not a spontaneous protest. Given that the five ex-ministers of the Catalan government had been imprisoned before, and Puigdemont was searched with a warrant, it was not unlikely that they would be arrested again. This was why organizers perceived the situation in March 2018 as different to previous arrests. From the interview with Carles, it transpired that the CDRs had different strategies ready for this scenario:

> This was decided in the assembly. We knew [the arrests] would happen, because the judicialization would come. So there was a protocol that was approved by all the CDRs. And we knew what to do when the arrests would happen. Today we call for a protest. You, you, and you. Call for protest at 8pm in Sant Jaume Square, and so on.

This plan was approved by the CDR Catalunya, the national assembly of CDRs. As Carles reported, almost all local CDRs followed the directive from the national level.

> It was quite consensual. There should be a protest in the squares in each village or city. People should prepare giant hand cuffs in order to say that the imprisonment is unjust. People prepared some shows. It was very planned.

These pieces of data suggested that the CDRs were prepared and could respond quickly with coordinated protest actions throughout the region. The phrase "it was very planned" shows that the March protests were not a case of spontaneous action. Moreover, Carles also highlighted in the interview that the ANC was pursuing a different tactic in the protest, calling for a centralized, symbolic protest with yellow ribbons. The stance of the CDRs was that this was not disruptive enough.

> We said "shit, of course we have to protest," because Puigdemont was arrested. But you can't go to the German Consulate. So our job was to say "no." This was the day when the first riots happened.

In the end, the ANC joined the CDRs' call for protest, but there was some confusion about where to march. In the end, the protest was headed to Spanish government's delegation, where confrontations between protesters and riot police occurred. While the protests were well organized overall, some activists said that the confrontation with the police at the Spanish government's delegation and in other places was not. This became clear in the following piece of data from the interview with CDR activist Gabriel.

> [The mobilization after the 1-O] went down a bit, not disappearing, but with dilemmas such as the action when they detained Puigdemont. As I told you, there was a call to occupy the central government's delegation, but without any kind of plan. Without anything, and it turns out to be a failure. Because we did not do anything, we only received blows by the police.

The lack of plan referred to the confrontation with the police, not to the overall protest. In Gabriel's view the CDR actions in Girona and Lleida were successful, but in Barcelona they were not. This was not surprising, because according to the interview data the March protests were the first time there were clashes between protesters and police since the 1-O. The protest became a turning point for the CDR in Sant Antoni, in which Gabriel participated, because a debate over

tactics emerged and a change of repertoire: "I think on this day there is a substantial change and it becomes understood that direct confrontation pauses."

Interviewees reported that demobilization continued to affect the CDRs after the March protests. What had started as large, open assemblies after the 1-O transformed over time into small groups with a stable but informal membership. The rest of activists remained latent and only participated in reaction to repressive events. The arrest of Puigdemont, for example was perceived as a "direct attack," as CDR organizer Miquel called it, and people mobilized briefly again. Or, as organizer Quims put it: "in the end, if there is no trigger, if there is no reason, people do not mobilize." Thus, in the long run, exhaustion, repression, and the lack of movement strategy took their toll on the CDRs.

1.4 Summary

When the Spanish senate suspended Catalan autonomy and dissolved the Catalan parliament by applying article 155 of the Spanish constitution on October 27, secessionists' hopes that the 1-O referendum would lead to independence were crashed. Subsequently, the cycle of contention began to contract and demobilization set on. As I have shown here, this did not mean that secessionist contentious actions were suspended completely after the 1-O episode.

ANC and Òmnium Cultural organized their secessionist actions mostly in well-structured, planned campaigns. The respective campaigns Llibertat Presos Polítics and Primaries illustrate this form of organizing process. Both associations relied heavily on the work of professional staff in these campaigns, and the ANC also involved volunteers on the ground to a large extent. While the Llibertat Presos Polítics was a quick reaction to the arrest of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez on October 16, the Primaries campaign was a result of a longer deliberative process in the ANC after the election of a new leadership. In the campaigns, organizers and activists employed mostly contained forms of action, such as orderly street protests, vigils, leafleting, and advertising. Overall, both the repertoire of contention and the organizing processes were quite similar to the cases before the 1-O episode of contention. However, the temporal comparison also revealed some crucial differences in organizing. The arrest of their leaders had a transformative impact on the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign in particular, because working with Cuixart in prison made internal communication in the organizing of the campaign more difficult.

The CDRs were born as open assemblies in neighborhoods and villages to occupy voting stations and organize resistance against the police interventions on October 1. After the referendum, they did not disappear though. They changed their names to Committees for the Defense of the Republic and continued their struggle for Catalan independence. Under their new

label, they came to be known to a wider public for their disruptive actions during the general strike on November 8, which had been called in reaction to the application of article 155 and the arrests of independentist politicians. Thus, the 8-N was not a spontaneous reaction, but activists had some time to prepare the occupation and blocking of highways and railways. Although there was some coordination at the regional level, most of the actions were planned by local CDRs, which at that point still functioned as open assemblies rather than proper organizational entities. This started to change after the general strike, when the assemblies were affected by demobilization, and the core groups of attendants gradually became stable groups without formal membership. In contrast to the 8-N, the March protest followed immediately after the detentions of four former ministers, and intensified when Puigdemont was arrested in Germany. Yet, these contentious actions were not spontaneous reactions either, because the CDRs had anticipated the repressive events. Different scenarios for action were developed at the regional level of the CDRs, but most of the disruptive action were planned and prepared at the local level. The protests were even more disruptive than the 8-N, and clashes between police and activists happened at the Spanish government's delegation in Barcelona, as well as on several highways.

In sum, there were notable instances of disruptive action by the CDRs after the 1-O episode. In contrast, Òmnium Cultural and ANC continued their contained repertoire of action, which was characteristic for them before the referendum. Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos (2019, 7) summarized the overall trajectory of the secessionist cycle of contentions as follows.

> The cycle brought about a considerable degree of radicalization and polarization of claims, frames and justifications for independence (and anti-secessionism), but a very limited amount of actual violent forms of action deployed by the challengers (at least until late 2018), which mainly came in the form of intermittent clashes with police.

This changed only in October 2019, when the prison sentences for nine pro-independence leaders sparked a series of protests that were more disruptive and violent than the 8-N and March 2018 protests. For several weeks, activists burned trash cans, constructed barricades blocked highways, railways and Barcelona's airport, and engaged in clashes with local and national police (Della Porta, Gunzelmann, and Portos 2021, 139).

2 THE OLD AND THE NEW – ORGANIZATIONAL CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION

2.1 Organizational Continuity and Re-equilibration

When studying political phenomena over time, transformations often catch the eye more easily than stability. Students of contentious politics have often been inclined to study visible moments

of sudden social changes, such as large-scale insurgencies and revolutions. However, scholars from a range of disciplines stressed the need to study both change and stability (e.g. Capano 2009; G. Hernes 1976; Mahoney 2002; Poole et al. 2000; Van de Ven and Poole 2005). In the same spirit, researchers in social movement studies highlighted the role of organizational structures for social movement continuity, especially to survive in times of low mobilization (Staggenborg 1988; V. Taylor 1989). Della Porta and Diani (2006, 138) summarized these findings as follows:

> For people committed to a certain cause, organizations are an important source of continuity, not only in terms of identity, but also in terms of action. At times of collective effervescence, when enthusiasm is high and the will to participate is strong, it is easier to mobilize people and resources even informally as individuals. But when opportunities for action are more modest and it gets more difficult to attract people spontaneously "to the streets," then organizations can secure continuity to collective action precisely because of their tendency to selfperpetuation.

Whereas the role of organizational structures in times of latency is well documented, less is known about organizational continuity in turbulent times. Also, the existing work has focused primarily on organizational entities and less on practices and processes. Although this dissertation is more concerned with transformative events and organizational change, it is important to acknowledge stability as well. After all, even the most radical ruptures do not overhaul *everything*. The problem for my empirical research was that continuities were often less visible in the data, especially because semi-structured interviews were the main data source. Interviewees often treated stability as inherently uninteresting and were keener to talk about changes. Consequently, the evidence on organizational continuity was rather sparse. Nevertheless, some organizational continuities emerged from the data. Given their rarity in the data it is particularly important to take them seriously and not dismiss them as marginal.

Between 2012 and 2017, the secessionist conflict in Catalonia was characterized by routine interactions between challengers and authorities. I have called this phase the normal times of secessionist conflict (chapter 4). In this period, the two large SMOs, ANC and Òmnium Cultural dominated the organizational field of the movement and managed to turn out massive numbers of protesters for their street manifestations. This repertoire of contention was characterized by contained action. Protests were primarily organized within these organizations in long and detailed preparatory processes, which involved the support of professional staff and volunteers.

These normal modes of organizing protest underwent dramatic transformations during and after the 1-O episode of contention. This does not mean, however, that protest organizing was completely overhauled. The empirical analysis of the four cases of contentious performances and

the organizational practices in the movement more in general showed that there were some important continuities throughout the 1-O episode of contention and beyond.

At the process level of analysis, the description of the cases showed that long and detailed organizing processes within the boundaries of single organizations continued to be relevant for contentious action in the independence movement. The primaries campaign, for example was developed by the ANC in a deliberative process and meticulously prepared by its professional staff. Although Òmnium Cultural's Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign was quickly called for after the detention of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez, it was continuously developed and most of its actions were the product of professional planning and preparation. This process resulted in the subsequent campaign Demà pot ser tu.

In the interviews, some organizers, even from Òmnium Cultural and ANC themselves, criticized the two large SMOs for their inaction before the occupation and defense of the voting stations. The inability to adapt their repertoire of action and to include more disruptive means was seen by many as a sign of organizational inertia. This was only part of the picture. Some interviewees pointed out the positive effect of the inertia of the two SMOs. They described how inertia provided organizational stability in periods of intense conflict. This is best illustrated by the following piece of data from the interview with Òmnium Cultural organizer Beatriu:

> Luckily, [Òmnium Cultural] is a large ship that has some inertia, a dynamic, it moves by itself. Even if the Executive disappeared one day, Òmnium Cultural would keep working. Although without political course, but an organization that manages 130.000 members would keep functioning.

The statement shows that the size and structure of Òmnium Cultural provided some resilience against the repressive actions by the state, and allowed the organization to continue campaigning despite the imprisonment of its president. In this situation, organizational inertia became important, as Òmnium Cultural interviewee Antoni put it:

> This is our work, the work we have done. Naturally support, give all our support to the president of Òmnium Cultural who is in jail. To continue working is resisting the current situation, which we do not know how it will end.

The inertia of Òmnium Cultural and ANC, which had limited their repertoire of action before the 1-O, became an asset for the organizations as they were hit by repressive action. Their organizers saw continuity as anti-repression.

At the level of practices, there were some important continuities as well. Generally, practices represent routinized patterns of behavior, which "occur in the sequence of time, in repetition"

(Reckwitz 2002, 255). Practices inhibit a certain regularity over time, which distinguishes them from singular actions. Although they are not rigid constructs, they certainly possess an inertia similar to that of organizational entities. This became apparent in the empirical analysis of the period of time after the 1-O episode of contention.

The stability of practices is best illustrated by the example of public assemblies. In chapter 8, I have described how in the process of organizing the defense of the voting stations, but also in the ANC and in UxR, activists combined assemblies and the practice of directing in an unusual way. This does not mean that the practice of assembly itself changed. There was some evidence in the data that the core features of assemblies – face-to face and multi-party talk, open access, facilitation – remained stable throughout the 1-O period and in the phase of demobilization that followed. Consider the following quote from the interview with SEPC organizer Irene.

> I: And how do you manage the assemblies? Has that changed?
>
> R: No, no.
>
> I: I don't know, did you have to include more people?
>
> R: No, no. I'm sorry.

Irene was apologetic that she could not report any changes. This illustrates the difficulty of getting interviewees to talk about continuities. The statement also suggests that assemblies as such did not necessarily change. This became even more apparent in the following passage from the interview with CDR Sabadell organizer Joana. As shown in chapter 8, the CDR Sabadell was a prime example of directed assemblies, in which deliberation was practically absent. However, Joana reported that the practice of assembly in itself did not change.

> [Decision making] still happens in the assembly. Assemblies are participatory, they are facilitated by someone. If somebody asks a question in the assembly, the facilitator picks up that question. We're not going to deny that, either right?

Even in directed assemblies, activists upheld multi-party talk and facilitation as core features of assemblies as a communicative practice. What did change was the openness of assemblies. Many CDRs closed off their assemblies to strangers or removed decision making from open spaces, as I describe in chapter 11. However, this was not a uniform transformation; some local groups decided to maintain their assemblies open.

There was not enough evidence in the data to make a comprehensive assessment of continuities of practices throughout the 1-O episode of contention and afterwards. Still, the case of open

assemblies suggests that practices themselves did not change so easily, even during eventful periods of time. However, as shown in chapter 8, some practices became more or less important in protest organizing. Also, activists combined them differently, depending on the context of the organizing process. In other words, what changed was the texture of practice (Gherardi 2012).

2.2 Organizational Innovation and Sedimentation

Periods of intense contention are productive times. When mobilization increases and resources become available, new spaces for collective action open up and activists get creative. Innovation of contentious action is a central mechanism as the cycle reaches its peak (Tarrow 2011). Transformative events may play a crucial role in a series of innovative processes. as Della Porta (2008, 29–30) argued:

> During cycles of protest, some contingent events tend to affect the given structures by fueling mechanisms of social change: organizational networks develop; frames are bridged; personal links foster reciprocal trust. In this sense, protest events - especially, some of them - constitute processes during which collective experiences develop in the interactions of different individual and collective actors, that with different roles and aims take part in it.

Della Porta suggested that contentious actions produce new frames for action, as well as relationships of trust and collaboration among individual and collective social movement actors. In other words, transformative events can trigger a series of cognitive, relational, and emotional mechanisms that lead to new practices, relationships, or structures in social movements.

Two organizational innovations were initiated in the 1-O episode of contention: open assemblies and IMAs. After the referendum was suspended by the Spanish Constitutional Court at the beginning of September, organizers faced an uncertain and increasingly repressive situation. When ANC and Òmnium Cultural remained paralyzed in the wake of the referendum, local organizers needed to find quick solutions to ensure that the referendum could go ahead. Open assemblies and the use of IMAs were instrumental in the planning and preparation of the defense of the voting stations. Of course neither of these practices was invented for this purpose. Interviewees reported that IMAs were used for internal and external communication in campaigns and protests already before the 1-O. Open assemblies already had a long-standing tradition in Catalan and Spanish alternative and autonomous movements (Flesher Fominaya 2014).

However, the 1-O episode of contention was innovative in that it led to a widespread diffusion of assembly and messenger practices. The two practices were crucial for the organizing of the defense of the voting stations, because they functioned as communication channels outside the boundaries of formal SMOs and thereby allowed coordinating the preparatory activities. Through

the preparation of the defense of the voting stations *outside* of the established SMOs, organizers reached a greater number of participants, especially those who were unlikely to get involved in an existing organization. Interviewees reported that these new participants learned in the emergent CDRs how assemblies and messengers worked as activist practices.

After the 1-O referendum, activists in the CDRs but also in other collective actors continued to organize through the same open assemblies and messenger channels. Thereby, the two innovative practices became permanent elements of the movement's organizational repertoire. In the following, I describe these two processes more in detail.

First, IMAs such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Signal were instrumental for internal and external communication in organizing protest in the 1-O episode. Organizers created messenger channels to give instructions to activists and other organizers in the preparation of. Many organizers continued to use these messenger channels after the referendum. For example, the interorganizational platform in Fastiada still used its Telegram channel Mou'te but changed its name to CDR, as interviewee Oriol described:

> Thus we went from Mou'te, in which there were also those from Convergència, to the CDR. Those from Convergència had left the group, and once all the other actors said they wanted to be in the CDR, we said "look, we will change the name of the channel and call it CDR," because we already had all the people in there. And when those from Convergència saw this, they said at a meeting "I just saw you changed the name, what is this?" And I said, "well, look, we were all in this coordination space, which you left, so we decided to do this." He didn't say anything. Mou'te was ok, but now it was Committee for the Defense [of the Republic] for strikes, and blockades, and so on. They didn't like that. Well, and from that moment we worked as CDR.

The organizers who had prepared the defense of the voting stations in Fastiada continued to use the same Telegram channel after the referendum. This was important, because it allowed them to build on an established communication channel to reach out to other activists. Fastiada was by far not the only local case to do so. Organizers in the Clot neighborhood in Barcelona changed the name of the channel from Clot deceideix ("Clot decides") to Committee for the Defense of the Republic, too. In this fashion, many messenger channels and groups were set up for the post-referendum CDRs.

The student platform UxR also made heavily use of messenger practices to prepare and manage the occupation of the University of Barcelona. The messenger channels that were set up for this purpose were also used by organizers after the occupation, as organizer Ester described in the interview:

> And then [UxR] has a larger, relatively stable group of people with already established communication channels, such as WhatsApp, and so on. This makes it much easier for them to clarify things, for example when there are demonstrations or social things. Now when UxR proposes a demonstration - where in fact the SEPC has a lot to say – UxR can call large assemblies again. They have a consolidated group of maybe more than 60 people that mobilize themselves regularly.

This piece of data illustrates the importance of the newly created messenger channels for organizing protest also after the 1-O episode. The use of messengers allowed organizers to reach a group of regular activists in the preparatory process.

