

“Aye means always”

Scottish independence activism in a Time of Brexit



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Introduction

On a dreary afternoon, Pam is sitting in the cafeteria in one of the buildings of Aberdeen University having a coffee with Maggie, the co-convenor of the Scottish Green Party. In the conversation about the effects of Brexit on Scotland, Maggie says that she thinks Brexit makes the emotional argument for independence so much stronger. “This is a mess of Westminster’s making. They are responsible for the fact that you don’t have medicines on the NHS [*National Health Service*]. They are responsible for the fact that we don’t have fresh fruit. They are responsible for, you know. And I think we have to be able to weaponize that in favour of [an] independence campaign.”¹ She starts speaking faster as she sounds more emotional talking about the effects of Brexit on Scotland. It is clear that Brexit uncertainty has its influence on her desire for independence.

At another moment, Rune finds herself at a Yes Aberdeen 2 meeting. About twenty people are present at the monthly general meeting of March. Just as Joey, the co-chair of the non-party political organisation, talks about the evaluation of their past events, Cara, the other co-chair, cuts him off. “Guys, just to interrupt, but Parliament just had a vote on Brexit, and they have voted against no-deal.” The difference was only about twenty votes, she says. All people present react at once, some clearly shocked by the large support of a no-deal in Parliament. “So close, that’s ridiculous!” shouts an elderly frustrated-sounding man. Joey also reacts by saying he believes there will not be an extension, and therefore they will be in a blackhole situation at the end of the month. He tells the group that if this is the case, there will be a Brexit protest on the 29th of March, like a flash mob. “Don’t ask. Just do!”²

In 2014, the Scottish population voted on Scottish independence in an advisory referendum. After a two-year campaign, a majority of around 55 percent of the Scottish population voted to reject independence.³ Two years later, in 2016, 52 percent of the population of the United Kingdom (UK) voted to leave the European Union in the EU referendum (Brexit). In Scotland, however, a 62 percent majority voted to remain in the EU;⁴ an example of what informants have called the ‘democratic deficit.’ Brexit has renewed tensions regarding Scottish

¹ Interview Pam with Maggie Chapman, co-convenor Scottish Green Party, 1 March 2019

² Yes Aberdeen 2 general meeting, 14 March 2019

³ BBC, *Scotland Decides*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/events/scotland-decides/results>

⁴ BBC, *EU referendum results*, https://www.bbc.com/news/politics/eu_referendum/results

independence and creates new possibilities for nationalists to gain support for a second independence referendum, commonly called indyref2 (Bambery [2014]2018, 316-32).

At the end of 2018, Theresa May made a deal with the EU on specific regulations regarding Brexit. May's deal, however, was voted down by Parliament multiple times. Several amendments were proposed, but none were agreed on. At the start of 2019, Brexit was in deadlock: there was no majority. Only weeks before the original Brexit deadline of March 29th, it was still unclear what the future would hold. This led to uncertainties about the future of the Scottish nation. We will discuss how these uncertainties influence nationalist activism and the desire for independence. The prospect of Brexit remains a massive source of uncertainty and anxiety for Scottish independence activists. At the same time, however, Brexit is the main catalyst for them to campaign for independence again. Brexit is often the reason non-party political groups got back together and are reinventing their strategies for a new campaign. It can thus both be a source of uncertainty and a source of hope for the future at the same time.

We see this future as something that already exists in the perceptions of what it should look like. Those who create reality of these perceptions actively work towards them (Adams et al 2009). Brexit and the post-Brexit future that people in Scotland are anticipating and constructing tremendously influence views on the Scottish nation and its future. As Brexit alienates Scotland from its cosmopolitan ties with Europe, Scots are experiencing something that can be described as temporal disorientation or temporal vertigo (Knight 2017), which occurs when a crisis situation causes unexpected change. It is a Time of Uncertainty, in which "confusion and anxieties about where and when they belong in overarching timelines of pasts and futures" arise (Knight 2017, 239). Although in the context of Brexit, the crisis is mostly based on *possible* difficulties, similar tendencies of temporal vertigo can be identified. We encountered this with Maggie Chapman and Yes Aberdeen 2 at the moment of our research. They both were touched by Brexit and its uncertainty, but this did not stop them in their desire for independence and their pro-independence activism.

The discussions above led to the following research question: *How do grassroots and institutional independence movements in Aberdeen imagine the future of the post-Brexit Scottish nation and how do they actively work towards it?* We argue that the current desire for Scottish independence forms a way to escape the uncertainty and temporal disorientation that Brexit brings to Scotland. Brexit and the consequential limbo situation make for a situation in which all

certainty has vanished, but it also creates possibility to imagine a positive future for Scotland and work towards that.

Our research can be seen as socially as well as scientifically relevant, as we aim to fill a gap in knowledge on the impact of changes like Brexit on how independence activists imagine the future of Scotland and how they are able to pursue that imagined future. We aim to look at how futural temporality and nationalism are experienced at a time when it is almost impossible to anticipate a future due to Brexit uncertainties. The Scottish independence movement has to deal with changes that have never occurred before, which is why it is interesting to study the case from a different perspective of temporality and national belonging. Because of this theoretical chasm in knowledge, we use the concept of temporal nationality to show that nationalism and temporality are intertwined. Nationalism and nationalist tendencies are situated in a specific time and place, and we cannot analyse it properly without considering its temporal situatedness. This link between nationalism and temporality is not new, but it has not often been properly researched.

Furthermore, we introduce a new concept: liminal activism, to look at the ways in which activists are operating in a time of liminality. Activists operated in a temporal vacuum at the beginning of 2019: after the loss of the 2014 independence referendum, without knowledge on the outcome of Brexit and in anticipation of a new independence campaign. This did not stop them from continuing their activism, albeit without a specific short-term goal. Therefore, we have called this phenomenon ‘liminal activism.’ We will elaborate on this in our theoretical framework.

Socially, a look at Scottish independence movements and their perception of time is also relevant, because it provides an insight into their motivations, experiences and hopes and dreams for the future. Furthermore, as we are looking at a nationalist movement that claims to be engaged in a civic kind of nationalism, our research fits into a narrative that looks at civic nationalism as distinctively different from ethnic nationalism. This way, we aim to provide a more nuanced outlook on modern nationalist movements and look at how they are produced in their social, cultural and especially temporal contexts.

To collect our data, we have carried out our fieldwork in Aberdeen from the 4th of February until the 12th of April 2019. Aberdeen, Scotland’s third largest city, is situated on the northeast coast of Scotland. Because of its location close to the oil fields in the North Sea, it is

considered to be the ‘oil capital of Europe.’ Traditionally, Aberdeen has voted more conservative and is considered a ‘no-city,’ which means that it used to vote primarily unionist and voted to remain with the United Kingdom. Looking at the statistics from a few years ago, independence activists would be considered a minority in Aberdeen.⁵ It is hard to find current statistics, so it is impossible to tell whether this is still the case after the EU referendum.