Second, open assemblies were an integral part of the organizing of the defense of the voting stations. Just like the messenger channels, some of these open encounters were called Committees for the Defense of the Referendum, some were called differently, and some did not carry any name. In any case, these local assemblies continued after the referendum, too. The following quote from the interview with Jordi describes the initial period of time after the referendum:

> Well, on October 2, people were outraged and wanted to do protest actions, block highways, and I joined the people in the village, with the CDR […] We started with meetings, assemblies to see what we could do, what we could not do, which actions to take basically. Of course, we wanted to do marches, we wanted to shut down the country.

In the assemblies on October 2, activists voiced their outrage over the violent actions of the Spanish police forces the previous day. These assemblies were instrumental in the preparations of the general strike on the following day but they were no single occurrences. They kicked off a series of local activist assemblies after the referendum. Just as the assemblies in preparation for the defense of the voting stations, these encounters took place in the streets and squares every week or every other week. Thus, the assemblies acquired a steady rhythm. They went beyond their initial purpose to defend the voting stations and turned into a permanent encounter.

These two practices, assemblies and messenger applications, did not disappear after the defense of the voting stations. They continued to be used by activists as communication channels and spaces of encounter in the aftermath of the referendum. Thereby, these practices were repeated and structured over time. This routinization of communicative practices gave rise to the CDRs as a concrete collective actor within the independence movement. In other words, the CDRs evolved from an open space of encounter that was closely linked to a short-term goal (the defense of the voting station) to a more permanent organizational form. This process of stabilization, or "sedimentation" as Della Porta (2018) called it, was reinforced by three parallel developments of the CDRs.

First, the CDRs were affected by demobilization. Interviewees reported that participation numbers in the assemblies dropped after October 27 and even more after the December 21 elections. The following quote from the interview with CDR organizer Ruben illustrates this process:

> I: I was going to ask you, did participation in your CDR drop?
>
> R: Yes, well, it has dropped, but there is a core of people that always attends. Thus, now there are "the 12 from the CDR," who are those that always go to the assembly and are now a group of friends. Now these people meet to put up posters, prepare I-don't-know-what, go to protests. They are those who continue and they form a loyal group.
>
> I: Since when?
>
> R: Well, I remember that the CDR maintained good numbers until the end of the year [2017], but since the beginning of 2018, it was more reduced. I think once the summer was over, this core was all that was left.

Although the CDRs became regular assemblies after the 1-O referendum, they suffered from demobilization. Instead of serving as a space of encounter with fluid attendance, many of them evolved into groups with a more or less stable but informal membership, as Ruben described. This process created close bonds among the remaining members and sometimes even friendship.

Second, the CDRs stabilized not only through mere repetition of messenger and assembly practices but also through deliberate efforts to structure themselves as a collective actor. Approximately a week after the 3-O, the CDR Sabadell proposed to enhance coordination between the local CDRs. The following quote from the interview with CDR Clot organizer Carles describes this proposal:

> Afterwards there was the great idea of the CDR Sabadell to say "listen, we cannot manage our actions everybody in our neighborhoods. Of course, in your neighborhood you have power, but a common response of 200, 300 CDRs at the same time, that's not the same thing, that's much more interesting." So, the CDR Sabadell proposed to hold a meeting. The first assembly of CDRs, which was in Sabadell after October 1, I think around October 10 or 11 […] We were 250 CDRs or more. Two people representing each CDR as a block […] and then the second, assembly, I don't remember where it was, Manresa, Igualada, I don't know. At this one, there were also people from the farmer's union, from Òmnium Cultural, because they saw that this was enormous. 250 CDRs from all over the region, trying to organize themselves. This was very powerful.

These first two encounters enhanced coordination between the local CDRs. They created a multi-level structure of local, intermediate, and regional levels, where rotating representatives from the local CDRs participated. Organizers set up a Telegram channel and a Twitter account called CDR Catalunya and started to hold regular meetings. However, until the end of my fieldwork, the

relationships among the different levels remained largely informal and the local CDRs maintained their autonomy. The CDR Catalunya was not able to force the local groups to participate in collective actions. Still, establishing the CDR Catalunya represented an important step towards coordination. This allowed organizing simultaneous actions throughout the region at the 8-N and the March protests.

Third, the establishment of the CDR Catalunya was coincidental with the name change of the CDRs. At the encounter at the regional level, it was proposed to change the name of the Committees for the Defense of the *Referendum* to Committees for the Defense of the *Republic*. This proposal was accepted and brought back to the local level by the representatives. After some intense debates, almost all CDRs adopted the new name. This change was not merely about labels. As I show in chapter 10, the debates around the name were also a way of making sense of what had happened during the 1-O and carried fundamental implications for the strategy of the independence movement. The point I would like to make here is quite simply that putting a uniform name for all local groups represented the establishment of a group identity. This identity was closely related to the readings of the referendum as a legitimation for independence, and the unilateral strategy that followed from it. Most importantly, it represented an important element in the consolidation of the CDRs as a proper collective actors as after the 1-O referendum.

The emergence of the CDRs as new collective actors was ultimately a result of the mobilizations around the 1-O referendum. This is a quite common process in social movement, as Tarrow (2011, 122–23) pointed out:

> Organizations emerge out of episodes of contention through interaction with authorities, allies, and third parties. [They] begin as local networks, spread through the diffusion of contention, and ultimately either disappear or scale upward to regional and national levels.

The CDRs largely fitted this process: they were born out of the need to organize the defense of the voting stations and the confrontation with Spanish police during the referendum. Before the 1-O, they were merely open spaces of encounter that rapidly spread all over Catalonia. After the referendum, they stabilized to a certain degree and initiated coordination at the regional level. However, the upscaling remained fairly limited, as local CDRs kept their autonomy. Moreover, they did not evolve into a formal organization and remained loosely structured. Or, as interviewee Miquel put it: "We're not talking about an organization. You cannot even call it structure." This situated the CDRs along the lines of other flexible and loosely structured forms of organization that have emerged over the last decade, rather than in the realm of classic formal organization. Independently of their character, the CDRs represented the most important organizational legacy of the 1-O episode of contention (see also Della Porta, Gunzelmann, and Portos 2021). Before

the 1-O episode of contention, the Catalan pro-independence civil society and its contentious repertoire was dominated by ANC and Òmnium Cultural. The emergence of the CDRs as a loosely structured actor can be seen as a response to the inability of the two large established SMOs to adapt to the strategic context of the 1-O episode and call for disruptive action. This organizational diversification of the independence movement reflects the pattern of environmental movement, in which many new grassroots groups emerged in the 1990s after the institutionalization and professionalization of the existing organizations (Diani and Donati 1999; Rootes 1999).

In this section, I have described the routinization of assembly and messenger practices, which led to the consolidation of the CDRs as collective actors. This stabilization did not mean that the CDRs were unaffected by the contraction of the cycle of contention that followed the 1-O episode. In fact, the data suggested that several mechanisms of contraction had a transformative impact on communication and decision-making practices in the CDRs and other collective actors of the independence movement. I introduce these mechanisms in the next section, and discuss them more in detail in chapters 10 and 11.

3 GIVING UP AND GIVING IN – EXHAUSTION AND FACILITATION

The declaration of independence by the Catalan parliament on October 27 did not have any practical effects. But as I have suggested at the outset of this chapter, it represented, together with the simultaneous application of article 155, a symbolic and strategic end point to the 1-O episode of contention. What followed was, apart from the four cases of contentious action described above, a phase of demobilization in which protests were reduced to mainly local actions with very limited numbers of participants. The contraction of the secessionist cycle of contention had a series of effects on protest organizing. The analysis of the empirical data suggested that four mechanisms – two external and two internal to the movement – were driving the transformation of organizing after the 1-O period of time: exhaustion, movement strategy, repression, and institutionalization.

First, the major internal driver of organizational change was activist exhaustion. October 27 was a great disappointment for pro-independence activists, as UxR organizer Pere reported in the interview:

> Since [October 27], more or less, we did some estimations, and we said "well, this is lost."
> It took us a lot to see it, me too actually, because I am very positive, but I said- well, we
> did an ideological reflection between all the organizers from the organizations, and we said
> "this is lost."

This impression of defeat was shared by many interviewees, for example by Antoni whose disappointment at the sight of the Spanish flag on the Generalitat's building I have quoted at the outset of this chapter.

The movement's failure to achieve independence cannot alone explain the following phase of demobilization, because "history is full of examples of movements that kept on fighting in the face of defeat, and of victories that served only to open up new horizons" (Koopmans 2004, 37). Still, the activists' interpretations of October 27 should not be understood as purely sentimental thoughts that did not have any consequences. The interview data suggested that increasing frustrations of pro-independence activists over the failed outcome of the referendum were an important driver of the process of demobilization that followed in the period after the 1-O episode of contention. Although contentious episodes "are exhilarating at first, [...] they involve risk, personal costs, and, eventually, weariness and disillusionment" (Tarrow 2011, 206). The wear and tear that intense times such as the 1-O episode put on activists also became apparent in the interview data. Exhaustion is best illustrated by the following passage from an interview with UxR organizer Ester:

> We could not maintain this rhythm. During one month we had put our lives on hold. I was working half days, was missing I don't know how many days, did not go to my internships. It was not sustainable in the medium term. So everybody went back to their things.

The "rhythm" that Ester referred to was the density of protests, repression, institutional actions, but also organizational activities during the 1-O episode. Internal tensions, for example among student organizations rose after the end of the occupation of the University of Barcelona. After October 27, participation and dedication dropped in the student platform, and after the 21-D elections the UxR organizers decided to suspend the platform's activities until a more opportune moment. Exhaustion had a series of consequences for protest organizing after the 1-O: both organizers and activists had less time and energy to sustain mobilization over a long period of time, especially when protest action became more disruptive and was met with repressive action by the Spanish state. Individual and collective actors had less resources at hand to cover the rising cost of contentious action.

The second internal mechanism that played a major role in the transformation of organizing after the 1-O episode was the disagreement among activists over the independence movement's strategy. The contentious character of the 1-O referendum sparked debates within the various collective actors of the movement about how to make sense of the event and its contested outcome. These disagreements over strategy led to more deliberation in the organizing processes,

as well as to less organizing between organizations. I describe these findings more in detail in chapter 10.

With regards to external factors, facilitation and institutionalization have been identified as important drivers of contraction by previous social movement research (Tarrow 2011). In the aftermath of the 1-O referendum, these mechanisms played only a minor role, however. Della Porta , O'Connor, and Portos (2019, 7) noted that the closure of opportunities at the national level was an important reason for the emergence of the secessionist cycle of contention in the first place:

> With the conservative Partido Popolar [sic!] (PP) winning national elections in 2011, opportunities for a negotiated enhanced autonomy (not necessarily full independence) for Catalonia closed down at national level.

The PP government under Mariano Rajoy continued this uncompromising stance throughout the 1-O episode of contention and afterwards. Facilitation on part of the authorities was virtually inexistent, even as socialist Pedro Sánchez won a vote of no-confidence in June 2018. Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos (2019) argued that there were some openings of political opportunities at the local level in the period around the referendum, which ultimately led to the downward scale shift represented by the defense of the voting stations. After the 1-O episode of contention, the elections on December 21 represented an (unwanted) opportunity at the regional level. At that moment, the independence movement could simply not afford to lose its majority in the Catalan parliament, but it was also an occasion to expand that majority. The electoral campaign brought the secessionist conflict back into the institutional arena. The 21-D elections also affected the organizational dimensions of the independence movement. Several organizers reported in the interviews that they were actively recruited by political parties to run in the elections. The most prominent case – who did not feature among the interviewees – was the ANC's Jordi Sànchez, who ran as number two of the Junts per Catalunya list. While this opened opportunities for individual careers, it also supposed a drainage of experienced organizers from all collective actors with the exception of the CDRs. Another instance of institutionalization was by the ANC's decision to promote its Primaries campaign for the 2019 municipal elections. Since none of the established pro-independence parties joined the initiative, it effectively meant running a platform whose main support was the ANC itself. Thus, the campaign can be considered a strategic shift of the organization from contentious to institutional action.

Still, the overall the effect of institutionalization on protest organizing was marginal. The other external factor, repression, played a much larger role. The Spanish state already increased repression against the independence movement during the 1-O episode through raids, legal action,

and the police intervention on the day of the referendum itself (see chapter 6). Repression intensified further in the aftermath of the referendum with the arrests of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez on October 16, and of vice president Oriol Junqueras and other politicians on November 2. Activists and organizers suffered from legal and physical repression, too, which in turn had consequences for protest organizing. In chapter 11, I discuss these effects and the role of counter-secessionist surveillance more in detail.

4 CONCLUSION

Without doubt, the days around October 1 were the peak of the secessionist cycle of contention, but protests continued in the aftermath of the referendum. In this chapter, I have described four cases of contentious action in the time after the 1-O episode of contention: the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign by Òmnium Cultural, the Primaries campaign by the ANC, as well as the 8-N general strike and March 2019 protest, during both of which the CDRs were the main protagonists. These cases were organized differently than the previous cases in both normal and intense times. Although there were some important continuities of normal organizing, as well as consolidating legacies of the 1-O episode, protest organizing was shaped fundamentally by the mechanisms of contraction that followed the referendum. Exhaustion drove the shortening of time, resources, and protest participants for the organizing processes, whereas institutionalization led to a drainage of experienced organizers and leaders. As the level of repression by the Spanish state increased, and the movement's strategy was divided after the 1-O, organizers had a much harder time to prepare and plan effective collective action.

The findings echo the work of Davenport (2014), who argued that both internal (factionalization) and external (repression) factors lead to the decline, and ultimately destruction of SMOs. Most importantly, he claimed that it is the *interaction* of these factors that is most damaging to social movements. The analysis of the empirical material suggests that there was a similar effect on protest organizing in the Catalan case – not just by integrating internal and external mechanisms, but also within that same category: exhaustion and disagreements over strategy enhanced each other, and limited institutionalization and opportunities made it hard to sustain repression.

These mechanisms are quite familiar to social movement scholars. This suggests that the organizational development of the Catalan independence movement was not significantly different from those of other movements. Just like many movements before them, the Catalan activists faced a variety of repressive forces by the state and were unable to maintain the rhythm of mobilizing and organizing in intense times. However, the chapter has revealed some peculiarities

of the case. First, as Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos (2019) already noted, there was surprisingly little radicalization of the movement despite increasing levels of repression. As I have shown in this chapter, protest action turned more disruptive but seldom violent. Second, there were little institutional openings for the movement. In the aftermath of the 1-O episode, the Spanish state responded primarily with repression and not with facilitation. The only opening were the 21-D elections, which were approached in a rather defensive manner by the movement. However, the lack of facilitation and institutionalization after the 1-O must be seen in context: the independence movement had *already* been quite institutionalized at the regional level. After all, the three pro-independence parties had enjoyed a majority in the parliament since 2015 and formed governments since then. This fact points to another characteristic of the case: The post-1-O development was also driven by interactions between pro-independence civil society and its representatives. This became most visible when political parties turned their attention to the 21-D. It also played a crucial in strategic debates after the referendum, as I show in chapter 11. All these elements did not just impact protest behavior but also protest organizing.

Most importantly, the analysis shows that the 1-O referendum represents a transformative event for protest organizing, not just because of its effects *during* the 1-O episode, but also because of the consequences it had in the time *afterwards*. The referendum triggered four contractive mechanisms that not only led to demobilization of the movement, but fundamentally changed the ways in which activists organized protests in Catalonia. These mechanisms contributed to the restabilization of the secessionist conflict, but they did not bring back normal organizing from before the 1-O episode. Neither were the legacies of the organizing *during* the episode of contention fully continuous afterwards. Instead, the four mechanisms had their very own impact on protest organizing, leading to further transformations after the end of the 1-O episode. In the next two chapters, I discuss two of these mechanisms, strategy, and repression, more in detail.

Chapter Ten

MAKING SENSE OF THE REFERENDUM: STRATEGIZING AND ORGANIZING AFTER THE 1-O

Transformative events are outstanding occurrences that have an impact on politics beyond their own duration. William H. Sewell (1996a, 861) in his seminal article stressed that what makes transformative events *remarkable* is their symbolic dimension. It is the images and stories that are resonant and set them apart within the continuous flow of time. However, events are not self-evident facts, as a series of scholars has pointed out (Abrams 1993, 193; Basta 2018; Wagner-Pacifici 2010). There is no objective measure what counts as an event and what does not, how common or rare they are, what their duration is, or whether two of them fall into the same category. All these things are not inherent to occurrences. Rather, they are subject to social construction, or, as Basta (2018, 5) put it:

> Occurrences do not become events as a matter of course, even if and when they do transform institutions or social structures. Their meaning must be actively created in order for them to become broadly apparent political facts.

The meaning of an event is not objectively given, but the result of a process of social construction. This shifts the analytical focus to the question how an occurrence becomes interpreted as an event in the first place (Wagner-Pacifici 2010, 1358; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005, 410). Basta (2018, 2020) showed that political actors sometimes anticipate scheduled happenings, such as elections, referendums, or court decisions, and attempt to prospectively frame them in their favor. However, most events are created as such only after they take place.