Our research population consisted of several groups that support and are working towards Scottish independence. We decided to look at groups in institutional and non-party political independence movements. On the institutional side, we primarily looked at the Scottish National Party (SNP), the dominant pro-independence party that has been in the Scottish government since 2007. Furthermore, we have spoken to people from the Scottish Green Party, who also support independence. The non-party side of the Scottish independence movement is quite fragmented and is comprised of many different smaller movements, even within the northeast of Scotland. We thus decided to look at three non-party political groups: Students for Independence, which is a society at the University of Aberdeen, Yes Aberdeen 2 (now Aye Aberdeen)⁶ and Aberdeen Independence Movement (AIM). These groups are all different from each other, with different approaches in their activism. Yes Aberdeen 2 was the most active out of these non-party political groups, organising a lot of events and meetings. AIM and Students for Independence were less active at the time of our research, but still organised some events. For the SNP, their activism also continued during the time of our research, which made it possible to join them in their activities.

The main research method that we have been using in this qualitative study has been participant observation. We have lived in Aberdeen for ten weeks during the course of this research. Through participant observation, we built rapport and tried to come as close to the experience of being a Scottish independence activist in a Time of Brexit as possible. For instance, we went canvassing with the SNP and leafleted with Yes Aberdeen 2. With Yes Aberdeen 2 and the SNP, we were able to do more participant observation than with AIM and Students for Independence.

Moreover, we have made extensive use of qualitative interviews. To conduct these, we have made use of a general topic list which mostly led to semi-structured interviews. Some

⁵ BBC, *Scotland Decides*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/events/scotland-decides/results>

⁶ We use Aye Aberdeen’s old name, as this is what they were called during our research period.

unstructured interviews have also been conducted, when it was more fitting for the particular informant or setting. These interviews provided the informants with the possibility to bring up topics and issues they found interesting, and we could alter our topic list accordingly. We have also conducted one focus group with seven informants from different groups within the independence movement. This made it possible to observe interactions between group members (Boeije 2010, 63), which was interesting because of the tensions within the Scottish independence movement. Furthermore, this made it possible to discuss a few specific topics more in-depth. The interviews provided us with valuable information regarding people's experiences and feelings about the current situation surrounding Brexit and Scottish independence and their hopes for the future. These topics sometimes evoked strong emotions, which was something we had to be cautious of. Therefore, we always tried to establish sufficient rapport before asking personal questions. We wanted to make sure our informants felt comfortable sharing their experiences and feelings. Moreover, we carefully selected the members of our focus group, as it came to our attention that personal feuds within the community could potentially have triggered an unpleasant atmosphere. We maintained a level of mutual respect within the group and kept a safe space where all people could share what they wanted to say.

Naturally, we are only able to provide a limited view of the Scottish independence movement, as the motivations and uncertainties might be different in other parts of Scotland and for different independence movements. Due to limits of the method of participant observation, we are only able to provide an in-depth view of a few groups and have left others out of the analysis. Furthermore, we are aware of the fact that our observations might be skewed because of the specific movements and people we have spoken to. Lastly, we have tried to use each other's data to write the following empirical chapters, but as Pam has written the first two chapters and Rune has written the last two chapters, there might be a bias towards the institutional independence movement in the first two chapters and a bias towards the non-party political movement in the last two chapters. We are aware of this and have tried to account for this bias as much as possible.

In what follows, we will firstly elaborate on theories on nationalism and temporality in our theoretical framework. Secondly, we will explain the context of independence activism in Scotland in a Time of Brexit. Then, we will advance to our empirical chapters, discussing our data. The first empirical chapter, Chapter 3, will be on the temporal effect of Brexit and the feeling of liminality in a time of uncertainty. Chapter 4 is on national belonging and nationalism

as a tool for independence activists. These first two empirical chapters have been written by Pam. Chapter 5 is on the imagination of a future Scotland and the future campaign. The last empirical chapter is on liminal activism: activism in a time of liminality. These two chapters have been written by Rune. Finally, we will bring our findings together, connect our data to our theoretical framework and give recommendations for future research.

Chapter 1. Theoretical framework

We chose to structure our theoretical framework using Anderson's concept of the imagined community as the foundation, as the concept is applicable on multiple levels. Firstly, we will discuss the imagined community of the Scottish nation, outlining how national identity and a sense of nationality are expressed in the longing for an independent Scotland. Secondly, we will apply the concept of the imagined community to the way in which the future Scotland is imagined. Time and nationalism are intertwined according to Anderson, but this viewpoint has not been developed in theory until quite recently. Thus, we aim to fill this gap by combining nationalism with temporality and future, using the concept of temporal nationality. We will also discuss the concepts of liminal activism and temporal disorientation, which will later be linked to our context. Finally, we look at the activist community in our research population and analyse their functioning on the basis of theories by Juris and Appadurai on networking futures and vertebrate and cellular structures.

Imagined Scottishness (Pam Ackermans)

National identity

Nations, Hobsbawm (1990, 3) writes, are not as old as history, as is popularly believed within nationalist movements, but instead they are historically a very recent phenomenon. Nations are a socio-political construction, and in this study, we look at the Scottish nation by using Anderson's concept of the nation as an imagined community; as something that does not materially exist, but something that exists in the mind. As all members of a nation will never be able to know each other personally but still maintain a feeling of connection with each other, Anderson defines the national community as 'imagined' (Anderson [1983]2016). Through this imagined community, an awareness of other members of the nation develops. This 'national consciousness' is seen as the basis of nationalism. Alonso (1994, 382) writes that Anderson's theory has done a lot for the understanding of nationalism, but also argues that Anderson does not succeed in identifying how the imagined becomes real. She argues more research needs to be done on the way a nation becomes a structure of feeling, or second nature to those who belong to it. To her, the imagined nation becomes real through material practice and lived experience. This collective feeling is

something that we will come back to in our empirical chapters later on. In particular, we are looking at the changing nation in the temporality that was present at the time of our research, as a shared conception of time is crucial to the imagination of a nation (Ibid.). We will elaborate on this later.

Bond (2006) agrees with Kiely et al (2001) that claims to national belonging are based on identity markers, which are defined as "...any characteristics associated with an individual that they might choose to present to others, in order to support a national identity claim" (Kiely et al 2001; in Bond 2006, 611). Having a formal state to harden and legitimize national identity serves as an important marker of nationality, which makes Scotland interesting because it cannot connect its distinct national identity to formal statehood (Bond 2006, 613). We do not place our emphasis on these identity markers, though, because our research has proven that they are of minor importance for Scottish national identity. Kiely et al (2001) note that, whereas people may experience a heightened sense of national awareness at times, Scottish national identity generally is implicit and regarded as "of little immediate relevance" (Ibid., 34). Our findings connect to this; national identity and the importance of identity markers are thus reliant on time and place. This shows their fluidity and connects to civic nationalism, which will be discussed later. Nevertheless, it does not yet explain national attachment to Scotland or why people want Scotland to be independent. To unravel that, we need to turn to theories on nation-ness and nationalism.

Nation-ness and nationalism

Anderson's theory on imagined communities will form the basis of this analysis on nation-ness and nationalism. The feeling of belonging to the nation will remain a central part of the analysis. For the specific analysis of the Scottish case, the reader is referred to the context of this study, in which Scottish 'progressive nationalism' and the SNP will be further discussed.

Eriksen (2010, 118) argues that nationalism is a relatively new field of inquiry in anthropology; scholars only really became interested during the 1980s. Since then, however, a rich body of literature has been written about it, in which the development of the modern nation-state has been studied. For instance, Gellner states that "nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (Gellner 1983, in Eriksen 2010, 118). Gellner sees nationalism as a movement striving for a culture or ethnicity under one

roof: the state. Ignatieff (1993, 3) defines nationalism as the belief that people are divided into nations which bear a right to self-determination, “either as self-governing units within a nation or as separate nation-states.” Self-determination can take the form of democratic self-rule or cultural autonomy. In the Scottish case, self-rule seems to be the fundamental idea behind nationalism; as we will describe later on, democratic deficit is the primary reason for most people to desire Scottish independence.

Anderson suggests that nationalism is not like all the other -isms but should rather be classified together with kinship and religion (Anderson [1983]2016). It is not only an ideology, but also a way of making sense of the world. Kapferer also described nationalism as an ontology, a “way of making sense of reality” (Kapferer in Eriksen 2010, 129). Nationalism must be able to make people experience the most intense emotions, in order to make people willing to die for the nation (Ibid.). It is, thus, not just seen as an ideology, but as a structural force, shaping people’s lives and society. Furthermore, in one of the final chapters of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson writes that the factors that made the development of nationalism possible do not explain why people feel so much attachment to national constructions (Anderson [1983]2016, 141). Nations inspire a great political love, which can also be deciphered from the use of metaphors and language of kinship (Anderson [1983]2016, 143), and they have over them the idea of natural ties. Again, this implies that national belonging and nationalism are constructions that exist in the mind. This emotional component is something that we will be looking into in our empirical chapters as well.

Civic and ethnic nationalism

We can divide conceptions of the nation and different nationalisms into ethnic and civic forms (Bond 2006). Whereas civic nationalism is based on territorial conceptions of belonging, ethnic nationalism emphasises common descent (Ibid., 611). These two categories are generally regarded as oversimplified, but are still useful to understand Scottish nationalism, as will be discussed later on. The more banal national identity markers, which are used in everyday life to decide who belongs to the nation, do not always have the power to decide who belongs and who does not. Nairn (1977, 99) argues that nationalism in the post-Cold War era will move more and more towards the civic kind, as the only antidote to ethnic nationalism. According to Ignatieff, this civic kind of nationalism “maintains that the nation should be composed of all those- regardless of race, colour, creed, gender, language or ethnicity- who subscribe to the nation’s

political creed” (Ignatieff 1993, 3). It sees the nation as “a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices or values” (Ignatieff 1993, 3-4). Because the sovereignty within a civic nationalist model lies with all citizens, the nation has to be democratic. In Scottish nationalism, this civic conception of the national imagined community predominates.

Imagining a future (Rune Sassen)

In order to understand how theories on nationalism and temporality can be combined, we first need to understand the anthropological study of time and temporality. Anthropology has traditionally focused on cultures in places ‘untouched by modernity,’ or, as Fabian puts it, on “past cultures” (Fabian 1983). The past within the present is often studied in the shape of collective memory, but the future within the present is often neglected, leaving a theoretical gap (Munn 1992, 116). As anthropologists, we are often told we can only study ‘the now’ through our synchronic methods of participant observation (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011, 125). We must not, however, neglect the power that imagined futures can have on the actions performed today. Social behaviour, based on people’s temporality, or social perception of time, can eventually be studied by anthropologists (Gell 1992). Temporalities are generated in social settings, meaning that time as we perceive it only exists within our minds, but is acted upon within a spatial, social setting (Lefebvre [1991] in Gottdiener 1993, 130). A temporality is how time is perceived, but it is also acted upon accordingly (Bryant and Knight 2019). This means that future-oriented temporal orientations have a teleoaffective structure, which helps us see the future functions as a certain goal we move towards (Schatzki 2002, 80).

Thus, the future is created in the present and can be influenced by our everyday actions. This is where anthropology comes in, as we are able to study people's actions and experiences of the present (Gell 1992). These are often about the future people wish to create, on a large scale, on the national level, but also on a smaller scale, such as the preparation of a meal in anticipation of having dinner. We all work towards an open-ended future, which unfolds during the performance of our everyday actions (Mead [1977]2005, 329): “The future shapes the familiarity of everyday life” (Bryant and Knight 2019, 19).

In order to help us gain an ethnographic hold on the relationship between the future and action, Bryant and Knight introduce six different futural orientations in their book *The Anthropology of the Future*. These orientations help signify the teleology of everyday behaviour,

meaning that every action we do, purposefully leads to a specific future (Bryant and Knight 2019, 16). “Action is not a phenomenon of ‘the present’”; it is part of an anticipated flow leading into ‘the future’ (James and Mills 2005, 2). All orientations of Bryant and Knight mark different experiences of the future and exist in the everyday and within every action the future is present (Ibid., 197). These futuralities can occur separately, shifting from one another as a political situation progresses, but they can also occur simultaneously (Ibid., 193). Bryant and Knight argue that temporality is collectively experienced. We all live together in Times of War, Times of Peace or Times of Crisis. Colloquial ‘times’, then, “induce collective responses.” (Bryant and Knight 2019, 30). We will now briefly discuss some futural orientations Bryant and Knight mention, starting with anticipation.

The process of anticipation is acted upon everyday by individuals, often with the help of calendars and agendas (Harms 2013, 349). Anticipation occurs when we think about ‘going somewhere’ and consequently act towards this future. For instance, it is when you make dinner in anticipation of eating it. The second orientation, expectation, is different, as it is more connected to past experiences. Deciding to make dinner, because you know you will be hungry otherwise, is expectation, using the past as a resource (Bryant and Knight 2019, 72). Speculation happens, for instance, in Times of Uncertainty, when it is impossible to know what will occur. Speculation is used to slim the gap in between uncertain circumstances, thinking about what could happen (Ibid., 86). Contrarily, potentiality focuses on everything the future could become: it is “the future’s capacity to become future” (Ibid., 107). Hope drives the potential to the present, as it is hope that motivates us, as a driving force to realise potential futures (Ibid., 134). Lastly, destiny is a temporality on the unknown future, the future that is past the horizon, but something that you work towards (Ibid.,160). All orientations are useful bases when looking into temporality and future ethnographically.