Organizational scholars have described this process of event creation as *sensemaking* (Maitlis 2005; Maitlis and Christianson 2014; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005). The concept of sensemaking rose to prominence in particular through the seminal work of Karl Weick (1995), who developed a theoretical framework for its analysis drawing on previous studies (Feldman 1989; Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991; Louis 1980; Sackmann 1992). He viewed sensemaking as the process of how social actors construct meaning out of situations that, quite literally, do not make sense to

them (Weick 1995, 5). When actors are faced with occurrences that do not meet their previous expectations, they try to retrospectively rationalize these occurrences and integrate them into a plausible narrative (1995, 17; see also Czarniawska 1998, 5). It represents an ongoing collective attempt to create reality.[32]

Sensemaking is more than just interpretation, because it involves the *active creation* of the problem that actors try to understand. The difference between the two is that "sensemaking is about the ways people generate what they interpret" (p. 14). This is why the concept is essential for the empirical analyses that are the subject of this chapter. It describes the processes through which social actors construct events, or as Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005, 210) put it:

> Organizational sensemaking is first and foremost about the question: How does something come to be an event for organizational members? Second, sensemaking is about the question: What does an event mean? In the context of everyday life, when people confront something unintelligible and ask "what's the story here?" their question has the force of bringing an event into existence.

The concept of sensemaking is extremely valuable for the study of events in the line of Sewell and others, precisely because it does not assume that events are "out there" to be discovered. Instead, it highlights how people do not just interpret and frame events, but how they actively create them. Hence, the concept of sensemaking can be employed to investigate how political actors construct transformative events.

Sensemaking is an everyday activity that is far from being without consequences. Weick and other scholars emphasized the role of sensemaking for organizational processes and practices. Sensemaking has often been linked to processes of *change* in organizational settings. Making sense of unexpected events can prompt organizational learning (Christianson et al. 2009; Haas 2006), creativity (Drazin, Glynn, and Kazanjian 1999), innovation (Jay 2013), or lead collective actors to shift their strategy (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991). But change is not the only outcome of sensemaking. In an early contribution, Feldman (1989, 20) pointed out that sensemaking does not always lead to action. Sometimes, sensemaking even fails completely. In his article on the Mann Gulch disaster, Weick (1993), showed how firefighters ignored cues on the severity of the fire when they countered it, sticking to their prior expectations, and ultimately died. Luckily, the failure to make sense does not always have fatal consequences, but the example shows that sensemaking represents a crucial foundation for collective action. Most importantly, Weick (1993) demonstrated

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[32] Of course, the academic debate around the concept is much more complex than presented here. For an overview, see Maitlis and Christianson (2014).

that unexpected occurrences do not always lead to change. In order to become transformational, social actors must make sense of them as such and adapt their actions accordingly. Thus, sensemaking as the process of meaningful event construction is a necessary precondition for the causal consequences of an occurrence. Sensemaking does not always unfold as a uniform process across individual and collective actors. In the next section, I describe how the October 1 referendum produced a crisis of sensemaking, and how the various actors of the independence movement constructed the 1-O as an event in different ways.

1 "THE DAY THAT LASTED YEARS". OCTOBER 1 AS AN EVENT

To anyone who follows Spanish and Catalan politics, there can be very little doubt that October 1, 2017 represents a remarkable date in Catalonia's recent history. The images and stories of activists occupying voting stations and of police beating voters have circulated widely in national and international media. They have become engraved in the memories of participants and observers. The abbreviation *1-O* has become a familiar symbol in public discourse.

The outstanding symbolic dimension of the 1-O also became apparent in the analysis of my empirical data. During my ten months of fieldwork in Catalonia, the date was ever present in conversations and during observations, on leaflets and banners, on TV and in social media, at protests and meetings. Organizers highlighted the role of the 1-O in the interviews as well. Many of them described the density of occurrences on that day. Interviewee Isabel said that

> October 1 is- I don't know, it's a day that could be years with all those things that happened.

Isabel's statement illustrates the eventfulness of the 1-O by pointing to the condensed sequence of occurrences during that day. In another interview, organizer Gerard independently used a similar phrase.

> It was one of those days they say about "days that last years" (*Dies que duraran anys*). This is how long they last, I think, all life long, and they will always be a reference for independentism.

In contrast to Isabel, Gerard used the expression to stress that the impact of what happened on October 1 went well beyond that very day. This was very much the empirical expression of McAdam and Sewell's (2001) idea that transformative events represent short, intense periods of time that have long-term consequences. In the activists' narratives, the 1-O became a turning point for the movement, as the extract from Eulàlia's interview shows:

> Everybody knows somebody who they beat or kicked or threw on the ground. Their
> grandmother, their mother. You cannot forget this so easily. It marked us. I think there is
> a before and after October 1.

The phrase "before and after" is a crucial construction. It indicates that something, or many things, if not everything, changed for the movement on October 1. The statement underlined the symbolic importance of the 1-O as a historic event in Catalan politics. In the data, there was a widely shared narrative that constructed the referendum and the related occurrences as a transformative moment.

At the same time, the 1-O has become such a familiar symbol that some interviewees did not even bother elaborating on it. Organizer Antoni, for example, elaborated quite extensively on September 20. But when he turned to October 1, he just mentioned it briefly.

> Some days later came October 1 (pause) we already know what happened on October 1,
> and you know it better than anyone.

After this quote Antoni proceeded to talk about the detention of the Jordis on October 16. He was not the only interviewee to treat the 1-O in this way. This suggested that the 1-O was so present in public discourse and its stories had been told so many times that interviewees would simply take it for granted, as not interesting for the purpose of my research. Thus, treating the 1-O as not worth elaborating did not take away from its symbolic relevance. No interviewee stated that the 1-O was not important or referred to other events as more relevant. Altogether, there was plenty of evidence in the data that the 1-O was socially constructed as a transformative event for the Catalan independence movement.

At the time of the interviews, which took place about eight to fourteen months after the referendum, the relevance of the 1-O was evident. However, the retrospective statements in the interviews also suggested that this was not the case right after the referendum. The transformative meaning of the 1-O was not clear immediately after the event, but was created in a longer process. At first, the violent imagery of the actions of Spanish police forces left activists, voters, and bystanders in shock. Outrage over the brutality of the police intervention provoked a massive reaction on the October 3 general strike, displaying unity among a wide range of the Catalan population.

In spite of this immediate reaction, the data suggested that the movement went through a collective crisis of sensemaking in the days after the referendum. The massive mobilization for the occupation of the voting stations had exceeded the expectations of activists. Many interviewees reported how they were startled by the long lines outside the voting stations already early in the

morning. But it was mostly the violent intervention on part of the police that many activists had not imagined (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019). This is best illustrated by the following lengthy quote from the interview with ANC and CDR organizer Berta.

> I: How do you recall the weeks before the 1-O, in September? What was the preparation?
>
> R: Well, there was a lot of uncertainty and worry, because we began to see that the Spanish started a repressive, totally antidemocratic campaign [...] we always thought that we would make it, that if we did it the State couldn't do anything, because the image of police taking away ballot boxes- we believed that a self-declared democratic state would not want that image at any cost. This was something we could not imagine. More than them taking away ballot boxes, we imagined we wouldn't have ballots, that in the end we would have to print them at home [...] We saw the logistic problem, the problem that the voting stations would be closed, but in no way we imagined the uncertainty if we would achieve it or not. It was like an obstacle race [...] Never, never did we imagine what the 1-O would be.

For many activists who were involved in the organizing of the defense of the voting stations, the 1-O had been a primarily logistic problem. Occupying the schools and guaranteeing the voting process was already difficult enough in an uncertain situation, in which parts of the preparations had been delegated to clandestine networks.

In addition, a significant part of the movement, including ANC and Òmnium Cultural, had not encountered much opposition, let alone physical repression from the state in the years before the referendum campaign. As mentioned before, former Òmnium Cultural leader Muriel Casals had dubbed the independence movement the "Smiling Revolution" (*La Revolució dels Somriures)*, because of its peaceful and orderly repertoire of action. Activists prided themselves as *gent d'ordre* (literally "people of order"). Before the referendum campaign, the movement had engaged in legal quarrels with the Spanish state, but not in confrontational action. The occurrences of the 1-O put an end to this self-understanding, as the following piece of data from the interview with Emma illustrates:

> It was always a happy movement. Always, well- I think the 1-O was happy, too, but they took it from us. We were very happy, because in the end we were able to vote and so on, but they took it from us. They took our happiness. You could not be happy, because, shit, you had voted when you knew that there were almost a thousand people injured and the brutality that they had been injured with. The Catalan *procés* is an emotional process. It always has been.

The violent intervention of the police shattered many activists' expectations – cognitively and emotionally – of what the referendum would be. They had imagined the 1-O as a joyful celebration of democratic self-determination, and, ultimately, the foundation of an independent Catalan Republic.

However, the data also showed that these expectations were not unanimously shared in the movement. Interviewees from groups of the independentist Left stressed that they had been suffering from state repression already before the 1-O and were much more aware of a potential police deployment. Even so, many of them were shocked by the magnitude of the intervention and the brutality of police actions, as the following quote from the interview with SEPC and UxR organizer Ester shows.

> As a people, we were not prepared, we fell into the fallacy of liberal democracy, only trying to vote peacefully [...] we militants from the radical left said that it would not be like that. We anticipated it in some way, but I think emotionally- at least I did not anticipate it enough. Police charging at you during a student protest or the 15-M is within your schemes, it's not the first time for me in a police charge. But uff (pause) seeing old people, seeing children [getting beat by the police].

The quote stressed again that expectations of the referendum were not just cognitive – there was a certain emotional element as well. The police violence on the 1-O did not meet the projections that many activists had previously made.

Letamendia (2018) pointed out that the peculiar character of the 1-O lied in the combination of three types of action: mobilization, vote, and repression. Activists were left puzzled by the unusual sequence of occurrences. As the pieces of data above have shown, the police intervention, but also the clandestine preparation and the involvement of non-governmental actors in the voting process did not fit with the expectation of a peaceful, official, and binding referendum. Activists needed to *make sense* of the referendum.

It was unclear what the 1-O meant. Did it represent a legitimate mandate for independence, an expression of self-determination, a massive act of civil disobedience, or even a failure to carry out a proper referendum? This was further aggravated by the fact that the institutional consequences of the referendum were unclear in the days after the referendum. Would Puigdemont declare independence? And how would the Spanish state react? Would the international community, and the European Union in particular, intervene? In Weick's terms, the occurrences of the 1-O did not *make sense* to many activists initially.

In response, the movement went through a collective process of sensemaking in the days and weeks after the referendum. This was an ongoing process that was influenced by the unfolding of further events, most importantly the suspended declaration on October 10, the detention of the Jordis on October 16, the application of article 155, as well as the parliament's declaration of independence on October 27, and finally the arrests of party leaders on November 2. There was agreement in the movement that the 1-O would occupy an outstanding place in Catalan history. However, even when the relevance of an event is clear, it still "can be plotted in many different

ways" (Abbott 1992, 438) and integrated in different narratives. This was true for the 1-O: in the aftermath of the referendum, there was significant controversy on why the event was so important, and what followed from it. The following quote from the interview with CDR organizer Xavi illustrates this debate:

> It is after the 1-O when precisely the substantive goals appear […] This is when the debates start about what to do with the results of the 1-O, how to interpret them, how to manage them. It was like "is it binding or is it not? Is it sufficient or not? Can we move forward or not?" And this is where the disagreements between parties, detractors, between the ANC, civil society, CDRs, and so on start […] This is where the independentist camp starts to break.

The quote points to abovementioned struggles of activists to make sense of the referendum. The meaning of the 1-O was – and remains until the time of writing – very much disputed within the movement.

This sensemaking process is best illustrated by the debates in the CDRs in the immediate aftermath of the 3-O. In the CDR Sabadell, for example, discussions started to take place in the assemblies after the general strike. This debate revolved around the "R" in CDR, as organizer Joana explained: "what do we do now? Are we Referendum, are we Republic?" Some participants argued that the name Committee for the Defense of the *Referendum* did not make sense anymore, because the referendum had passed. Now, the R should stand for "Republic" instead. Others suggested that this would not represent all those people who participated on October 1 and 3 to defend the right to decide but were not pro-independence. Losing them would mean losing strength. The issue was picked up by the first national assembly of the CDRs and from there spread to all local CDRs throughout the region. However, Xavi's quote above shows that this debate did not just take place within the CDRs, but in the independence movement as a whole.

Obviously, this was not just a discussion about labels, but one about sensemaking, strategy, and identity. It was basically a debate between those who supported the right to decide "but weren't so sure if they were pro-independence and those who were pro-independence for all their lives," as Joana put it. However, these positions should not be equated with particular actors. Rather, it was a debate between two discourses that cut across the various organizations, parties, and milieus. In the following, I describe them more in detail.

On the one hand, some activists declared electoral victory for the independence movement. Organizer Carles from the CDR Clot said that "we believed that we had won the referendum. And that there must be a Republic." Also in the CDR Sabadell, one part of the activist group claimed that "we have won. That's it" (Joana). In this narrative, the 1-O was first and foremost a legitimate and democratic decision by the Catalan people. The overwhelming Yes vote provided sufficient

grounds for independence, notwithstanding the abstention of a large part of the population and the interference of police in the voting process.

On the other hand, the "we have won" reading of the events attracted a lot of criticism from within the movement. CDR organizer Xavi argued in the interview that it represented an erroneous interpretation of the referendum.

> I think it's a very bad reading of the results. It's a very bad reading of what has happened. It's a very bad reading when the mobilization had most success, and I think it is a reading because of political interests. I think that the independentist Left is wrong about this reading, plain wrong. […] If we have won, then where is the reward? No, maybe, we haven't won [...] You're managing a defeat with a rhetoric of victory.

Xavi questioned the victory claims of a part of the movement after the vote, considering it a bad construction of the event. In the view of many activists, the narrative of "we have won" represented a simplification of what happened on the day of the referendum. For organizer Joana, it was "not as easy as 'we have protested, we have voted, we won, that's it.' " In this view, it was at least doubtable that the turnout and result of the vote were sufficient to claim victory and justify a declaration of independence. Hence, the referendum could not represent the final decision over independence, as Oriol argued:

> In any case, the 1-O, I think, has a lot of value, but not just by itself and because of the many things that happened, but because it is part of a process and not the end of a trajectory.

In this perspective, it was not so much the result of the vote that was important, but the fact that the referendum could take place at all in the face of a massive police intervention. "We have won means we have managed that people could vote," as interviewee Joana put it. In this line of thinking, the 1-O had value for the movement, but not as an electoral victory.

In spite of this internal critique, the interpretation of the 1-O as a definitive decision and legitimation for independence imposed itself - at least in the CDRs. Practically all CDRs throughout Catalonia changed their names to Committee for the Defense of the Republic. The change was a signifier of the narrative that the referendum should be seen primarily as a legitimation for secession from Spain and the foundation of the Catalan Republic. Besides the name change, there were frequent calls to "defend the results of the referendum" on leaflets, social media, and protest banners in the weeks after the referendum. Defending meant making the results of the vote binding – against threat and repression from the Spanish state on the one hand, but also against those who criticize the "we have won" reading of the event within the movement.

In sum, the occurrences surrounding the referendum on October 1, 2017 were retrospectively constructed as a transformative event. This was not an immediate outcome though. The large-scale mobilization for the defense of the voting stations, as well as the violent police intervention left activists in shock. Moreover, the outcome and legitimacy of the referendum were unclear at first. The occurrences of the 1-O were unexpected and did not make sense to many activists. In response, two rival event constructions emerged within the movement, one claiming victory and grounds for independence, and one highlighting civil disobedience. These two *senses* of the 1-O were not just retrospective in nature, but carried important implications for future actions of the independence movement. I describe the conflicting strategies that emerged on the bases of rivaling event constructions in the next section.

2   FROM THE SENSEMAKING CRISIS TO THE CONFLICT OF STRATEGY

What happened on October 1 was not what many pro-independence activists had expected. Those who had imagined an orderly and regular referendum, a purely institutional act, were appalled by the confrontations between voters and police. Only the immediate response was apparent to organizers: to mobilize massively for the general strike on October 3 as rejection of the police violence on the day of the referendum. Everything else was unclear, especially the question whether the referendum strategy (see chapter 6) had been successful of not. Since the meaning and outcome of the referendum were ambiguous initially, there was no clear way forward from the event. Hence, the crisis of senses, which I have described above, was also a crisis of movement strategy. This became manifest in various ways.

For example, several ANC interviewees pointed out that the organization had a crisis of strategy after the 1-O. As interviewee Iris put it, the ANC was in "a state of shock." After the detention of Jordi Sànchez, the organization was lacking a stable leadership. Local ANC organizers reported that they had difficulties coordinating with the central organization. The lack of coordination among organizational levels led to overall disorientation. This was not exclusive to the ANC. Also other collective actors briefly lost their sense of reaction. La Forja organizer Gerard described the state of the independentist Left after the referendum as follows:

> I think until some point, we in the independentist Left, all sectors, doesn't matter if Endavant or Poble Lliure, we all lost sight of reality.

The ambiguity of the 1-O left the collective actors of the independence movement disoriented and without a clear strategy forward. According to interviewee Pere, already on the day of the referendum the internal fractures in the independence movement started. One part wanted to

dialogue and relax the situation, while the other part wanted to push further and risk more confrontation with the Spanish state. He highlighted that this debate ran across party lines: there were people on both sides in ERC and JxCat. The disorientation was aggravated by further events such as the detention of the Jordis and Puigdemont's suspended declaration of independence. In sum, the independence movement had no clear strategy going forward in early October.