Temporality and nationalist activism (Rune Sassen)

Time and nationalism in uncertain times

When discussing issues of nation-ness and nationalism, it is important to consider the temporal aspect of these topics. Without a sense of temporality, after all, a sense of nationality would not exist (Anderson [1983]2016). Temporality and nationality go hand in hand, because they represent the two most basic principles of human experience: time and space (Kellerman 1989). Time and place are interlinked within human experience and cannot be seen as separate entities. With concepts like temporality and nationality, we make sense of an otherwise unstructured world, as they provide a framework in which we perform our existence (Bastian 2014). A temporal sense of simultaneity is important, because it enables us to grasp the full extent of the nation and the lives of its people (Ibid., 36). In other words, nationalism “enables people to locate all members within a certain temporal frame” (Alonso 1994, 388).

Nationalism needs a sense of temporality in order to create a feeling of time-evasion: as something that exists outside of time itself, but only exists explicitly within a certain place (Alonso 1994, 382). In this sense, the nation is determined as something that has existed forever and will forever exist (Anderson [1983]2016). The notion of endless time becomes spatialised and then territorialised, within the boundaries of the nation-state (Alonso 1994). To gain momentum, however, nationalism needs to focus on historical events of the nation in order to rectify its current existence. A myth of origin creates a sense of commonality and can also be used to anticipate the future (Anderson [1983]2016). When people know where they come from, it is easier to imagine where they are going. Nationalism is heavily engaged with the past, but it is proclaimed to be a movement of progress, making it, therefore, a means to anticipate futures (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202).

Nationalism, thus, tends to look back at the past, even though it can also be used to move people into action and create new futures. However, what Anderson seems to entail, is that nationalism cannot bring us progress, because it is too preoccupied with history (Anderson [1983]2016, 162). Especially as time-space compression increases and nations are more and more connected, feelings of uncertainty ‘on where we are going’ become more apparent. In Times of Uncertainty, as things that used to be seen as fixed and safe become less controllable and more chaotic, people are often holding on to familiar frameworks, like nationalism, in order to make sense of the often quickly changing world (Alonso 1994, 388; Appadurai 2006, 2). This, according

to Anderson, is to no avail, as he considers nationalism to be a force connected to the past (Anderson [1983]2016, 162). However, progressive nationalism is, like we have mentioned, differs from the ethnic nationalism Anderson seems to discuss mostly. If this progressive nationalism is put into a Time of Brexit, and therefore a Time of Crisis, it can arguably hold the progressive notion Anderson disregards nationality from having.

On a large scale, variations of different futures are often presented to the public in the forms of myths. They are stories of an imagined future used to move people to action, to achieve a common goal. Only through actively imagining or acting upon the myth, it will become reality. The creator of the myth offers solutions to achieve the mythical future (e.g. ‘vote for this party,’ ‘use green energy’). These myths are often political, but this does not necessarily have to be the case (Wingfield 2005, 120-121). Futures and their imagination, thus, have power in the present. They can move and occupy people. Myths, like utopias, entail promises on better times and better places. In these imaginations of the future, places, too, cannot be separated from time, because humans experience time as intertwined with space. Imagined futures, and myths, are shaped by this lived experience of the interlinkage of space-time (Wingfield 2005).

There is, however, a downside to utopian myths. There is always a possibility that the imagined perfect future stays just like a myth; unreal in spatial sense. When a myth does not generate widespread support, or people do not work hard enough to achieve certain goals, the future is not realised. Especially in a globalised society, the future is often experienced as dreary. We find ourselves in uncharted territory and Times of Crisis are always on the horizon.

The uncanny present and temporal disorientation

In Times of Crisis it can become harder, or even impossible, to look towards the future (Bryant 2016). Still, anticipation is, as we have seen, something that people are doing in everyday life. Increasing feelings of crisis, however, make it more difficult to anticipate in the long term, through the processes we have mentioned above. What is considered a ‘crisis,’ here, is a shift away from regular, ‘normal temporality’ (Bryant 2016, 20). People can experience a sense of radical change in the way they live their everyday lives. A crisis does not by definition have to be a historical turning point to be *experienced* as a crisis (Knight 2017). Additionally, the anticipation of a crisis can become a crisis in itself. By some, Brexit can be considered as such (Knight 2017, 238), as it is creating temporal disorientation and temporal vertigo, when it seems impossible to anticipate the

future (Knight 2017). It is this feeling of eeriness, which Bryant calls the ‘uncanny present,’ in which it is impossible to anticipate an immediate future (Bryant 2016).

The uncanny present occurs at “moments when the inability to anticipate the future makes the present-ness of the present visceral and immediate” (Ibid., 29). The regularity of the progression of time is disrupted in times of crisis, leaving people with feelings of uncertainty on the progression of their lives. Temporality stops temporalizing itself; time seems to stop moving forward (Bryant and Knight 2019). This can be combined with a feeling of vertigo, which Knight calls temporal vertigo or temporal disorientation. In such a vertigo, people may feel like they are moving to the ‘wrong direction’ in space (Knight 2017).

In circumstances of political and social chaos, the uncanny present, accompanied by temporal disorientation, can feel daunting. It can be very desirable to move back, or perhaps forward, to a ‘normal’ sense of the progression of time, to a Time of Peace (Bryant 2016). The uncanny present can therefore feel liminal: it is a period in between (political) actions. A liminal phase is the ‘in between’ stage of rituals (van Gennep [1909]1961). Turner borrowed this term, which was first coined by van Gennep, and expanded it. A state of liminality implies “both the immanence of the future and the idea of pressing forward to it, potentially crossing it.” (Bryant and Knight 2019, 35). Turner also states that liminality presents a “moment in and out of time,” which unites the people that find themselves at this stage simultaneously (Turner 1969, 360). He explains a liminal phase as socially ambiguous and structurally invisible in society, creating bonds between those going through liminality together (Turner 1967). This is what Turner calls *communitas*: the power of a shared experience in a liminal phase (Ibid., 372). Normative *communitas* occurs when this period of lack of social structures extended and becomes normalised (Ibid., 132). The power, or energy, that emerges through *communitas* is portrayed as mostly positive and is almost idealised by Turner, which is a critique we endorse as well. Especially in Times of Uncertainty, *communitas* and its energy can also be outed negatively (Killinger 2010).

Liminal activism

Activism and the liminal, uncanny present are somewhat non-compatible, in the sense that through the experience of an eerie, uncertain feeling, the anticipation of the future becomes blurred. However, with activism, it is very important to keep a certain idea of the future alive whilst working towards this future. Still, there is a way for people who experience this uncanny present to still

have a wish to do something to get a better future. This is what we will call liminal activism. This new concept that we introduce shows the ways in which activists try to operate in a time of liminality. It combines the idea of Turner's liminality with theories of Bryant and Knight on temporality and nationalist activism in Time of Uncertainty. As Turner states, in a Time of Liminality, people come together and share a certain intimate experience together, *communitas*, which is seen in the reuniting independence groups after the EU referendum. We will continue discussing this term later in our empirical chapters and discussion.