Nevertheless, two rival constructions or *senses* of the 1-O emerged in the weeks of October, which I have described in the previous section. The various individual and collective actors tried to make sense of what had happened on the day of the referendum. These were no mere isolated retrospective assessments, though. In fact, the two meanings of the 1-O were fundamental for movement strategy after the event. The interview data reflect how organizers designed plans how to move forward on the basis of the constructed senses of the 1-O. Thus, the two processes – sensemaking and strategizing – were closely intertwined, as actors' constructions and interpretations of past events directly influenced their projections into the future. Moreover, these elements were not stable, but changed over time as further events after the referendum had to be integrated into these strategies.

3   SECESSIONIST STRATEGIES AFTER THE 1-O REFERENDUM

3.1   Fer República: Unilateral Strategy

The two event constructions of the 1-O led to vastly different conclusions about the movement's future actions. On the one hand, the "we have won" narrative, which was materialized in the name change of the CDRs, resulted in goal replacement: from organizing the referendum to "implementing the Republic." In particular in the days after the referendum, this meant putting pressure on the Catalan government, and President Puigdemont in particular, to unilaterally declare independence from Spain. This is why I call this strategy *unilateral*.

Proponents of the "we have won" interpretation demanded the application of the referendum results. In the interview, CDR organizer Carles reclaimed the 1-O as legitimate and rejected any agreement with the Spanish sate.

> We think that the 1-O was worth it. It was real and for everything that it cost us to defend it, we also have to defend the results […] if some "fool on the hill" from Convergència, Esquerra, or the CUP comes and says "we have to make an agreement [with the Spanish state]," then as a CDR we have to say that we don't want to bargain, that we have already won a plebiscite.

The quote illustrates nicely the strategy that followed from the "we have won" reading of the 1-O. For Carles, defending the results and implementing the republic required "real civil

disobedience" from all pro-independence actors: the movement organizations, the political parties, and the government. Unilateral action was the only way forward, and there should be no negotiations with the Spanish state.

After Puigdemont's suspended declaration and the ineffective declaration on October 27, the pressure strategy was complemented by a narrative of disenchantment with institutional politics. Many interviewees criticized the regional government and the political parties for not applying the results of the referendum. Instead of institutional politics, many interviewees chose protest as the primary tactic. Organizers aimed to keep the level of mobilization high, as Iris recalled in the interview.

> I: Do you remember the days after? What was the atmosphere, the debate?

> R: Yes, yes. We want the Republic. We want to defend the results of October 1. How? Publicly, showing our will in the streets.

When the institutional means to achieve independence failed, contention in the street seemed the only option forward to many organizers. However, the disappointment with the pro-independence parties and the regional government also led to demobilization after October 27. Maintaining pressure on the streets became more difficult for those who followed the unilateral strategy.

On the other hand, the strategic proposition of unilateral action and disobedience attracted quite some critique as well. One line of criticism attacked the viability of the unilateral strategy. Many organizers within the movement thought that this strategy could not be maintained, in particular as it became clear that the Spanish state would respond with severe legal repression. A second argument criticized the strategy as ineffective. Oriol argued that "we will not advance by saying 'tomorrow Republic, tomorrow Republic, tomorrow Republic', hanging ribbons and flags." Thus, many activists within the movement came to regard the unilateral strategy that focused on "implementing the Republic" through civil disobedience as illusionary. Or, as Xavi put it, as trying to implement the "Republic of the unicorns, over the rainbow in candy land." As such, many organizers perceived the unilateral strategy as deceptive, or - as Pere called it - a blatant "lie."

Interviewees addressed this criticism mostly to the CDRs. La Forja organizer Gerard, for instance, argued when it became clear it would not be possible to "defend the mandate of the 1-O", the CDR became "a space void of goals." Others also attacked the political parties. Oriol for example, said that the problem was that the parties went into the 21-D election campaign with the slogan to "implement the Republic." However, these organizers did not only criticize the unilateral strategy, they also proposed a constructive alternative, which I describe in the next section.

3.2 Eixamplar la Base: Gradualist Strategy

The second strategy emerged out of the construction of the 1-O as an event that had value for the movement beyond the electoral victory. This narrative rejected the notion of the referendum as a final decision on independence, but situated it as part of a larger process. The strategy that followed from this event construction can be called *gradualist*. It opened up several avenues for future action. More concretely, interviewees pointed to a combination of two plans. The first one was to achieve what the 1-O could not be: a binding referendum, which would have been agreed in some form with the Spanish state (*un referèndum pactat*). This meant acknowledging that the 1-O had not been a success, which automatically attracted criticism from those who claimed to defend its mandate. This was why Joana responded to my question about strategies: "Which is the way to go? They will call me traitor, but: an agreed referendum." This choice of language showed the severity of the debate: anyone who demanded another referendum risked being attacked as revisionist, as betraying the 1-O. Yet, this strategy did find support within the movement. Many interviewees mentioned another referendum as a potential way forward.

The second plan implied building a solid pro-independence majority among the Catalan population in order to win a possible binding referendum. This approach has often been called "enhancing the basis" (*eixamplar la base*). This discourse was mostly pushed by Òmnium Cultural after the 1-O episode. In the view of organizer Isabel, the movement had to speak to the majority of the people, which it had not always done. However, this perspective was widely shared beyond Òmnium Cultural. For example, CDR organizer Xavi stressed the need to extend support among the population.

> I don't even know if [the referendum] is legitimate, and I'm independentist, but we have 48 percent [of support among the population]. We don't have 58. [...] Well, we have to work- we must enhance the basis [seguir ampliando la base].

The phrase *48 percent* became a shorthand signifier for the broad but not majoritarian support for independence in Catalan society. Another CDR organizer, Oriol, argued that the "we have won" narrative contributed to a spiral of polarization, of splitting Catalan society. Instead of following a unilateral strategy, the movement should broaden its appeal outside of its constituencies.

> Maybe it is the moment to withdraw and see in which ways we can have an impact in the entire society again [...] If independentism wants to be a winning project it must be interested in building bridges.

Of course the gradualist strategy came under attack from those who pursued the unilateral strategy. CDR organizer Carles, for instance, criticized other collective actors, in particular Òmnium and

ANC. In his view, these organizations had chosen to move on. "These political strategies are wrong in my view - but I can understand they see it like this." This suggested implicitly that ANC and Òmnium might adopt a more "moderate" stance for "political" reasons - i.e. their close relationships with political parties.

3.3 Llibertat Presos Polítics: Anti-repressive Strategy

The two strategies described above, unilateral and gradualist, were the results of competing interpretations of the 1-O as an event. The strategizing process within the movement did not stop after the referendum, though. As the 1-O episode continued to unfold after the referendum, further events occurred that activists had to make sense of. In particular, the detentions of several pro-independence politicians and activists produced a third movement strategy: anti-repression.

On October 16, the leaders of ANC and Òmnium Cultural, Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez were cited by a judge for their actions on the protest on September 20. Both were charged with rebellion and sedition for calling the protest and kept in custody. On November 2, eight politicians, among them Vice President Oriol Junqueras, were also arrested and charged with rebellion and sedition. These events were perceived as unjust and repressive and led to an adjustment of the post-referendum movement strategy. This strategy is represented by the label *Llibertat Presos Polítics* ("Freedom for the Political Prisoners"), which was the name of the campaign by Òmnium Cultural (see chapter 9). Anti-repressive strategy was also actively pursued by ANC, the CDRs, and the political parties, and was also shared by many smaller collective actors within the movement.

Interviewees report that the strategy supposed a dramatic shift for the Òmnium Cultural, because its leadership did not expect that Cuixart would enter prison directly on October 16. The day after, Òmnium Cultural organizers designed "a whole strategy with regards to the prison" (Antoni) and launched its Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign. The strategy meant supporting Cuixart and his family on the one side, and a public campaign denouncing the detention as repression by the Spanish state. Òmnium Cultural launched its Cuixart campaign, which was in conjunction but slightly different from the main Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign. Its goal was to single out Jordi Cuixart as a social leader who never held or ran for office. This campaign tried to reach out to people who were not independentist, but against the imprisonments of Catalan leaders.

Solidarity with the political prisoners was unanimous in the movement even after the 1-O episode. However, the anti-repressive strategy did receive some criticism. CDR activists in particular criticized the increased attention to this particular brand of anti-repressive action. In their view, the demand to free the political prisoners "absorbed" the more profound demands such

as independence itself. In the interview, organizer Quim argued that the "concept" Llibertat Presos Polítics replaced the concept Republic. In his view, the pro-independence elites proposed that "first we free the prisoners, then we implement the Republic." In contrast, CDR activists claimed that as long as Catalonia remained an Autonomous Community of Spain, it would be impossible to bargain with the Spanish state as equals.

Interviewees also criticized their own organizations. ANC organizer Enric, for example, said in the interview that focusing so much on the political prisoners was a "mistake that we recognize." This focus took away energy from their main effort, which should have been to fight for the Republic, while in reality they could not do anything in their power to free the prisoners. He told me that the only power they had was to "really create the Republic" or to provoke a crisis in the Spanish state. "If all we do is to simply defend them, we will lose a lot of strength, and I think we're becoming aware of that." This is why they started to not dedicate "100 percent of our efforts" for the political prisoners, as they were doing before.

4   POST-REFERENDUM STRATEGIES AND PROTEST ORGANIZING

As shown above, the strategies of the Catalan independence movement were not rigid over time, but changed as a result of transformative events. Throughout the 1-O episode, organizers had to make sense of a series of occurrences, in particular the contested referendum itself. The constructions of these events were not uniform within the movement. A debate emerged about what they meant and how to move forward.

The data analysis showed that secessionist strategy played an important role for protest organizing both during and after the 1-O episode of contention. As frames for future action, strategies were fundamental in structuring the focus of organizers. Before the 1-O, individual and collective actors dedicated their time and resources to the preparation of the referendum. ANC organizer Carme, for example, said in the interview that the organization "did everything else on the side" since the announcement of the referendum. The referendum strategy was able to channel all organizational efforts into a single goal (see chapter 7). Once the referendum was past, organizers lost this focus and the various strategic discourses drove their time and resources into different directions. The data showed that both ANC and Òmnium Cultural devoted a lot of energy to anti-repressive strategy after the 1-O. For some time, practically all the organizations' efforts went into work for the prisoners. After a while, the leadership re-evaluated this strategy, as organizer Enric told: "we thought we could take on everything, but then we realized we couldn't do anything." Subsequently the debate shifted, and so they decided to diversify their efforts.

Strategies not only influenced what kind of actions movement actors pursued. Strategies also impacted how movement actors *organized* these actions. Interviewees linked the debates over strategy to two shifts in organizational practices and processes. The strategic debates after the 1-O resulted in, first, more deliberation and less directing in decision making, and second, less collaboration among collective actors.

An important caveat of these findings is that they do not suggest that these transformations were the result of a *specific* strategy adopted by the given actors. Although this seems a plausible line of reasoning, there is no conclusive evidence about this relationship. Instead, the data show that what mattered was first the *lack* of strategy and later the *disagreement* over strategy. These two critical moments then resulted in more deliberation and less collaboration. In the next two sections, I describe the two transformations.

4.1   From Directing to Deliberation

The data showed that the increased debates over strategies resulted after the 1-O resulted in a shift in decision-making practices, from directing to deliberation. First, it became evident that there was less directing. While the practice of directing played an important role in the protest organizing processes before the referendum, and in particular during the preparations of the defense of the voting stations (see chapter 8), it became less prominent after the 1-O.

For example, organizer Josep lamented that after the detentions of the Jordis and the application of article 155, the ANC as an organization was disoriented and lacking a stable leadership. There were no clear directions given to the lower organizational levels. The sectorial and territorial chapters of the ANC did not know what the strategy of the organization was and were lacking concrete and coordinated action.

Another illustrative example is the student platform UxR, which did not have the same success after the 1-O and the end of the occupation of the University of Barcelona. As described in chapter 8, the organizing process of the occupation relied heavily on leadership decision making. A small group of leaders from different student groups told other youth activists how to prepare and manage the occupation. This top-down organizing process was only acceptable to participants, because it served a short-term goal, as Pere explained.

> Of course, you cannot do this indefinitely. You cannot do it. You cannot avoid uprising, you cannot table debates forever. It can only be for a short amount of time and for a tangible, real goal.

Once this clear goal - the referendum - was past, this way of organizing protest did not work anymore in the student platform. Organizer Ester said that this type of leadership "has many

limits. It works if applied well-measured, but in the long run it has some problems." After the 1-O, the course of the platform became unsteady and the leadership group had less control over the organizing process. This became clear already on the 3-O, when the group failed to organize a protest camp because of internal differences (see chapter 7).

Second, activists and organizers deliberated more after the 1-O referendum. A central characteristic of the organizing processes for the occupation of the university, as well as of the defense of the voting stations, was the absence of deliberation, because the goal of the organizing processes was clear: making the referendum happen. Once the referendum was over, deliberation reemerged in the CDRs, UxR, and the ANC. As described above, the contested character of the 1-O required activists to make sense of the event and to readjust their strategies. These collective sensemaking and strategizing processes took place in the form of deliberations within and between SMOs. The most striking example of this shift from directing to deliberation were the CDRs. In chapter 8, I have shown that deliberation was practically absent in their assemblies. This changed dramatically after the 3-O, as this passage from the interview with CDR Sabadell organizer Joana showed.

> The assemblies started to have more debates as well. Because the other ones [before the 1-O] are more functional, more organizational. Those after October 3 are more for debate, "well, what are we doing, are we referendum, or are we Republic?" This is also when the coordination at the Catalan level started and the CDR Catalunya emerges.

Comparing the assemblies before and after the referendum revealed notable differences in decision-making practices. In contrast to the "more functional, more organizational" assemblies before the referendum, there was much more debate after the 3-O – primarily about strategy and identity of the CDRs.

Another example was the ANC after the referendum, and in particular after the detention of its leader Jordi Sànchez on October 16. As mentioned above, these events left the organization without a clear strategy and leadership. In the interviews, organizers report that this led to more deliberation about how to move forwards both in the Board of Directors as well as at the local level. Carme told that within the leadership, there was a group of members arguing the organization should act more carefully and coordinate with other organizations and the political parties, while others thought the ANC should spear-head the secessionist struggle without the other pro-independence actors.

> And this is reflected in the Board of Directors as well. There are people who think we should wait a bit, and people who do not think so, that we have to be- that we have to act without the others, follow our line alone. Looking for consensus in this situation of course

slows down the decision making. It already is [slow] because the structure of the ANC is already complex and even more when you add these obstacles.

The quote from the interview with Carme shows that the disagreement over strategy after the referendum slowed down the ANC's decision making, because finding consensus becomes much more difficult.

Of course, one might argue that these strategic debates should be regarded as separate from the actual processes of organizing protest. It might well have been the case that activists discussed more about the overall strategy of the independence movement, but agreed on tactics, and, as a consequence, the organizing process remained unaltered by the strategic debate. Even if this was true, activists would have had less time and energy they could devote to the preparation of protest, because there were more deliberations over strategy. In addition, there was some evidence in the data that strategizing also took place while organizing protest. Many CDR interviewees reported that ideas for protest actions often emerged from participants in assemblies. In one of the CDRs in Tarragona, activists had fundamental disagreements over protest tactics after the 1-O episode. During one assembly, one group of participants proposed to walk the city's beaches dressed in yellow to draw the attention of tourists to the independentist cause and the prisoners in particular. Interviewee Quim was not happy with this idea: "Walking on the beach dressed in yellow is the silliest thing ever." Instead, he and some other activists favored street demonstrations at concrete events. This approach, in turn, was criticized by the beach walkers as not attracting enough participation and that small protests looked poor. In the end, both types of actions were organized, but the debates made the respective preparatory processes much more difficult.

Deliberation needs time, as another interviewee put it: "the assemblarian movement is demanding, it takes to come to an agreement when there are different opinions." In the CDRs, a protest action could not be done until there was consensus. While typical for grassroots groups, the bottom-up development became much more difficult when there was not clear overall movement strategy to guide these tactics. This became most visible precisely when there was little time to prepare protests. For example, after the detentions of the Jordis, the CDRs wanted to react quickly and organize a large-scale protest. Organizer Gabriel reported in the interview that "there was a lot of energy." CDR activists felt that they had won the referendum and that they were ready to occupy the parliament or carry out any action that would lead to independence. But they saw that from the side of institutional politics, there was not really a plan. Organizer Xavi said that "we talked about blocking the airport, but in the end we didn't do it, we talked about blocking the harbor, but we didn't do it. And I think this is where we fucked it up." In Gabriel's view, there was no sense of direction in the movement. In that phase, "we improvised too much and weren't able

to organize" because of the lack of strategy. Xavi told that already then, there was a certain sense of defeat, as it became clear that the CDRs were not able to put the country on hold and organize an effective strike. Only three weeks later, and after further detentions, the CDRs organized the 8-N. Also, during the protest in reaction to Puigdemont's detention, the CDRs were not well prepared. They acted "without any kind of plan, without anything, and we failed. We didn't do anything, we just received blows from the police" (Gabriel).

These pieces of data illustrate the consequences of the disagreements over strategy for decision-making practices in the independence movement. Before the 1-O, the alignment of movement strategy had allowed for quick organizing processes with little deliberation and more acceptance for directing. In the aftermath of the referendum, as goals became unclear and several strategies emerged out of the event constructions of the 1-O, there was more need for deliberation within and between collective actors. As a result, organizing processes were slowed down significantly.