Activist structures in a time of liminality (Pam Ackermans)

To look at how activists in the independence movement deal with liminality, we use Appadurai's theory on cellular and vertebrate structures. Appadurai (2006, 20-21) writes that group structures can be classified as either vertebrate or cellular. Vertebrate structures rely on structural systems, not always but often hierarchical, and always reliant on a set of regulative norms and signals. Cellularities, on the other hand, are comprised of networked, rhizomatic forms, which are not reliant on fixed norms (Ibid.). These different modes of organisation, Appadurai argues, are prone to know friction with each other. He uses the examples of the nation-state and grassroots globalisation organisations. However, these concepts are also applicable to the Scottish independence movement; the friction between the different groups in the independence movement can be explained using the idea of vertebrate and cellular structures. The fact that the activists operate in a time of liminality can partially explain this conflict; the energy of the different structures does not have a different direction to go to than against each other. We will provide a more in-depth analysis of this later on.

For both the institutional and the non-party political side of the Scottish independence movement, activism is largely organised through digital means. The activists connect and communicate with each other through social media networks; Twitter and, most importantly, Facebook. These platforms make it possible to imagine themselves as a coherent movement, whilst most of them do not and will never know each other personally. Yet, as Anderson writes in his analysis of the nation as an imagined community, "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson [1983]2016, 6). They work together towards a common goal, trusting on other activists' simultaneity and like-mindedness in their activism towards independence. Thus, we see them as another example of an imagined community. Here, we use Castells' idea of "networking, [a] decentred form of organisation and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination in the information society" (Castells 1997, 362; in Juris 2008, 11); through the networking possibilities of the twenty-first century, it is possible to organise a huge social movement without real-life contact with most of its members. The possibilities that the internet brings make for a new kind of activist community; one that is connected primarily through digital means.

Chapter 2. Context

Historical context (Rune Sassen)

Scotland's struggle for independence began after its union with the English monarchy in 1603, the Union of the Crowns (Bamberg [2014]2018). Another important moment was the adjournment of the Scottish Parliament based in Edinburgh in 1707, creating a multinational state in which Scots obtained dual identities; Scottish and British (Bamberg [2014]2018; Torrance 1997). This dual identity was both nationalist and unionist at the same time. Politically, thereafter, it proved that there needed to be a balance between the two identities in order to maintain peace (Torrance 1997, 52).

In the 18th and 19th century, nation-states started to emerge (Anderson [1983]2016). However, Scotland, with its anglicized elite and lack of localised media in the Scots language, did not meet the requirements to create a sense of nationalism, according to Anderson. This was despite a distinguishable Scottish intelligentsia, English print capitalism and anglicization. A European-style vernacular nationalist movement could not exist, because the Scottish identity was scrutinised by its unification with England (Anderson [1983]2016, 88-90).

Over the years, there have been multiple rebellions against 'English rule,' with one of the most memorable ones ending in the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Afterwards, weapons, bagpipes, the Gaelic language and kilts and tartan were banned, and the previous Highland lifestyle changed significantly (Bamberg [2014]2018; Haywood 2015, 124). In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Scottish clearances took place: Scots, both in the Highlands and Lowlands, were forced out of their homes to make room for cattle. Villages were destroyed and its inhabitants were forced to move to the cities or make dangerous journeys to overseas colonies. Scottish settlers started new lives all over the world, making the Scots a diaspora people (Haywood 2015, 134). Immigration is still very important in Scotland and it is an important part of SNP policy.⁷

In 1997, Scotland voted to reinstall a devolved parliament for more 'home rule.' Certain areas became devolved matters, meaning the Scottish Parliament could make specific laws and regulations regarding topics such as the NHS and education. Some would argue that devolution caused young people to be more politically aware of their Scottishness, which means they are more likely to vote in favour of independence (Torrance 1997).

⁷ Scottish National Party website, URL: <https://www.snp.org/policies/pb-what-is-the-snp-s-policy-on-immigration/>

The first independence referendum (2014)

After the SNP had won a majority in Parliament in the 2011 elections, there was an open path to an independence referendum. For the first time, the biggest Scottish party in favour of independence triumphed. Still, there was a long way to go. In March 2013, they announced that a referendum was to be held in September 2014. In the period thereafter, both non-party political activists and SNP activists hit the streets, canvassed and leafleted with all their hearts.⁸

“It was genuinely the happiest period of my life,” described an activist, “everyone was out on the streets, it was a period filled with hope and possibility. I wanted it so bad.”⁹ Unfortunately for him, however, eventually only 45 percent voted for independence, making the aftermath hard. Avery told me she and her husband did not go outside for at least a week after the lost indyref of 2014.¹⁰ However, this was not the end for independence activism. After the 2014 referendum, SNP membership rose drastically, indicating that the wish for independence had not died (Audickas et al 2018, 12). The first battle for independence was lost, but the war was far from over.

Scottish nationalism (Pam Ackermans)

Scottish ‘progressive nationalism’ and the Scottish National Party

Political success in Scotland after the union in 1707 came to be based on balancing Scottish and British identities (Torrance 2016, 52). However, Scottish nationalists needed to tell a story of Scottish identity in order to achieve their goals. The SNP only developed a comprehensive nationalism in the 1960s, and only recently established the ‘myths of identity’ needed for a Scottish nationalism suitable to everyone (Torrance 2016, 55). These myths are subsequently being used to stimulate a movement of people towards a particular future in which Scotland is an independent country (Wingfield 2005).

In the wake of the Brexit referendum, the SNP explicitly sided with the EU, which made some people critique them; why did they need to be with one union and not with another? (Torrance 2016, 58). Nevertheless, the SNP’s wish to stay with the EU strengthened their call for

⁸ Interview Rune with Mike, 6 April 2019

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Interview Rune with Avery, 12 March 2019

a ‘social nationalism’ or ‘progressive nationalism’ (Torrance 2016). This can be connected to the civic and ethnic forms of nationalism that Bond (2006) uses. From this, we can deduce that the type of nationalism of the SNP should be much more civic-minded than ethnic. Kiely et al also argue that Scottish nationality is guided by a ‘sense of place,’ instead of a ‘sense of tribe’ (Smout [1994] in Kiely et al 2001, 33), which again underlines this hypothesis.

Dynamic in the independence movement: the SNP and non-party political movements

The Scottish independence movement involves multiple actors, in the institutional as well as the non-party political realm of political organisation. This can be connected to Appadurai’s (2006, 20-21) cellular and vertebrate structures; the top-down, vertically and orderly structured (vertebrate) organisation of the SNP stands in contrast to the many different, overlapping and mostly horizontally organised (cellular) non-party movements. A challenge lies in combining these bottom-up and top-down sides of the independence movement. The networking logics of the grassroots are often challenged by vertical command logics (Juris 2008, 289). Whereas the institutional politics in the Scottish independence movement are organised through vertebrate structure, the multiplicity and fluidity of the non-party political independence movements show their cellularity. The conflict between vertebrate and cellular structures applies to the functioning of the independence movement; there are differences between the SNP and the independent grassroots movements, in ideology as well as in strategy. We will discuss this more in-depth in our empirical chapters.