4.2 Declining Organizing *between* Organizations

The second consequence of the strategic debates after the referendum was that SMOs collaborated with each other to a lesser extent. Diverging interpretations of how to make sense of the 1-O, as well as different ideas of how to move on from there were not only the subject of debate *within* collective actors but also *between* them. As mentioned above, there was a debate in the ANC leadership about strategy that slowed down the organization's decision making. This also affected the ANC's collaborations with other entities. The ANC and other entities were struggling to find their strategy internally, and they were doing even more so at the interorganizational level. ANC organizer Carme reported that it became very difficult after the referendum to agree on a common strategy among organizations. She said that "what affects us most is disagreement and repression in itself." When I ask how they noticed disagreement and repression, she told me the following.

> Yes, you notice it, because of course when we normally plan a demonstration we have to find a consensus with all the other parties and entities. Then, of course you notice that we are a bit more daring, and there are people that are a bit more hesitant right now.

Before the referendum, a central characteristic of the independence movement was that most large protests were jointly called for by the different SMOs. After the referendum, the diverging ideas about strategy made this much more difficult. This was visible in the difference between the two general strikes. While the 3-O was a great display of unity, the 8-N was called by a small trade union, and most of the protests were organized by the CDR. Other organizations, such as the ANC also decided to take a vanguard stance and organize contentious action in solitary fashion,

as Carme described above. In her view, the ANC was ready to act alone and to "pull the wagon and the other parties."

The prime example of the impact of strategic disagreement on interorganizational collaboration is the student platform UxR. As described in chapter 7, UxR was the result of a small group of former SEPC militants, who managed to bring together organizers from different student and youth organizations to join forces in a single interorganizational platform for contentious action during the 1-O episode. In this way, the platform organized the occupation of the University of Barcelona. However, already after the referendum and the end of the occupation, the emerging strategic debate made collective action much more difficult, as organizer Pere describes in the following quote.

> I: At the level of the platform, did you change how you organize after October 1?
>
> R: The platform only works when there are no political discrepancies. At the level of general politics. When there is a common strategy it's perfect. When there was strategic unity, it was perfect, because it was able to agglutinate all the organizations that represented the entire cross section of the youth part of the movement […] But when there is strategic disparity it does not work. We tried one thing, but the JERC told us "I can't move [from my position], I cannot meet you", so we said "well let's go home then and within a month when things a clearer we organize something."

Collaboration was the foundation for UxR as an interorganizational platform. As the piece of data shows, strategic disagreements made effective collaboration at the level of the platform impossible. This had a direct effect on protest organization, which in the youth sector of the movement was only successful when launched by a broad coalition. This became apparent on the 3-O, when the platform organizers had the idea to set up a protest camp.

> We said "we have to set up a camp, like the 15-M." And we were discussing whether we could do it. Those from the independentist Left were like "ok, seems good," but those from ERC "well, we have to call the party, you know". […] this was where the division starts […] in the end, they say yes, but we came very late […] I think on the 3-O, had we anticipated it, it would have been a bit different. I'm not saying we would be independent, but it would have been different […] but we came late for political decisions

This quote from the interview with Pere shows that UxR was incapable of acting without collaboration of the participating youth organizations, which in turn depended on their parent parties. In a situation when quick action was needed, the emerging strategic disagreement slowed down the organizing process to the extent that the contentious action practically failed. After October 27, the UxR organizers came to realize that "this is lost," as Pere put it. The data suggested that the platform did not develop into a formal organization, but essentially remained an

interorganizational space that relied on the collaboration of its part. This became increasingly difficult, because most of the youth organizations (JERC, JNC, Arran) were linked to political parties, which is why it became impossible to find a common strategy with the 21-D elections coming up.

Of course, this does not mean that collective actors did not collaborate at all after the 3-O. There is some evidence of organizations joining forces for contentious action at the local level. The ANC in Hospitalet, for example, put some efforts into interorganizational collaboration with the CDRs, but also the political parties. At the same time, the growing criminalization of the CDRs by the media and police made collaboration difficult, because the ANC took a certain distance to the CDRs. Also in the youth sectors, La Forja was focused on initiating mass protest by bringing together different organization, for example in December 2018. Overall, however, the data suggested that the strategic disagreement within and among collective actors made collaborative protest organizing difficult after the referendum.

5   CONCLUSION

October 1, 2017 has gone down in history as an exceptionally important event in the secessionist conflict in Catalonia. While it did not lead to independence, the referendum had a transformative impact on the independence movement itself. Massive participation at the vote and the violent actions of Spanish police forces turned the 1-O into a complex series of occurrences that was hard to grasp for challengers, authorities, and observers. Most importantly, the contentious and contested character of the referendum led to conflicting constructions of the 1-O as an event within the independence movement. While one part of the movement claimed victory in the referendum and saw it as legitimation for outright independence, another part considered the results as insufficient and emphasized the value of mobilization. In other words, there was disagreement about whether the referendum strategy had been successful or not. The 1-O had produced a crisis of sensemaking and strategy. Consequently, two rival strategies emerged in the aftermath of the 1-O referendum. On the one hand, those who claimed victory in the referendum proposed a unilateral strategy that aimed to "implement" the independent Catalan Republic through wide-scale civil and institutional disobedience. On the other hand, the critics of the "we have won" approach championed a more gradualist strategy that centered on increasing support for independence in the Catalan population and the negotiation of a binding referendum.

These findings represent an important contribution to the academic debate on secessionist and counter-secessionist strategies. Previous research in these fields has portrayed the adoption of particular secessionist strategies by independence movements as a result of rational choice

processes (K. G. Cunningham 2013; Sorens 2012). Secessionist movements were understood as having a full repertoire of tactical and strategic options at hand, and being able to choose among them through cost-benefit calculations. Although I have not put the cost-benefit calculations of independence movement under scrutiny in this chapter, I argue that the findings cast considerable doubt on this assumption for two reasons. First, the case of the Catalan independence movement shows that a unitary strategy does not always exist within secessionist movements. The disagreements over strategy could be the result of different actors arriving at different cost-benefit calculations depending on their strategic situation. However, I have shown that these debates mainly take place *within* collective actors, which makes it unlikely that strategy depends on their specific costs and benefits. Second, and most importantly, the findings show that strategy is formed through on *interpretive* rather than rational processes. Strategies are not freely available to activists, but must be constructed in meaningful and convincing ways. The Catalan independence movement was quite successful at strategy building before the 1-O, when the referendum strategy served as a unifier for its diverse collective actors. However, as described above, the contested character of the 1-O initially caused a crisis of strategy. Before activists could even think about calculating costs and benefits, they had to make sense of what happened during the day of the referendum. This involved the construction of the event in the first place and the creation of its meaning. I have shown that these event constructions had crucial consequences for strategizing after the 1-O. What follows from this is that students of secessionist strategies should not limit their analyses to rational choice assumptions, but include the role of transformative events and interpretive sensemaking and strategizing processes of actors in their response.

The conflicts over strategy after the 1-O referendum are not only interesting in themselves, but they are relevant for the purpose of this dissertation because they had a crucial impact on the organizational dimension of the independence movement. The analysis of the empirical data showed that there were two important transformations as a result of the competing strategies. First, at the practice level, there was a shift from directing to deliberation. The referendum strategy as a unifier had made the directions of movement organizers more acceptable to other activists before the 1-O. After the referendum, the lack of such a common strategy made it much harder for leaders to formulate clear directions. The disagreements over the movement's strategy and tactics simultaneously led to a greater need for deliberation in the protest organizing processes described here. Second, at the process level, the conflict over strategy led to less protest organizing between organizations. While interorganizational collaboration was an important feature throughout the 1-O episode of contention, the various organizations of the independence movement mostly decided to organize protests on their own after the referendum.

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These findings highlight the role of movement strategy for organizational practices and processes. On a general level this is not surprising: protest organizing is, after all, an organizational process that is aimed at realizing contentious methods and tactics. The properties of this process depend very much on the relationship of these methods and tactics with the overall plan of the movement. What is remarkable, however, is how much a contingent event, such as the 1-O referendum, can transform protest organizing if it results in the dissolution of a unitary movement strategy.

Chapter Eleven

COUNTER-SECESSIONIST REPRESSION, SURVEILLANCE, AND PROTEST ORGANIZING

The announcement to hold a referendum on October 1, 2017 was an audacious attempt to achieve Catalan independence. But it backfired almost immediately. After the Catalan parliament approved the Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination, the Spanish government under conservative Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy reacted with a series of counter-secessionist actions. The response of the Spanish state was hardly surprising. After all, states have a reputation to lose: they fight secessionist demands in one region to prevent other regions from following this example (Walter 2009). But states do not respond uniformly to repression: some states employ violence, others negotiate or accommodate (Griffiths 2015, 2016). Even the same state may vary in its responses to different secessionist movements (Butt 2017). In any case, previous research stressed that counter-secession shapes the strategies and tactics of secessionist movements (Griffiths and Muro 2020a). This chapter looks at how counter-secessionist repression as a result of the 1-O referendum affected protest organizing in the Catalan independence movement.

Social movements studies have produced an impressive body of work on the repression of social movements (for overviews, see Earl 2011; Peterson and Wahlström 2014). Scholars have analyzed the dynamics of repression along three dimensions (Peterson and Wahlström 2014): the scale dimension (from the supra-national to the local level), the institutional dimension (state and private actors), and the functional dimension (from coercion and violence to softer forms of repression). In spite of this broad interest for repression, some important blind spots remain in the literature. Earl (2011) noted that social movement studies have paid more attention to overt and coercive repression, and protest policing in particular, than other forms of repressive action (e.g. Della Porta 1996; Della Porta and Reiter 1998; Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003; Soule and Davenport 2009). The effects of repression on public protest and mobilization – what is called "repression-mobilization nexus" (D. Cunningham 2009; see also Davenport 2005a) – are well studied. For the Catalan case, the existing research focused mainly on the impact on public opinion

(Balcells, Dorsey, and Tellez 2020; Barceló 2018), the movement's repertoire (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019) and frames (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2020). However, little is known about consequences for other aspects of activism in the Catalan case and beyond. This chapter expands this literature by looking at how repression affects organizational practices and processes in social movements.

This is an important question for three reasons. First, organizing is an important prerequisite for protest action, social movement scholars have shown (Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow 1989; Lofland 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Rucht 2013, 2017). The effect of repression on movements' organizational practices may thus impact their capacities for mobilization. Second, liberal democracies grant their citizens the freedom to political association. Repression of activist organizational practices might directly limit or impede the exercise of these fundamental rights (Starr et al. 2008). Third, many social movements can be considered "schools of democracy" (Tocqueville), because they champion inclusive and horizontal forms of organizing (Della Porta 2009b; Della Porta and Rucht 2015; Felicetti 2017; Polletta 2002). Repression might have harmful consequences for movements' internal democracy by altering their organizational practices. In short, the relationship between repression and activist organizational practices matters not only for social movements themselves, but for the state of liberal democracies.

The first part of the chapter looks at the sequence of counter-secessionist repression that was triggered by the announcement of the referendum and how it impacted protest organizing in the independence movement. I describe how the detentions of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez affected the campaigns of ANC and Òmnium Cultural, and how the CDRs suffered from policing and criminalization. The second part shifts the attention to repressive surveillance. I briefly discuss the existing literature on surveillance and how organizers in the independence movement perceive surveillance. Then I turn to describe five responses to perceived surveillance threats in the movement.

1   REPRESSION AND PROTEST ORGANIZING

Repression against the independence movement already began before the referendum. The Spanish government had taken secessionist actions to the courts repeatedly, for example the 9-N referendum. However, the announcement of the 1-O increased the intensity and frequency of repressive action. The approval of Law on the Referendum on Self-Determination by the Catalan parliament was followed by a range of counter-secessionist actions by the Spanish state. In chapter 6, I have described the five most important repressive occurrences during the 1-O episode of contention: first, the ruling of the Spanish Constitutional Court on the illegality of the referendum.

Second, the search of the Catalan Department of Economy and the attempted raid of the headquarters of the CUP on September 20. Third, the violent police intervention on the day of the referendum. Fourth, the detention of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez on October 16. Fifth, the application of article 155 on October 27. These counter-secessionist actions represented a "repressive turn" (Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos 2019) in the cycle of contention. The single actions were interconnected: for example, the detention of the Jordis is a result of their response to the raid on September 20. Neither of these actions would have happened if the Constitutional Court had not ruled the referendum illegal. Thus, they are part of a repressive sequence.

This repressive sequence can be read as a transformative mechanisms that was triggered by the announcement of the referendum and affected the independence movement beyond the conclusion of the 1-O episode. After the application of article 155, legal prosecution of secessionist activists and politicians by the Spanish state continued. On November 2, Oriol Junqueras, and seven other members of the Catalan government were arrested and investigated for rebellion, sedition, and misuse of public funds. Jordi Turull, Carme Forcadell, Raül Romeva, Josep Rull and Dolors Bassa were released on bail on December 4, but arrested again on March 23. The day of their arrests, judge Llarena also opened the proceedings against Carles Puigdemont and issued a European arrest warrant. A few days later, Puigdemont was arrested in Germany. The disruptive protests on November 2, and in particular those in March 2018 resulted in clashes of CDR activists with the police. On April 10, 2018, the Spanish Civil Guard accused CDR organizers Tamara Carrasco and Adrià Carrasco[33] of rebellion, sedition, and terrorism for planning and preparing the disruptive March protests. While Adrià Carrasco managed to escape detention and fled the country, Tamara Carrasco was arrested. She was later released and put under curfew in her hometown but eventually acquitted of all charges. The peak of legal persecution represented the trial against the leaders of the independence movement. The trial resulted in long prison sentences for former vice president Oriol Junqueras and other former members of the Catalan government, former speaker of the parliament Carme Forcadell, as well as Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart. In short, counter-secessionist repression as a result of the 1-O referendum continued well beyond the very 1-O episode of contention. The analysis of empirical data showed that this chain of repressive actions influenced the four cases of protest organizing outlined in chapter 9.

First, the detention of Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez on October 16 represent a transformative repressive event for their organizations. As an immediate response, Òmnium Cultural launched its Llibertat Presos Politics campaign and also the ANC dedicated much of its

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[33] Despite having the same last name, the two are not related.

efforts to anti-repression. But the organizing process of this campaign was hindered by the grievance it addressed, namely the imprisonment of their presidents. Both organizations had been relying very much on their leadership before the 1-O episode. As shown before, the two leaders became even more important during the referendum campaign. In that time period, they were the only representatives from their organizations to participate in the Estat Major, the series of meetings of party leaders and associations. These meetings were often confidential. Arresting Cuixart and Sànchez thus supposed removing their knowledge and experience in the Estat Major. ANC organizer Emma stated in the interview that this was problematic, because the organization had relied more on directing than on deliberation in the 1-O episode of contention. Expert Roger also stressed that "any organization loses collective intelligence when their leadership is removed. Cuixart and Sànchez had information that no one else in the organizations had."

The detentions affected the everyday practices in the two organizations. This became apparent in particular in the interviews with organizers from Òmnium Cultural, who described the preparations of the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign and the functioning of the organization around that time. Staff member Isabel said that Cuixart's detention conditioned how the entity worked – in contrast to the ANC, which worked "normally" according to her, because it chose to elect a new president. After the imprisonment, Isabel started writing reports for Cuixart every three days. Cuixart wanted to know everything that happened and not miss a detail. He voiced his opinions and intervened in the process. But this did not always work smoothly, as Isabel reported:

> Sometimes you forget a conclusion and he misses all the debate. Then it may become a loop, because I've got an opinion, but the other [board members] don't see it clearly. I explain it well in a meeting and convince them. I show it to Jordi, but he is not convinced. Then I have to explain it to him too. It makes everything slower, because he does not want to miss a detail. He is the president and he wants to see everything. But the truth is it makes internal organization more complicated.

The quote from Isabel's interview shows that working with Cuixart in prison disrupted the meeting practices and deliberations in Òmnium Cultural's board. Involving Cuixart in the decision-making process required to establish another communication channel with him, because he could not be present at meetings at the organization's offices. But communication with Cuixart was not always easy, organizer Antoni reported:

> His lawyers can go see him, for other people it is more difficult. I have gone only a few times, but I write letters. Communication exists. He receives the letters, they do not read them to him. He told me they open them in front of him, but don't read them. And also when he writes them he can close them and send them. At the moment it works like that.

Communication by mail obviously contributed to slow down the organizing process. In short, repression made communication between the president and the rest of the organization extremely difficult. Professional staff working on the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign like Isabel had to do a lot more organizational work. This slowed down the process and made it more complicated, as Isabel said.

Board member Antoni called Cuixart's imprisonment "an exceptional situation and we have to be aware that the way the organizing functions also is exceptional. That is the reality and we must accept it." This statement underlines the impact of repression on Òmnium Cultural. Cuixart's detention represented a transformative event for the organization, because it had consequences that lasted beyond the 1-O episode. Nevertheless, there never was a debate about electing a new president. As I have mentioned in chapter 9, this was seen as anti-repression. In Isabel's view, the intention behind Cuixart's imprisonment was "that people forget him." Instead, Isabel called the prison an "opportunity – even if that's a bit cynical."[34] The organization thus developed the *Cuixart* campaign as a continuation of the Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign. The narrative was to single Cuixart out, because he was different from the other prisoners in that he was a "social leader," who never held or ran for public office.