In the independence movement, these vertebrate and cellular forms have to work together to get to their goal of an independent country, which can sometimes be problematic. What is particularly interesting about the SNP is the fact that, whereas the party is vertically structured, the activism on the ground can also be characterised as grassroots activism. Within the party, there is thus divergence between the structures at the top and the more fluid forms of organisation at the bottom. The bottom-up, grassroots activism is, more than the formalised top of the party, organised by means of Facebook groups and other social media outlets, in which campaigning activities are laid out. It is an example of Castells’ “*networking, [a] decentered form of organisation and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination in the information society*” (Castells 1997, 362; in Juris 2008, 11).

A digitally organised network is vital for the organisation of grassroots activism, with activists connecting with each other primarily through digital means.

EU referendum (Rune Sassen)

On 24 June 2016, the UK voted in what would come to be known as the Brexit referendum. On this referendum, the fate of the unitary state was decided on with the question “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?” After 6 weeks of campaigning, both on social media through directed ads and in real life, for instance on ‘the bus of 350 million,’ the Leave campaign was remarkably successful, though accused of selling lies. Especially due to the directed ads, it was difficult to believe to those outside of the target audience that the Leave campaign actually had a chance of winning, but they did so with a margin of 52 to 48 percent. Scotland as a whole voted to remain in the EU by 62%, which was an overwhelming difference to the other countries in the UK.

Mainly because, as stated before, a majority of Scottish people voted against Brexit, a majority of Scottish nationals were now in an uncertain situation that they did not agree on in the first place (Knight 2017, 240). As the previous Brexit deadline of the 29th of March 2019 was getting closer, the anticipation of a future after this deadline was becoming increasingly unclear (Koch 2017, 228). The deadline also came closer without people having the power to control it. Time and its correlating power of change are sensible (Hazan 1984). Knight explains that the people of Scotland, because of their cosmopolitan and progressive tendencies, were especially affected by Brexit, creating an experience that Knight calls temporal disorientation (Knight 2017, 239). Because it was clear that Brexit would happen at a specific date, the anticipation of this date of crisis, in itself, became the crisis (Bryant 2016; Knight 2017, 239). Scotland and its cosmopolitan future, linked with ideas of nationalism, were under pressure, creating a feeling of “being trapped in a temporal moment” (Knight 2017, 241).

The initial reaction of Nicola Sturgeon, First Minister of Scotland, was as follows: “I think an independence referendum is now highly likely, but I also think it is important that we take time to consider all steps and have the discussions, not least to assess the response of the EU to the vote that Scotland expressed yesterday.”¹¹ Sturgeon stated that she would explore the possibilities for a

¹¹ Taylor, Brian. “Is the time right for indyref2?” *BBC Scotland*, last edited: 24 June 2016. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-36625068>

new independence referendum, ensuring to protect what the people of Scotland voted for: a place within the EU and its single market. For the first time after 2014, there was hope for a new referendum (indyref2), and independence activists gradually began to get back in touch again.

Empirical chapters

Chapter 3. Living in limbo (Pam Ackermans)

I'm meeting a member of the Scottish Parliament, sitting down on the other side of a wooden table in her brightly lit office, whilst she eats a salad for lunch. When I ask her how she felt after the EU referendum, she says, swallowing a bite: "It's all I can do not to cry, seriously." She describes how cheated she feels, being taken out of the EU against the general will of the Scottish people, after losing the independence referendum on the basis of scaremongering about losing EU membership. "I actually can't contemplate the fact of not being in the EU and what that might mean. Getting rid of freedom of movement, not being part of the single market... and also the psychology around it as well. I feel European. I have benefitted from being in the EU myself, as a student, as a lecturer, as someone involved in education. My son's twenty, he feels really angry that I had all these opportunities to live and work in places in the EU that will not be open to him with a work visa, all the Erasmus programs that I was involved in as a student and as a lecturer... they're not open to that generation anymore. So yeah." The look on her face is one of anger, betrayal even.

"So that emotion is very much still there?" I ask. She nods and confirms: "It absolutely is. And it's stronger than it's ever been."¹²

Temporal disorientation

During our time in Scotland at the beginning of 2019, the Brexit process was in full swing. For weeks on end, we spent several nights a week on the couch in our Airbnb living room, watching new indicative votes on possible Brexit outcomes. However, while the situation surrounding Brexit was changing by the day, there was no certainty in sight about its outcome. The population of the UK, and the population of Scotland in particular, could be said to be living in a time of temporal disorientation (Knight 2017). The Scottish people, because of their cosmopolitan and progressive tendencies, were particularly affected by Brexit and its uncertainty (Ibid.). This temporal disorientation makes the present seem to last forever, because it is virtually impossible

¹² Interview Pam with Gillian Martin MSP (*Member of the Scottish Parliament*) (SNP), 22 March 2019

to anticipate on the unknown future. Scotland and its cosmopolitan future, linked with ideas of nationalism, were under pressure, creating a feeling of “being trapped in a temporal moment” (Knight 2017, 241). This way, the uncertain becomes the new normal, and it is difficult to look towards the future. This feeling especially was strengthened because the Brexit process was out of the activists’ control, which led to a sense of despair.¹³

In this chapter, I set out this feeling of uncertainty and limbo, arguing that Scottish independence functions as an escape from the temporal imprisonment caused by Brexit.

After the EU referendum

The sense of betrayal and sadness that Gillian Martin told me about was widely shared within the independence movement. Many activists could vividly recall their emotions when they first heard about the outcome of the EU referendum. “I was actually travelling,” an informant told me. “I had voted [via postal vote], and I got on a flight in the US with a friend texting me saying ‘Don’t worry about it, we’re gonna be fine.’ Because the Brexit polls were saying it was gonna be a remain. And so, I got on that flight, just like ‘thank God,’ and then when I landed on Schiphol Airport, I put my phone on and that same person said: ‘I’m really sorry, we’re out.’ And I felt sick. Just like, oh my God, that can’t be real. And I was just ashamed of my passport, very ashamed.”¹⁴ There was still an overwhelming feeling of anger and betrayal for many people in the [generally pro-EU] independence movement. One of the main arguments used by the Better Together campaign in 2014 was that an independent Scotland would be taken out of the EU. Thus, activists felt like people voted no to independence because they were afraid for that to happen.¹⁵ During the Brexit vote two years later, the majority of the Scottish population (62 percent)¹⁶ voted to remain in the EU. However, as a part of the UK, Scotland was going to have to leave the EU anyway. Therefore, the general sentiment within the independence movement with regard to Brexit was very bitter. The process had, once again, strengthened the conception that the Westminster government did not truly represent Scotland’s will. This can also be seen as an example of democratic deficit, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

¹³ Interview Rune with Craig, 6 February 2019

¹⁴ Interview Pam with Serena, 26 March 2019

¹⁵ Interview Pam with Annie, 12 March 2019

¹⁶ BBC, *EU referendum results*, https://www.bbc.com/news/politics/eu_referendum/results

For independence supporters, Brexit clashed with their cosmopolitan view of Scotland. They saw Scotland as outward-looking and internationalist, whereas the arguments for Brexit, on the other hand, were constructed around xenophobia and racism. “The reason why we’re in this mess,” Guy said during our focus group, “is because it was a campaign not on simply leaving the EU but based on xenophobia. So the whole reason why we’re in this difficulty is the fact that stopping freedom of movement was seen as the main thing of Brexit.”¹⁷ Because of Brexit, for the independence activists, Scotland becoming an independent country was now no longer something that would be nice to have, but an absolute necessity. “It will be like running from a tidal wave,” an informant said.¹⁸ If Scotland wanted to save itself from what they see as the upcoming collapse of the economic and health system, they thought the country *had to* become independent.

We’re sitting across Fiona in our local café. It’s quiet, except for the murmuring of a few other people in the café and the acoustic music that is playing softly in the background. We’re having a coffee together as she talks to us about what Brexit, whether it would be a ‘soft’ or a ‘hard’ Brexit, would do to her and to other disabled people. “People will die because of Brexit,” she says. We are quiet for a bit, as we’re unsure how to react to that. She repeats: “People will die.” I can see the despair in her eyes as she drinks her beverage, which has probably gone cold by now. We can only listen to her as she tells us what she thinks will happen to the sick and disabled if Brexit goes through. “People are already dying,” she says. “And that will only become worse.”¹⁹

As the vignette above highlights, the uncertainty that followed from Brexit was not only something that existed on the national level, but it was also something very personal. Fiona is a disability activist and the SNP’s Women’s and Equalities Convener. To her, Scottish independence was a matter of life and death. For sick and disabled people, she told us, being taken out of the EU would mean a loss of access to vital health support and medicines. Most of the funding that helps disabled people came from the EU, and it seemed unlikely that the UK

¹⁷ Guy during our focus group, 1 April 2019

¹⁸ Interview Pam and Rune with Fiona, 14 March 2019

¹⁹ Ibid.

government would match that after Brexit.²⁰ As Fiona saw it, the UK government “will just continue dismantling what people like me need.”²¹ Thus, independence (and EU membership with that) again had become not just something that would be nice to have, but something that was desperately needed for people to survive. James, who had a specific health condition, said that he worried about getting necessary medication and equipment if Brexit went through, especially in the case of a hard (no-deal) Brexit. There was a looming threat of medicine shortages after Brexit, and the price of his medication was also expected to go up significantly.²² Thus, both informants experienced a threat to their personal health after Brexit, which fuelled the feeling of being left behind by the UK government and made the desire for independence more urgent than ever before.

Furthermore, people worried about the loss of jobs in the northeast of Scotland, an area highly dependent on trade with the EU. Aberdeen’s economy (and its inhabitants’ jobs) mainly depended on the oil industry, the fishing industry and the food and drink industry, which were all very closely connected to the EU. “Businesses are (...) desperate to have some certainty, almost one way or the other,” an informant told me. “And that’s horrific, that sort of stress that people must be dealing with because their market is about to disappear.”²³ Economically, there was also a lack of investment in Scotland because of the uncertainty. And, as an informant noted, whilst the devolved Scottish government did what it could, it could not fix all of that.²⁴ All in all, the uncertainties following from Brexit caused a time of crisis, in which it was impossible to anticipate on a new future (Bryant 2016).

Trapped in a temporal moment

“Folk need to know what they’re voting for and against. (...) Be fair to people. I can’t tell people now what’s happening with Brexit. So, until I can, I don’t think it’s fair to ask them to vote for independence. We just need to know what’s going to happen.”²⁵

²⁰ Talk by Stewart Hosie MP (SNP), Forfar, 10 March 2019

²¹ Interview Pam and Rune with Fiona, 14 March 2019

²² Interview Rune with James, 14 February 2019

²³ Interview Pam with Serena, 26 March 2019

²⁴ Interview Pam with Annie, 12 March 2019

²⁵ Interview Pam with Doug, 22 March 2019

When we were in Scotland, independence activists felt like they were waiting for something to happen. The Brexit negotiations led to a long delay to the UK's exit from the EU and a situation of political impasse. Scotland had been in a state of limbo for the past two years, since the Brexit negotiations had started. Everyone was waiting for a change, but as an informant said: "People don't like indecisiveness. They'd rather make a decision that's maybe not as good as it could've been. (...) Not making any decision is far worse for some people."²⁶ Bryant and Knight (2019), in their discussion of different ways of looking at the future, write that "some people's ownership of the future was rudely repossessed in a single referendum." A particular view of the future was now on hold. We see this in the state of limbo that has followed from the outcome of the EU referendum, leading to what Bryant and Knight have called a "Time of Brexit," in which the uncertain has become normal; the state of limbo slowly growing into the normal state of affairs.

The indecisiveness of the UK government led to frustration with independence activists. If a hard Brexit went through, activists agreed that independence needed to happen very quickly, "for the survival of Scotland."²⁷ However, the situation of political impasse, chaos and turmoil also made for a political environment in which, to many, it did not seem fit to launch a new campaign. Brexit was delaying the new independence referendum, a hard Brexit even more than a soft one.²⁸ There was not much that the independence activists could do to get out of the uncertainty. Even a member of the Scottish Parliament said: "I feel pretty powerless at the moment, watching Brexit happen. You know, we all do. It doesn't matter what the SNP government does. We just get ignored."²⁹

However, some activists also saw Brexit as something that could be seized by the independence movement, proving that Scotland and the UK really were incompatible. In an interview with a non-party activist, Rune was told: "You see, Brexit is a godsend for us really. I should not say that, but I... (...) Although I think we should be able to call a referendum at any time. But because that was a material change. We were taken out of Europe against our will, it gave us a legitimate chance. Actually, it was quite a good decision for us. Although in the long run, I would rather be in Europe."³⁰ The temporal uncertainty, here, is seen as a chance to become

²⁶ Interview Pam with Annie, 12 March 2019

²⁷ Interview Rune with James, 14 February 2019

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview Pam with Gillian Martin MSP (SNP), 22 March 2019

³⁰ Interview Rune with Avery, 12 March 2019

independent and not just a negative circumstance for Scotland, although that still remains the dominant narrative.