The imprisonment of the leaders of the two largest organizations not only had negative consequences for themselves. It also affected organizing *between* organizations. The leadership crisis in ANC and Òmnium Cultural made it more difficult for other movement actors to interact with them. Organizer Josep from a small profession-based organizations told that:

> Well with article 155 and when they put the Jordis in prison, the ANC of course did not have a stable leadership. Sometimes it took a lot to find coordination, a direct order or a clear order. It was obvious that the ANC was disoriented.

The statement suggests that after the 1-O episode of contention, the lack of leadership of ANC and Òmnium Cultural hindered their communication and decision making with other organizations. Moreover, the detentions also played a role in the disagreements over movement strategy described in the previous chapter. They led to the creation of Llibertat Presos Polítics as a campaign but also as an anti-repressive strategy. As I have shown, all organizers were not satisfied with the efforts put into this campaign rather than in other strategies.

Second, repression also affected the organizing processes of the 8-N general strike and the March 2018 protests, which were planned and prepared by the CDRs. Both protest cases were

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[34] The word she used was "crudo", which literally translates as "raw".

reactions to repressive events: on the 8-N, CDR activists took the occasion of the general strike called by the CSC-Intersindical to condemn the detentions of Junqueras and other members of the government the week before. The March 2018 protests were an even more immediate reaction to the imprisonment of Bassa, Romeva, Rull, and Turull, and the detention of Puigdemont in Germany.

There was significant disagreement among CDR interviewees regarding the impact of these repressive events on organizing. Organizer Jordi for example observed demobilization as a result of repression, saying that "people were very afraid." Other interviewees stated that despite overall demobilization in the CDRs after the 1-O episode, repressive events actually motivated activists and were beneficial for organizing protests in response. Miquel from a small town CDR said that "when there is repression, people come back to assemblies." The different reactions are likely a result of the heterogeneity of CDRs and it is difficult to discern a general pattern. To some extent, these mixed findings mirror the contradicting results on the "repression-mobilization nexus" (D. Cunningham 2009; see also Davenport 2005a). What is clear is that the protests were not spontaneous, as I have described in chapter 9. Organizer Carles explained in the interview how organizers prepared the protest in his local CDR:

> Normally as a CDR it takes us a month or a month and a half to plan an action. Apart from that, we said "if they detain Puigdemont' […] if they detain Puigdemont, we'll be at 7pm of that day in the main squares of each city." But also for the [other members of government] there was a plan, which I don't remember exactly. If they cite them and release them on bail, we demonstrate. If not, then everybody to the Delegation of the Spanish government. Anyway, there were different ideas depending on the outcome.

Carles did not remember the exact plans in the interview, but the key fact is that the CDRs activists had expected the repressive actions and prepared plans for protest.

Despite these repressive events, the independence movement did not radicalize in the year after the referendum, Della Porta, O'Connor, and Portos (2019) have shown. The repertoire of action became more disruptive but not violent through the 8-N general strike and the March 2018 protests. Subsequently, the CDRs suffered from attempts to depict them as radical or even violent after the 1-O episode. The organizers I interviewed felt criminalized by the Spanish state. CDR organizer Iris for example expressed this as follows.

> There was an attempt to identify the CDRs with terrorism. A malicious and atrocious attempt to associate the independence movement with violence and terrorism. While it is totally the contrary, nobody hides, the assemblies are public in the streets.

The data showed that this attempt to criminalize the CDRs had an impact of their protest organizing. Several interviewees stated that other organizations of the movement grew more careful of collaborating with the CDRs to organize protests together. For example, Iris reported that the ANC in Hospitalet did not let the CDRs use their facilities for assemblies in winter when it was too cold to meet outside. Repression thus contributed to the isolation of the CDRs and reduced interorganizational collaboration in protest organizing. This was already visible in the organizing protests analyzed here, but it would continue even more after Tamara Carrasco and Adrià Carrasco were accused of terrorism in April 2018.

In sum, counter-secessionist repression in the form of legal prosecution and protest policing affected post-1-O protest organizing. The detentions of the leaders of ANC and Òmnium Cultural had a negative impact on the two organizations. It removed some their organizational knowledge, slowed down internal communication, and made it more difficult for other organizations to collaborate with them. The CDRs were targeted by repression, too. Although it is unclear from the data whether repression resulted in mobilization or demobilization of their activists, the CDRs had plans in place to organize potent reactions to repressive events. Nevertheless, the increasing criminalization of the CDRs hindered collaborations with other organizations. These findings show how the referendum affected protest organizing in the independence movement through a repressive sequence. This sequence can be considered a transformative mechanism that extended beyond the 1-O episode and had lasting consequences for the movement. However, the data also suggested that legal prosecution and protest policing were not the only means of repression. The remainder of this chapter turns to counter-secessionist surveillance as a covert form of repression.

2   SURVEILLANCE

Most scholars interested in the role of state and private repression of social movements have focused more narrowly on the relationship between overt repression (in particular protest policing) and mobilization for protest (D. Cunningham 2009; Davenport 2005a). In contrast, this chapter shifts the attention to two different concepts that have been studied to a lesser extent: surveillance as a covert form of repression, and organizational practices as a specific aspect of activism.

David Lyon (2001, 2) defined surveillance broadly as "any collection and processing of personal data, whether identifiable or not, for the purposes of influencing or managing those whose data have been garnered." Although social movement scholars study surveillance less frequently than other forms of repression, the field has documented how surveillance specifically targets internal dissent and contention. With a particular focus on the United States, Marx (1974, 1979, 1990)

describes the manifold ways in which state and non-state actors employ surveillance technologies for the repression of social movements. Cunningham (2004) provides extensive evidence for the surveillance of US movements through the FBI in the 1960s. Fernandez (2008, 10) shows how global justice movements faced different forms of "soft-line social control." Wood (2014) describes how intelligence techniques were an integral part of the militarization of policing in North America after the Seattle protests. These studies draw on material from the US and Canada. They are mainly interested in how surveillance itself functions and less with its consequences for activism.

In contrast, I am not so much concerned with the workings of surveillance itself but with how surveillance is *perceived* by activists in a European case. This idea stems from theoretical debates in surveillance studies. Foucault's (1995) writings on Bentham's panopticon highlight the disciplinary power of surveillance. In the panopticon prison, all prisoners are not being watched at any moment in time, but the sheer possibility of being observed creates the docile and self-disciplined prisoner. Following this idea means that it is not decisive whether activists are actually surveilled; what matters for activists is that they *feel* surveilled.

However, post-Foucauldian surveillance theorists suggested that the panopticon might not be an adequate model (Haggerty 2006; Haggerty and Ericson 2000; Lyon 2006; Murakami Wood 2007). Surveillance has much more complex consequences than simple discipline. Social movement scholars emphasized that activists are not passive subjects of surveillance. Previous empirical research showed how activists develop strategies against surveillance (Hermida and Hernández-Santaolalla 2018; Leistert 2012; Marx 2009; Neumayer and Stald 2014; Ullrich and Knopp 2018; Ullrich and Wollinger 2011; D. J. Wilson and Serisier 2010). Although this literature focused mainly on public protests, similar findings can be expected for organizers. Organizers need not necessarily have any direct experiences with surveillance. Believing to be surveilled may be enough for them to adapt their practices. In this way, surveillance may have productive rather than disciplinary effects. Before turning to the empirical illustration of how organizers perceive surveillance, I elaborate on the second key concept: organizational practices.

2.1 Surveillance and Organizational Practices

The question how repression affects the organizational dimension of activism has merely been of secondary importance to social movement scholars. But some case studies do highlight the negative effects of repression for the organizational infrastructure of social movements. Many organizations face violence and legal action against their members, must deal with slumps in their resource flow, the erosion of their reputation and turn their efforts and resources towards counter-

repressive action and organizational maintenance (Boykoff 2006; D. Cunningham 2004; Davenport 2005b). Other organizations see themselves forced to "go underground" (Della Porta 1995, 110–11; Zwerman and Steinhoff 2005; Zwerman, Steinhoff, and Porta 2000). In some cases, repression can lead to the complete destruction of SMOs, as Jeffries (2002) shows for the Baltimore chapter of the Black Panther Party for example. In short, repression harms organizational structure and strategy.

Starr et al. (2008) go beyond previous research by showing how repression also affects the internal life of SMOs. As a result of repression, "organizations are communicating much less and across fewer media" (Starr et al. 2008, 262). Participation in meetings and other organizational activities declines, as members drop out for fear of repressive action. Interviewees in their study reported how the threat of surveillance limits the room for internal discussion. Instead, activists described the emergence of a "security culture" within organizations, which makes activist safety the number-one priority, "with devastating impacts on inclusivity, solidarity, bonds of friendship and community, and prefigurative practices" (Starr et al. 2008, 262). The authors show that repression and surveillance do not only play a crucial role in "going underground," but that they profoundly affect the everyday *modus operandi* of SMOs as well.

The present chapter builds on these findings by analyzing organizational practices rather than form or structure. However, Starr et al. (2008) only look at practices *in* organizations. In line with the approach taken in this dissertation (see chapter 2) I follow the idea that "there is much more organizing in social movements than social movement organizations" (de Bakker, den Hond, and Laamanen 2017, 217). I thus look at the broader set of organizational practices in the independence movement. Using organizational practices as the unit of analysis highlights organizers' agency in dealing with surveillance rather than considering them passive subjects (Ullrich and Knopp 2018).

The analysis includes only pieces of data in which interviewees made an *explicit* connection between organizational practices and surveillance. On the one hand, I disregarded descriptions of perceived surveillance that do not have an impact on practices, and, on the other hand, reports of organizational practices that were not the result of perceived surveillance. This meant focusing on a smaller portion of data for the sake of analytical rigor. The next section turns to how organizers in the movement perceived surveillance.

2.2 Perceptions of Surveillance

Since much of surveillance is covert, it is difficult to obtain reliable data on its dynamics unless documents produced by the police and other state actors are declassified. This is why I focused on

organizers' *perceptions* of surveillance as they emerged from the interview data without checking whether activists were actually monitored by state authorities. The interview data provided rich evidence on the perceived surveillance of the Catalan independence movement by Spanish state authorities. Organizers started to feel surveilled already during the 1-O episode, but continued to do so as the level of repression persisted in the contraction phase of the cycle. The following description thus covers both the 1-O episode and the following time period. Surveillance was less time-sensitive than other forms of repression, which were normally linked to concrete events. Interviewees often reported a general climate of surveillance that began with the 1-O episode and features a series of different perceptions that ranged from an abstract awareness of being monitored to concrete instances of surveillance.

First, at the abstract end of this spectrum were descriptions of general surveillance and repression. During the episode of contention around the referendum, activist were constantly living "in tension," one interviewee reported. Another one said that "you could smell this climate of tension and repression, which was intensifying," and that organizers were "afraid of everything" that could be a potential threat to the movement.

Second, in the middle of the spectrum, interviewees made references to concrete instances, but the character of surveillance remained rather diffuse. Alba, a CDR organizer from a small town in central Catalonia, said that on "September 11 [at the ANC's *Diada* protest] strange things were happening, phones were not working. " Although activists often did not explain how and when exactly they were surveilled, they had little doubt that they *were*. ANC organizer Emma, for example described her experience as follows:

> I'm sure that they had our phones hacked. My phone was- (.) People tell me "you're exaggerating." Well, when I talked over the phone I heard noises, you see? Normally that doesn't happen – but I heard noises. So we began to have quite a bit of paranoia.

The description of perceived surveillance as "paranoia" was frequent throughout the data. Interviewees used the term to highlight that their fears of being monitored might actually not grounded in actual surveillance acts. But other interviewees such as Emma were convinced they were targeted, and used the word to convey how serious and impacting the feeling of surveillance was for them.[35]

Third, at the concrete end of the perception spectrum, references to specific times and locations could be found. Activists reported concrete exposure to surveillance and often described

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[35] Paranoia is, after all, a pathopsychological symptom. When using this term, interviewees stress the impact surveillance has on their state of mind.

the form of surveillance in detail. Some interviewees even pointed to official sources. CDR organizer Carles, for example, referred to the report of the investigation judge Pablo Llarena, which contained details from the first two national assemblies of the CDRs. From the analysis of the data, two specific surveillance threats emerged: the monitoring of (digitally) mediated communication and the infiltration of meetings and assemblies by undercover informants.

First, the interviewees mentioned that their mediated communication might be monitored by state authorities. This included emails, landlines, and written communication, but most of all mobile phones and messenger applications. I have already mentioned above the description by organizer Emma who was sure that her phone was hacked by the police. In almost all cases, interviewees experienced digital surveillance as covert, i.e. not visible to them, which is why their descriptions often remained abstract. In one case, organizers Jordi and Josep from profession-based organization described how a conversation from their WhatsApp group was leaked to the press. Other interviewees reported intruders in group chats sending distracting messages, attempts to hack Twitter accounts, as well as the confiscation of mobile phones at police raids.

Second, undercover police at activist meetings and assemblies represented another surveillance threat. Interviewees reported several instances where they felt that police had infiltrated their meetings to observe activists and gather information. This was particularly the case on the day of the referendum on October 1, when activists occupied voting stations throughout the region and organized themselves for potential confrontations with police forces. Generally, the occupations were open to anyone who wanted to participate. In this situation, organizers were afraid that undercover police would infiltrate the occupations to anticipate the protesters' strategies. Activist Lluís described this as follows:

> This was a situation, where, of course, you don't know if you can trust all the people inside. And we said "Jeez! What if there's an undercover police?" The town was full with undercover police that day, you could see them on the street. You could see them going around in pairs, with sunglasses, earphone, the gun under the jacket. You could see them.

Many interviewees reported that they were worried about undercover police in the voting stations. Some, like Lluís claim to have recognized them as such. October 1 was not the only example though. The data showed that counter-secessionist surveillance continued after the 1-O episode, for example with the infiltration of the first two national assemblies of CDRs, which I have mentioned above. Some interviewees reported that they were generally worried about undercover police at their meetings. CDR organizer Quim for example stated that: "now if somebody unknown comes we know that we have to stop the assembly and call them out. We prefer that they

call us rude, rather than having police [at the assembly]." In other cases, activists were policed overtly at public assemblies in the streets, having their IDs checked by officers.

The monitoring of (digitally) mediated communication and the infiltration of meetings and assemblies by undercover informants represented the two most important perceptions of surveillance that emerged from the interview data. Interviewees did not describe these perceptions in isolation, but within the larger context of repressive action against the independence movement. The cycle of contention provided an interpretive frame for what might otherwise be considered meaningless singular instances – such as the "phones not working" at the Diada demonstration described by Alba. Moreover, the perceptions of surveillance as described above should not be understood as uniform across organizations and individual activists: not all interviewees mentioned the two major surveillance threats. The perceptions are subject to debates among activists as well, as several interviewees reported. Some activists argued that surveillance threats were often exaggerated, leading to accusations of "paranoia." Paranoia or not, the perception of surveillance, and in particular of meetings and digital communication, had severe impacts on the organizational practices of the independence movement, as I show in the next section.

3   COUNTER-SURVEILLANT ORGANIZING

In the previous section, I described how Catalan secessionist organizers felt surveilled by state authorities during the October 1 episode of contention. This had important consequences. Perceived surveillance put into jeopardy the generalized trust that was required for open communication in the movement. This took two forms.

First, organizers lost their trust in technology. Interviewees stated that during the episode of contention around the referendum, they were worried about the safety of their communications, particularly when texting over WhatsApp. Òmnium Cultural organizer Beatriu, for example, said:

> There was a time when we were using WhatsApp, but only briefly, because we saw that it was not a safe network. It was not a safe channel, there could have been leaks truly easily. Telegram is slightly more secure.

This shows that organizers were worried that digital communication technologies could easily be hacked by state authorities. This implied a loss of trust in some technologies that were perceived as weakly protected, such as WhatsApp.

Second, and most importantly, surveillance created mistrust among activists. From the interview data, it became clear that activists did not trust all participants in open communication settings. During the occupation of the University of Barcelona at the end of September 2017,

organizers held open assemblies at the occupation but shared only limited information with their fellow activists. Interviewee Ester described this situation as follows:

> What had to come out always came out in the assembly. It had to be like that to a certain extent because there was a brutal level of repression. So sometimes we could not pass on all the information that we had. You did not know who was there in assembly. There were problems one night like "you're an undercover cop" and I don't know, kicking people out, which in the end did not happen. However, well, it was not a moment…I don't know how to say…of classic functioning.

When the pressure of surveillance and repression was high, such as in the contentious period around the October 1 referendum, the generalized trust among activists rapidly declined. Activists were afraid of being monitored and of being accused by each other of being undercover police. What emerged instead of trust was what interviewees called *secretismo*, and Starr et al. (2008, 262) called "security culture", i.e. a culture in which the safety of activists had priority over all other concerns. Similar to the groups studied by Starr et al., perceived surveillance led "security culture to replace organizing culture, with devastating impacts on inclusivity, solidarity, bonds of friendship and community, and prefigurative practices" (262). Security culture was expressed in five responses to surveillance, which I call *counter-surveillance moves*, following Ullrich and Knopp (2018). Counter-surveillance moves are "techniques intended to subvert or contribute to the defense against video surveillance" (188). In the next sections, I describe these five moves: encryption, face-to-face communication, analogizing meetings, committee decision-making, and closing-off assemblies.

3.1 Encryption

First, organizers responded to perceived surveillance by changing their digitally mediated communication, particularly on the use of instant messenger applications. As I have shown before, activists in the Independence Movement were seriously worried that their digital communication was monitored by the police and other state authorities. Interviewees described how the perception of surveillance led them to use instant messenger applications more carefully. Organizer Josep for example recommended the following:

> From time to time, clean your WhatsApp, delete the pictures, or whatever. There obviously were questions of security, right? Of course, WhatsApp, or your phone could have contacts, depending on whoever takes it […] we know for sure that we do not do anything illegal, but we know that we are in the view of the police. So, the police are waiting for our smallest error.

Josep was convinced that the police were surveilling activists, which was why they regularly deleted their phone data. He also stated that, more generally, "Constantly living in tension has had an impact on the security measures that we have taken. For example, everything was over WhatsApp before, now it's Signal". This application shift was the most widespread impact of surveillance on digital communication practices. Throughout the data, interviewees stated that in the contentious episode around the October 1 referendum, activist groups and organizations switched from WhatsApp to Telegram or Signal. They used these messenger services to create group chats to announce meetings and protests, share documents, discuss different issues, and even to make decisions. As such, their use represented an important organizational practice in contentious interactions. Signal and Telegram were supposedly better encrypted and hence offered more protection from surveillance. One interviewee also reported the use of other encrypted technologies, such as the Tor browser and the email provider Tutanota. In short, when activists felt that their digital organizing practices were surveilled by state authorities, they switched to practices that felt safer, primarily by using encrypted technologies.

3.2 Face-to-face Communication

As a second counter-surveillance move, activists emphasized face-to-face over mediated communication. The data showed clear evidence that activists, when they felt watched, preferred to talk to each other in person in a safe environment rather than over the phone or email. This pertained to different levels of communicative practices. On the individual level, CDR organizer Oriol, for example, explained:

> Well, it was slightly complicated. There was a moment, let's say between mid-September and the end of September, if you had to print something for example, you would go to the firm to speak to them in person, you did not call, did not send any email […] this created a certain climate of- I don't know, clandestinity, of semi-clandestinity.

As it became clear from Oriol's statement, organizers did not just avoid instant messenger applications but almost any kind of mediated communication when they felt that these kinds of practices might be surveilled. They also avoided mobile phones, landlines, emails, and 'traditional' mail when they were perceived as unsafe. Òmnium Cultural organizer Beatriu even stated that for some issues, they avoided any kind of written records because of repression:

> There are many things that we only tell each other when we see each other [in person] so that there is nothing written down, right? I'm sorry to say this, but the police have already twice entered our building and confiscated peoples' phones.

Activists were afraid that their mediated communication might be intercepted. This was why several interviewees emphasized the role of face-to-face meetings and assemblies for discussion and decision-making under surveillance. CDR organizer Alba, for example, stressed that there were "certain things that you cannot write in a text message, which must be decided face-to-face". Activists discussed sensitive issues only in person, for example, the preparations of disruptive and potentially illegal protests, such as those on the day of the referendum. Alba's fellow activist Miquel even suggested that they "have to unlearn to use the phones, especially the young people […] We have to rediscover old forms of organization". This did not mean that face-to-face communication was a solution for these perceived threats. The next section describes how meetings and assemblies were also affected by surveillance.

3.3   Analogizing Meetings

The third move also pertains to the relationship between face-to-face and digital practices. *Analogizing* describes the practice of removing digital devices from activist meetings. Many activist groups did not allow phones or computers at their meetings for fear that police might be recording them through these devices. ANC organizer Emma said that activists "have a high level of paranoia. In the last meetings of the leadership, we left the phones in another room". Judit, from the same organization, confirmed that they "have had many meetings without phones, computers, all locked up, and always in a different location. Like, truly a lot [of meetings]". This was a common pattern across groups and organizations. During several interviews with organizers, I was also asked to switch off my phone or leave it in a fridge or in another room.

3.4   Committee Decision making

The fourth move consists of removing decision-making from open assemblies to closed committees. Interviewees reported that activists did not dare to discuss sensitive topics in open assemblies because they were afraid of undercover police. For instance, as mentioned before, CDR activists found that police and general attorneys had information on the first two national assemblies. After this event, activists left phones outside their meetings, but the discussions were still inhibited. Organizer Carles said the following:

> One thing that has changed, for example, is that before, in the assemblies, we talked about everything. If tomorrow we were going to burn a container, if we were going to stop the high-speed train, or if we were going to kill Franco. Now, in the assemblies, nobody talks about actions.

This did not mean that activists simply avoided sensitive topics. In fact, the most relevant impact of perceived surveillance was the closure of open meetings and assemblies in the Catalan Independence Movement. As mentioned before, open assemblies in the neighborhoods and villages throughout the region were crucial in the preparatory process for the defense of the voting stations on the day of the referendum. However, the data were also rich with examples of processes of closure as repression continued after the referendum. In continuation to the statement above lamenting the lack of discussions in the open assemblies, Carles explained the following:

> Now everything is decided in committees […] the committees have their Signal group, which is supposedly the most secret communication, they meet among themselves without phones, phones switched off outside the room. Then they decide.

Moving decision-making and sensitive topics from the open assembly to committees and other closed circles was a frequent reaction of the CDRs to the perception of surveillance. Other organizations limited these practices to their leadership groups. In the ANC, for example, the most important decisions in the episode of contention around the referendum were made by the permanent committee. Organizer Josep also explained that in the activist group he was part of, they "had to close off the leadership to some extent".

3.5 Closing off Assemblies

The fourth move also aims at protecting decision-making from the threat of infiltration. This move kept decisions and sensitive topics in their assemblies but closed the meetings off for strangers. This became evident, for example, in the interview with CDR organizer Quim, which I have quoted before:

> When the detentions of CDR comrades in Catalonia started, we put the assemblies on alert. Now, if somebody unknown comes, we know that we have to stop the assembly and call them out. We prefer that they call us rude rather than having police [at the assembly]. So, when somebody comes, the assembly stops and we say, "Hello, who are you?" and the entire assembly looks at him and says, "Where do you come from, where do you live and what's your name?" So we ask some questions [...], and that is the filter we use.

Quim specifically referred to the risk of having undercover police at the assembly as the reason for asking strangers a series of uncomfortable questions, which would most likely deter anyone interested in joining the assembly. New participants first had to earn the trust of the assembly. As a consequence, Quim admitted that this has transformed the open assembly into a stable group of activists.

4 CONCLUSION

The 2017 referendum on independence represented an immense opportunity for Catalan secessionists. For a brief and intense period of time, the creation of an independent Catalan republic seemed possible. But most of the times, states do not simply let go of secessionist territories (Butt 2017; Griffiths 2016; Walter 2009). The Spanish government under Mariano Rajoy took a firm stance denying Catalans not only independence, but the right to self-determination. After the Spanish Constitutional Courts ruled the holding of the referendum illegal, Rajoy and his government engaged went a long way to prevent the referendum. Counter-secessionist repression did not end with the 1-O episode of contention, however.

This chapter has described the relationship between counter-secessionist repression and the organizational dimension of the independence movement. The analysis of empirical data showed that repression had a negative impact on the movement's organizational practices and processes. I have focused on two levels of analysis.

The first part of the chapter has outlined how the sequence of repressive occurrences extended beyond the 1-O episode of contention. The various collective actors of the independence suffered mainly from harsh protest policing and legal prosecution. These repressive measures impacted the four cases of protest organizing described in chapter 9. The detentions of leaders Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez had terrible consequences for their respective organizations. Especially Òmnium Cultural faced difficulties during the organizing of its Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign: the complicated communication and decision making with the imprisoned Cuixart slowed down the organizing of the campaign. Both organizations lost collective intelligence and points of contact with other organizations, which reduced interorganizational collaboration. The CDRs responded to repressive occurrences with more disruptive protests on the 8-N general strike and in March 2018. While having these protests were well prepared, organizing in the CDRs was increasingly affected by their criminalization. Other organizations were less inclined to collaborate with them. In short, ongoing repression made protest organizing after the 1-O episode of contention much more difficult.

The second part of the chapter has focused on counter-secessionist surveillance in the 1-O episode and beyond. Drawing on the empirical data, I have described how organizers perceived surveillance. Interviewees identified two threats: the monitoring of digital communication and the infiltration of meetings and assemblies by undercover police. These threats put into jeopardy the generalized trust among activists and led to emergence of a "security culture." In response to these surveillance threats, activists made five counter-surveillance moves: they used encrypted

technologies, switched to face-to-face communication, refrained from using digital devices at meetings, moved decision making to committees, and closed off their assemblies. In short, surveillance heavily affected some of the fundamental organizational practices in the movement: activists used less messenger applications, deliberation was hindered, and assemblies became less open.

In sum, the 1-O referendum triggered a transformative repressive sequence by the Spanish state. Counter-secessionist surveillance and repression affected the organizational dimension of the independence movement on three levels: organizations suffered from the removal of their leadership, organizing processes were slowed down and less collaborative, organizational practices became less inclusive and deliberative. These findings are based on similarities emerged from a comparison of diverse interview sources. It is striking how repression surveillance had the same impact on practices across different organizations and activist groups. While I have focused on similarities, there were some important differences in the data that can be understood as caveats to these findings.

First, the causal connection between repression and organizing should be treated with care. Repression and organizing are not *necessarily* related. On the one hand, there were a number of interviewees who describe the organizational practices displayed above, but did not link them explicitly to surveillance. This leaves room for other interpretations, for example that activists generally valued privacy and used encrypted technologies, not because they were specifically worried about surveillance. On the other hand, perceived surveillance did not always lead to a change in practices. CDR organizer Jordi, for example, reported in the interview that "we even know that in some places there are undercover police to see what we are talking about." But he also said he was not worried about that, because they did not discuss anything illegal. He even joked that police "are welcome, maybe they can contribute something."

Second, one should be careful to consider repression as an external treatment that only set on in the contentious episode around the 1-O referendum and led to a closure of what were previously open organizational practices in the independence movement. Although repression intensified dramatically during the 1-O episode, it was far from new. Organizer Miquel from a small town CDR stressed that "people are used to repression, this is nothing new. Some practices have always been used in the independentist Left. We are very careful generally."

Third, Miquel's statement also highlighted that there was some variation how repression and surveillance were experienced across different sectors of the same movement. Not all activist groups were targeted in the same way by state authorities. This is particularly true for an ideologically diverse movement such as the secessionists in Catalonia, which comprises activists

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from the radical left to the moderate right. Many CDR groups felt this distinction in the time after the referendum, when some of their members were detained and accused of terrorism.

Despite these three caveats, the findings represent an important contribution to the literature on repression in social movements. It expands this literature in two ways: first, by looking not only at protest policing and legal prosecution, but also at surveillance as a covert form of repression, and second, by focusing on its impact on organizing – rather than public protest. Most of all, the findings underline previous findings on the harmful effects of repression and surveillance for social movement organizing by Starr et al. (2008). When security culture replaces an open organizing culture, the internal democracy of social movements suffer. The two latter counter-surveillance moves – committee decision making and closing-off assemblies – undermine the open and inclusive character of many social movements. By repressing and surveilling activist groups, liberal democracies may harm their own civil societies as spheres of democratic practices.

Chapter Twelve

CONCLUSION

The referendum on independence on October 1, 2017 was a risky gamble for the Catalan independence movement. On the one hand, the push for a binding vote opened up opportunities and sparked a wave of unprecedented mobilization demanding self-determination and independence. The announcement of the referendum produced an intense episode of contention of roughly two months in which an independent Catalan Republic seemed achievable. On the other hand, the audacity to call for a referendum without the consent of the Spanish state came with a high cost. The Spanish government responded with police batons and prison bars. Catalan autonomy was suspended for the first time since its hard-fought re-establishment in 1980.

This dissertation has addressed the question of how this intense phase of contention shaped the ways in which the independence movement organized protests. Before the announcement of the referendum, the independence movement had built a reputation for staging massive street performances such as the Diada. These performances were the result of meticulous organizational efforts by secessionist SMOs, in particular ANC and Òmnium Cultural. I have developed the concept of protest organizing to capture the work of organizers when planning and preparing collective contentious action. Through the experiences and interpretations of these organizers, the empirical part of the dissertation has explored how protest organizing changed over time. I have sought to understand how organizers made sense of the referendum and the intense episode of contention and how they connected these understandings to the ways in which they organized protest.

To answer these questions, I gathered four types of qualitative data during ten months of fieldwork in Catalonia: direct observations, documents, expert interviews, and interviews with key organizers. These data cover twelve protest cases over three time periods: before, during, and after the 1-O episode of contention. I performed process-tracing to reconstruct the organizing processes of these protests and used grounded theory to identify the most relevant organizational practices.

Comparing the thick descriptions of the twelve preparatory processes showed that not all contentious performances are organized in the same way. On the one hand, the findings showed that different kinds of protest required different preparations. A strike was organized differently than an occupation or a street demonstration. Activists prepared large-scale action differently than local protests. Thus, the preparatory processes seemed to depend very much on the type of action. On the other hand, performances of the same type can also be organized in various ways. The occupation of the voting stations differed from the occupation of the University of Barcelona, as well as the general strikes on October 3 and November 8. The results thus confirmed Rucht's (2017, 1698) point that "there is no single pattern in the ways to prepare mass protests."

Simply pointing out variation and complexity is a rather banal finding that does not advance the state of the art in any way though. While it was difficult to draw any generalizable conclusions from a set of twelve protests from a single movement, the analysis yielded some important insights on the temporal development of protest organizing.

I have approached the problem of organizational change from an eventful perspective. One could rephrase the central research question as: was the 1-O referendum a transformative event? As mentioned above, the referendum did not lead to independence. One could thus conclude that it did not result in "durable transformations of structures" (Sewell 1996a). However, I have argued throughout this dissertation that the 1-O referendum was eventful for the independence movement itself. Its announcement triggered an intense contentious episode that had a profound effect on protest organizing in the movement. The analysis of the empirical data showed that the 1-O episode of contention shaped protest organizing two ways: during the episode and afterwards. The next two sections summarize these findings.

1 PROTEST ORGANIZING FROM NORMAL TO INTENSE TIMES

The first protest case in the 1-O episode was the yearly Diada street performance on September 11, which had become a fixed date in the calendar of the independence movement. The 2017 edition was not any different from previous years: a contained symbolic performance. It was prepared by the ANC in a long and detailed process, which had started way before the 1-O episode and did not allow for spontaneous action during the performance. The organizing process of the Diada thus resembled very much the modes of protest organizing in normal times prior to the 1-O episode.

This changed afterwards: protest not only became more disruptive, but was also organized differently. The four other cases of protest organizing during the 1-O episode differed very much from the Diada and normal organizing. The analysis of these cases yielded five important insights:

First, the 1-O episode unfolded as a combination of spontaneous eruptions and deliberate, planned action. During all four disruptive protests, spontaneous lines of action emerged. Interviewees described how protesters did not leave when demonstrations ended, marches took different routes than foreseen, and crowds engaged in clashes with the police. However, the majority of actions during these protests were the result of deliberate organizing. This shows that, empirically, the relationships between contentious action, spontaneity, and organizing were quite complex. Through organizing activists tried to minimize the role of spontaneous action in contention. But the responses of the police could not always be anticipated. In intense contentious interactions, organizers could never fully eliminate uncertainty: unforeseen events happened and protest escalated. In short, organizing and spontaneity were "often highly interactive" (Snow and Moss 2014, 1126).

Second, the four disruptive organizing processes were much shorter than the Diada. After the Constitutional Court ruled the holding of the referendum illegal, counter-secessionist actions by the Spanish state became increasingly intense and unexpected. Organizers reported that the dense sequence of these repressive actions put them under time pressure. The protests on September 20 and the occupation of the University of Barcelona were quick reactions to the search of the Department of Economy. The 3-O general strike was a response to police violence on the day of the referendum less than 48 hours before. Preparatory activities had to be completed in a much shorter process. But interviewees also mentioned that they needed less time, because the referendum provided a clear goal for the process.

Third, there was a lot of organizing between organizations. In three of the disruptive protests, existing SMOs collaborated extensively in the protest organizing processes. This took two forms: platform building and cooperation. SMOs had collaborated also before the 1-O episode of contention. However, the data suggested that the referendum strategy was key in formulating a mid-range goal that allowed SMOs to put aside their disagreements and focus on protest organizing more effectively.

Fourth, the defense of the voting stations was an exemplary case of organizing outside organizations. Òmnium Cultural and ANC played an important role in the disruptive 20-S protest, but for strategic reasons, they remained paralyzed before the referendum and refrained from calling for disruptions again. In response, organizers from different backgrounds used open assemblies and instant messengers to form the CDRs at the local level. This scale shift and the organizers' practical experience and knowledge were key in realizing the defense without the support of the existing SMOs.

Fifth, there was a shift in organizational practices during the 1-O episode. In normal times, organizations in the independentist Left, but also the ANC, championed deliberation and assemblarian practices. During the 1-O episode, and in particular during the defense of the referendum, deliberation was practically absent. Instead, organizers used assemblies and instant messengers to give instructions in the preparatory process. Interviewees suggested that this was possible because the referendum set a clear aim and put disagreements on hold.

In short, protest organizing in the 1-O episode was very different from protest organizing in normal times. With the exception of the Diada, the protests were organized outside or between organizations in shorter processes. Opponent actions, contingency, and time pressure made it impossible for organizers to stick to previous routines of long, detailed, and deliberative planning. They were able to draw on their experience and practical skill to direct the organizing processes and successfully mobilize masses of protesters. Another key factor was the referendum as a unifying strategy for the movement. However, once the referendum was over and it became clear that it would not lead to independence, internal divisions in the movement reappeared and protest organizing transformed further. The next section summarizes the changes after the 1-O episode.

2   EVENTFUL TRANSFORMATIONS

When the Spanish senate approved article 155 of the Spanish Constitution on October 27, it became clear that effective independence would not become reality soon, despite the declaration of the Catalan parliament on the same day. This did not deter the independence movement from organizing further protests. Òmnium Cultural launched its Llibertat Presos Polítics campaign in response to the detention of leaders Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sànchez. The CDRs used the occasion of the general strike on November 8 to block highways and railroads. They continued disruptive protests after Puigdemont's arrest in Germany in March 2018. The ANC launched a series of campaigns, including a primary for Barcelona's municipal elections. However, these actions took place in a context of demobilization. Counter-secessionist repression in the form of legal persecution and the closure of opportunities through the suspension of Catalan autonomy led to the contraction of the cycle of contention. In this phase, there were three trajectories of protest organizing: re-equilibration, sedimentation, and transformation.

First, some of the changes that occurred during the 1-O episode of contention were reversed afterwards. For Òmnium Cultural and the ANC, the September 20 protest remained an exception. Afterwards, they returned to their previous mode of organizing and focused on detailed preparations of structured campaigns. The inertia of these large organizations, which had left them paralyzed before the defense of the voting stations, now provided some stability in the face

of repression. Despite a crisis of leadership (see below), they continued their campaigning work. The CDRs, too, took more time to prepare their responses to repressive action and were well organized in the 8-N general strike and the March 2018 protests. Overall, there was less spontaneity than during the 1-O episode.

Second, some of the organizational innovations that emerged during the 1-O episode were there to stay. The messenger and assembly practices that were diffused through the organizing of the defense of the voting stations became routine. The most important result of these sedimentations was the emergence of the CDRs as a collective actor. The CDRs in their early stages can hardly be described as an organizational entity, but assembly and messenger practices provided them with a stable routine over time and allowed them to organize the 8-N and the March 2018 protests.

Third, the referendum triggered four contractive mechanisms that led to further transformations of protest organizing after the end of the 1-O episode: facilitation, exhaustion, strategizing, and repression. After the application of article 155, the focus of the conflict returned to the institutional arena and the campaign for the anticipated elections on December 21, 2017. The movement's civil society actors suffered from demobilization for their protest activities. Organizers were exhausted and could not maintain the fast pace of preparatory work of the 1-O episode. Two mechanisms were particularly important in transforming protest organizing after October 27: strategizing and repression.

The referendum strategy had allowed the diverse collective actors of the independence movement to rally around a mid-range goal. However, once the referendum was over, this strategy fell to pieces. The crucial factor was that the outcome of the referendum was absolutely unclear, because of its contested and contentious character. In the aftermath of the 1-O, debates emerged in the movement how to make sense of this event. Two meanings emerged: on the one hand, some actors considered the referendum a legitimate mandate to implement an independent Catalan republic. Others held that the referendum could not be the final decision on independence, but only one step in a longer process. From these rivaling senses of the 1-O, different strategies emerged: unilateral and gradualist. After the detentions of Cuixart and Sànchez, they were complemented by an anti-repressive strategy. These disagreements over movement strategy impacted protest organizing in two ways: first, they led to more need for deliberation when preparing contentious actions, and second, they inhibited organizing between organizations.

Counter-secessionist repression was the other contractive mechanism that had profound transformative consequences for protest organizing. The announcement of the referendum triggered a series of repressive actions by the Spanish state that extended beyond the 1-O episode

of contention. The movement suffered from criminalization, legal prosecutions, and protest policing, which made directing, internal communication, and interorganizational collaboration much more difficult. At the same time, the threat of surveillance by the Spanish police made organizational practices less inclusive and deliberative.

In short, the referendum was transformative in two ways. On the one hand, some of the innovations that emerged during the 1-O episode became persistent parts of the movement's organizational repertoire. Assemblarian practices and messenger use sedimented into the CDRs as the most important new collective actor. On the other hand, the referendum set off four mechanisms that transformed protest organizing beyond the 1-O episode. Exhaustion, facilitation, repression, and strategizing had complex and profound consequences for organizational practices and processes. In the four analyzed cases, internal communication and interorganizational collaboration became more difficult. Organizational leaderships were weakened and could rely less on directing. Not everything was overhauled, though: after the 1-O episode there was less spontaneity and organizational processes were longer and more meticulous. Organizational structures and practices showed some inertia in turbulent times.

The 1-O referendum was a transformative event in the history of the independence movement. It did not lead to Catalan independence, but it changed how activists organize protest in fundamental ways. These findings shed light on the development of the independence movement in one of its most turbulent phases. Thereby, this dissertation contributes to a deeper understanding of the internal dynamics of the movement. But the contributions go beyond describing the Catalan case. The next section outlines some of the scholarly contributions along with the dissertation's limitations and open questions.

3   LIMITATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

This dissertation underlines the importance of events in the study of secessionist movements and protest organizing. The argument I have put forth is that outstanding political occurrences, such as the 1-O referendum, have transformative consequences for independence movements and secessionist conflicts. I have substantiated this argument with qualitative data from the Catalan independence movement. Before turning to the contributions of this argument to the scholarly debate, I briefly address its limitations.

Scope represents the main limitation of my argument. First and foremost, the time period under investigation was relatively limited. The case selection included the Ara és l'hora campaign from 2014, but the rest of the protest cases fell within a time span of less than a year. The interviews took place about 8 to 18 months after the referendum. Thus, when I call some of the

organizational transformations *durable*, this should be read with care. It is possible that some of the changes that took place during or after the 1-O episode simply take longer to re-equilibrate. However, this problem is not unique to my research: one can only judge the duration of change and stability from a particular point in time. The only remedy is to repeat data collection in the future to see if the changes described in this dissertation persist. Second, the protest cases I have studied here were drawn from a single movement. This had the advantage to prioritize comparisons within the movement and over time, but it crucially limits the scope of the findings. It is hard to say whether the findings can be generalized for other secessionist movements or even social movements more generally. The Catalan independence movement represents an utterly important case among secessionist movements. But if anything, I have shown that protest organizing can vary drastically within one movement and within a short period of time. Again, the only way to address this shortcoming is more comparative research. Third, even within the movement, the scope of the analysis has its limits. I performed a qualitative analysis of the most important cases of protest organizing. This of course, represents only a snapshot of contentious activity. The power of the argument would benefit immensely from mapping more rigorously the Catalan cycle of contention, for example through protest event analysis. Performing this kind of data collection in addition to in-depth qualitative work went beyond the possibilities of this PhD research, but it remains an option for future research.

Despite these limitations of scope, this dissertation has made important scholarly contributions. It represents an ambitious project in that it has explored several unchartered territories of knowledge. On the one hand, it left structural approaches to the organizational dimension of social movements aside and focused more explicitly on what activists actually do when they organize. On the other hand, the dissertation is among the first works to systematically address the organizational dimension of secessionist movements. In short, the question of how protest organizing in secessionist movements changes over time has not been posed before. However, the answers to this question do speak to the existing literature.

This dissertation has bridged social movement studies and research on secessionism. The findings contribute to both these fields. Despite their longstanding interest in organization, social movement scholars have normally reduced organization to structural entities. I have advanced the conceptual state of the art by distinguishing between the organizationality of protest, protest organizing as a process, and organizational structures. This conceptual framework has broadened the view on the organizational dimension of social movements and served as the basis for a number of empirical findings relevant to social movement studies.

First, I have shown that the 1-O episode of contention was a not a chaotic sequence. Rather, it unfolded as a combination of spontaneous and organized action. This finding illustrates that social movements often involve both types of action. Spontaneity and organization are not inherent to contention, but they are the result of relational interactions in time. When activists face adversity, time pressure, and uncertainty, they may overthrow previous plans as a protest unfolds and take spontaneous decisions on the spot. The distinction between spontaneity and organizing also shows that organized action should not be confused with protest organized by organizations.

Second, classic writings in social movement studies considered organizational structures an important precondition for protest (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Klandermans, Kriesi, and Tarrow 1989; Kriesi 1996; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Rucht 2013; Zald and McCarthy 1979). In contrast, the empirical analysis confirmed what organization theorists have suggested (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011, 2019a): Organizing in the independence movement took place inside, outside, and between organizations. Although SMOs provide routines and resources that often lead to well-planned protest, they are far from being a necessary condition. The defense of the voting station has shown that experienced and skilled organizers can also take organizing in their own hands. In this case, SMOs refrained from organizing action.

Third, the analysis of empirical data showed that protest organizing is very volatile over time. Previous research has found that social movements undergo organizational change, but has focused on changes of structural entities over longer periods of time (Clemens 1993; Diani and Donati 1999; Kriesi 1996; Rootes 1999; Rucht 1999). While organizational structures may be relatively stable, protest organizing appears to change over shorter periods of time. The relational interactions of challengers and opponents not only impact the frequency and type of protest, but also how protests are organized.

The dissertation has also made important contributions to the literature on secessionism. Conceptually, I have distinguished between secessionist movements and the collective actors that compose them. This distinction has provided the grounds for extensive comparisons within the movement. Empirically, the existing literature on secessionism treats secessionist strategy mainly in rational choice terms (K. G. Cunningham 2013; Griffiths and Muro 2020a; Sorens 2012). However, the findings of this dissertation suggest that secessionist do not simply pick strategies from a readymade portfolio. First, the Catalan case suggests that organizers do not adopt strategies on the basis of cost-benefit calculations. Rather, strategies must be *constructed*. The conflicting strategies that emerged in the movement after the 1-O referendum were the product of sensemaking processes that are inherently symbolic. Second, strategies must be *organized*. Tactics,

understood as the means to pursue a strategy, are not readily available to secessionist challengers. Contentious action as one set of tactics requires the organizational effort of activists.

This dissertation highlights that both these literatures should take seriously the role of events. With the notable exceptions of Mark Beissinger (1996, 2002) and Karlo Basta (2018), scholars of secessionism have not included events as central units of analysis. Social movement studies engage with eventful approaches to contention, but this has not had repercussions for the study of the organizational dimension of social movements. The case of the contentious 1-O referendum makes it very clear that outstanding political occurrences and their symbolic meanings may have profound consequences for secessionist conflicts and contentious politics more in general.

Scholars have bemoaned the decline of organizational sociology, not just in social movement studies (Soule 2013), but also more generally within the social sciences (Ahrne and Brunsson 2011; Besio, du Gay, and Serrano Velarde 2020; King 2017). It goes beyond the scope of this dissertation to develop a theory of organizing that deserves that name. But the framework I have presented here demonstrates that organizational sociology has much to offer for scholars of social movements and contentious politics if they are willing to go beyond narrow entity-based understandings of organization. Process, practice, and CCO approaches to organizing have not been employed in social movement studies, with some notable exceptions (Haug 2013; Kavada 2015; Shoshan 2017). These approaches represent valuable resources for social movement scholars in that they not only clarify some of the conceptual confusion I have described in this dissertation.

4 OUTLOOK

More than three years after the referendum on October 1, 2017, there is still no independent Catalan Republic. Catalan secessionists have not lost their determination to split from Spain. In the Catalan regional elections on February 14, 2021, pro-independence parties for the first time achieved not only a majority of seats in the Catalan parliament, but also of the votes cast. However, at the time of writing these lines in April 2021, ERC, JxC, and CUP have not come to an agreement to form government. Moreover, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic the previous year marked a clear rupture with the previous political cycle. Secessionist parties have tried to exploit the pandemic by blaming the Spanish government for its management of the crisis. But secessionist civil society and protest activity have clearly suffered from the pandemic. It is too early to tell whether the pandemic represents an endpoint to the long secessionist cycle of contention that started in 2009. What is obvious is that secessionist contention, which had its peak at the 2017 referendum, has not resulted in Catalan independence.

As I have written at the outset of this concluding chapter, the referendum was a risky gamble in retrospective. This does not mean that the 1-O referendum will go down in history simply as a failed attempt at secession. As I have shown in this dissertation, the referendum had numerous consequences for the independence movement and Catalan politics. Some of them were short-term changes, some of them had an impact in the long run. Without doubt, the 1-O referendum represents a truly historical event for Catalonia. However, this does not mean that all questions are answered. Throughout this dissertation, I have bemoaned the lack of academic research on the 1-O many times. This dissertation itself has addressed this gap and made important contributions in some areas but only scratched the surface of other questions of course. First, the findings suggest that the relationship between institutional and non-institutional secessionists, the prospective and retrospective framing of political events, and the role of strategizing processes are all important for the study of secessionist movements. Second, I have demonstrated that contentious action played an important role in the Catalan case, but its forms and frequency could be mapped more precisely over time. Third, the comparison with other secessionist movements and independence referendums looms over many of the findings. With a potential second referendum on independence in Scotland on the horizon, it is necessary to go beyond Catalonia to provide some generalizable insights. In my view, these three areas represent important avenues for future research on the 1-O referendum, on the Catalan secessionist conflict, and independence movements more in general.

In this dissertation, I have sketched some lessons that scholars of social movements and secessionism can learn from this remarkable episode of contention. The Catalan independence movement will surely draw its own conclusions from the referendum and the subsequent development. The post-referendum debates on strategy illustrate that making sense of transformative events is not always easy nor consensual, but learning processes are inevitable. Only the future will tell if the gamble on independence was worth it or not.

APPENDICES

1   EXPLORATORY INTERVIEWS:

- Eduard (19/05/18; 21/06/18)
- Zaina (25/05/18)
- Daniel (13/06/18)
- Ivan (15/06/18)
- Thomas (22/06/18)
- Roger (13/12/18)
- Jaume (23/11/18)

2   OBSERVATIONS

- Putting up posters in Poble Sec (24/05/18)
- Protest solidarity with Valtonyc (23/05/18)
- Anti-racist protest (27/05/18)
- Assembly and Vermut in Poble Sec (02/06/18)
- Open assembly CUP Vilanova (16/06/18)
- Vermut i Bitlles CDR Tarragona (17/06/18)
- Assembly CDR Vilanova (21/06/18)
- Assembly CDR Tarragona (26/06/18)
- Diada: Arc de Triomf, Diagonal, Uriquinaona (11/09/18)
- Protest Remembering 20-S (20/09/18)
- Torn-al-cole in Gràcia (30/09/18)
- Protest Banco de España (01/10/18)
- Remembering 1-O (01/10/18)
- Protest CCD, Hospital Clínic (14/11/18)
- Protest CCD, Hospital Clínic (22/11/18)
- Protest against Constitutional Court Sentence (19/11/2019)
- Protest against Constitutional Court Sentence (26/11/2019)

3   DOCUMENTS

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4   SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Table 6: Interview data.

#	Pseudonym	Org. affiliation 1	Org. affiliation 2	Org. affiliation 3	Org. Level	Territorial	Gender
1	Alba & Miquel	CDR	ANC		Local	*Montanya*	F/M
2	Alex	Òmnium Cultural			Regional	Regional	M
3	Antoni	Òmnium Cultural	Convergència		Regional	Regional	M
4	Beatriu	Òmnium Cultural			Regional	Regional	F
5	Berta	ANC	CDR	RA	Local	Girona	F
6	Carles	CDR			Local	BCN-El Clot	M
7	Carme	ANC			Local, Regional	Barcelona	F
8	Emma	ANC			Local, Regional	Exterior	F
9	Enric	ANC			Local, Regional	L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	M
10	Ester	UxR	SEPC	CUP	Local, Regional	BCN, Regional	F
11	Eulàlia	N/A	RA		Local	Local in Gironès	F
12	Gabriel	CDR			Local	BCN - Poble Sec, Sant-Antoni	M
13	Gerard	La Forja	JUP	Arran	Regional	Regional	M
14	Irene	SEPC			Local	Hospital Clínic	F
15	Iris	ANC	CDR	RA	Local	L'Hospitalet de Llobregat	F
16	Isabel	Òmnium Cultural	ANC		Regional	Regional	F
17	Joana	CDR			Local, Intermed	Sabadell	F
18	Jordi	BxR	CDR		Local	*Santa María del Coll*	M
19	Josep	BxR	CDR		Regional	Regional	M
20	Judit	ANC			Local, Regional	Regional, BCN	F
21	Lluis	AMPA	CDR	ANC	Local	Gavà	M
22	Montserrat	CSC-Intersindical			Regional	Regional	F
23	Oriol	CUP	CDR		Local	*Fastiada*	M
24	Paloma	Òmnium Cultural			Local	BCN-Gràcia	F
25	Pasqual	N/A	Convergència	ANC	Local	*Fastiada*	M
26	Pere	UxR	ANC	Arran	Regional	Regional	M
27	Quim	CDR			Local	Tarragona	M
28	Ruben	Arran			Local	BCN-Sant Gervasi	M
29	Sergi & Dolors	CDR			Local	Girona	M/F
30	Xavier	CDR			Local, Intermed	Sabadell	M

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