“There’s just too much politics happening”³¹

Within the independence movement, there often was a general feeling of what they called “activist fatigue.” The Brexit chaos was experienced as very overwhelming, on top of the disappointment about losing the 2014 independence referendum. “Everyone’s too tired and too overwhelmed with this chaos to really be interested in a new [independence] campaign. The future campaign will be a lot harder. Before, it was like a positive festival of ideas.”³² For most activists involved in the Scottish independence movement, their activism took up much of their spare time, next to their paid job. This could be exhausting, as an SNP activist told me: “You gotta have a balance. For the first time recently, I decided I needed to switch off my phone and not look at social media, because every bit of politics in the UK is just sometimes overwhelmingly negative. And that hasn’t happened to me before. I needed a bit of a break. I’d hate to be a politician, because they can’t do that.”³³ As there were constantly new political campaigns running, it took up a lot of (primarily SNP) activists’ time, which led to extreme tiredness and a less invigorated activist base. On top of that, Brexit was confusing the situation, causing activist fatigue as well as voter fatigue.³⁴

This kind of fatigue was, then, not just experienced by the activists, but it was also noticeable in society as a whole. Voter fatigue was a problem; people felt disengaged with politics and had been losing trust in the political system. The general faith in politics was diminishing mainly because of Brexit: “They see Brexit being a fiasco and if they’re not that politically motivated anyway, that’s a danger, just lack of faith in politicians,” an SNP councillor said during our focus group.³⁵ Exhaustion also was a big problem, as Scotland had many elections in recent years. Informants noted that the amount of votes turned people off, as well as confused them.³⁶ The same phenomenon is noticeable around Brexit; many people, whether they

³¹ Interview Pam with Maggie Chapman, co-convenor Scottish Green Party, 1 March 2019

³² Interview Pam and Rune with Fiona, 14 March 2019

³³ Interview Pam with Serena, 26 March 2019

³⁴ Guy during our focus group, 1 April 2019

³⁵ Annie during our focus group, 1 April 2019

³⁶ From our focus group, 1 April 2019

were opposed to Brexit in the first place or in favour of it, were now so done with the topic that they said “just get it over with,” when activists spoke to them on the doorsteps.

Moving on from Brexit

I'm meeting SNP activists in for a canvass tonight. It's taking place in Torry, the old fishers' area next to Aberdeen. Its old houses are scattered on the hill across the river Dee. The activists joke around, laughing whilst they are walking through the area. Because Torry is situated on a hill, we enjoy gorgeous views of Aberdeen and the North Sea whilst the sun is setting, covering the landscape in golden light. When we get to a house, we check the names on our list to see who lives there and call one of the doorbells to get into the front door of the building. When we get in, it's dark and we have to climb up the stairs to get to the individual apartments. “How do you think Brexit is going?” we ask the residents, which brings horrified responses. Not everyone wants to talk to us; one time, to my horror, we get the door slammed in our face. For the activist I'm with, that's just normal business. “Not everyone agrees with us,” she says, shrugging. At one of the last houses, a woman in leisurely clothes opens her front door after we ring the doorbell. She looks suspicious, until we explain that we're from the SNP. Her face lights up, and she now fully opens the door. “I thought you were Tories!” she says, laughing. It turns out she is an independence supporter and is very happy to talk to us.³⁷

For independence supporters, the Brexit process felt like an endless slur of uncertainty. This temporal disorientation of not knowing what the future would bring made it impossible to plan ahead for the future of the country. However, there was a glimpse of hope on the horizon, as they waited for a second independence referendum to bring them the possibility of a different future. This possibility of creating a better version of the future can be seen as what Bryant and Knight (2019) called “collective anticipation.” In this period of time -saturated by uncertainty- the present can be seen as liminal, as something that needs to be endured before you can get to where you want to be (Bryant and Knight 2019). In the case of the Scottish independence movement, we see that the Time of Brexit caused fatigue. Activists wanted to move on to a better time, to a hopeful future. “We're trying to save people's lives, save England from itself. But we have to

³⁷ Vignette from canvass session Pam attended with Aberdeen SNP on 4 April 2019

protect ourselves too. The differences are just too big. We can't fix it for them. At some point we have to put on our own oxygen mask. Indyref is the only opportunity that we've got," Fiona said.³⁸ This shows that an independence referendum, to activists, was now more needed than ever. Brexit gave the cause for independence a huge impulse and thus, we can say that the negative experiences from Brexit also give birth to something positive and active. Later, we will discuss how this works out in practice.

³⁸ Interview Pam and Rune with Fiona, 14 March 2019

Chapter 4. Scottish national identity and progressive nationalism (Pam Ackermans)

For many people, becoming an independent country formed Scotland's chance to escape the current position of temporal disorientation and uncertainty. As described in the previous chapter, becoming independent was now not only a nice option, but it became a necessity because of Brexit. However, the Scottish independence movement existed before the EU referendum. In this chapter, we will set out what Scottishness means to people, and why activists see Scottish national identity as distinctly different from Britishness, to the point where it justifies an independent country. We will be arguing that the desire for independence is a tool to escape the current temporal position of the country, and that a civic form of nationalism is used to get out of that uncertainty.

Being Scottish

“I believe in the principle of right of soil. So, someone who comes to Scotland, they're Scottish in my eyes. (...) Being Scottish is living in Scotland and playing a part in that community. I like to think that there's a lot of places in Scotland that have that sense of community. And from there, I would like to think as well that playing a part in that community, that's what makes you Scottish.”³⁹

Internationalism, openness, and a connection to Scottish land were often noted as important to Scottish national identity. Scottishness was not seen as closed off or rigid; it was linked to residence in Scotland instead of descent. The general opinion seemed to be that if you live in Scotland and contribute to the Scottish economy, then you are Scottish. “Whether they have been Scots for a year, or two years, or their whole life...”⁴⁰ This openness and international character were what many valued as the most important aspect of Scottish national identity. It might even be fitting to call the Scottish nationalism a kind of ‘international nationalism.’ As Christian described in the following extract from our conversation:

³⁹ Interview Pam with Jack B, 14 February 2019

⁴⁰ Interview Pam with Gillian Martin MSP (SNP), 22 March 2019

*“I don’t want to be defined by a piece of paper [a passport], let’s define ourselves. (...) We have to start to understand that a strong identity of the nation should have nothing to do with where an individual comes from. It’s not where you come from, but where you want to get to. There are people from different ethnicities all over our movement. My accent, for instance, is very strong. But that’s okay.”*⁴¹

Christian formerly was an MSP for the SNP and now served as a councillor in Aberdeen.⁴² He moved from France to Scotland years ago for work, not intending to stay. However, he fell in love, as he said, first with his wife, then with Scotland. Sitting across him in a cafe, it was sometimes difficult to understand what he was saying due to his strong French accent and the background noise. He told me how being Scottish is not exclusively reserved for people who are born in Scotland or have Scottish heritage. The Scottish nationalist movement has traditionally been very welcoming of immigration, with the ideology that Scotland needs it to be able to care for its ageing population. “In order for us to thrive and survive, we need a population that’s growing,”⁴³ I was told during one conversation with a parliamentarian. “We need migration in Scotland,” another said during a talk I attended, “those are the people that are giving the care to our relatives,” with the audience at the talk reacting with a standing ovation.⁴⁴

Informants often did not identify as British; Britishness was seen as an involuntary identity, implemented from the top down. It was something that was more seen as institutional or geographical than it was actually *felt* by people. Britishness was also not something that truly encompassed Scotland, activists thought, as it was based on the *English* status quo and did not represent how Scots felt. Additionally, they linked Britishness to the past colonial empire, which was something that people did not want to associate themselves with. They also felt like, whilst Scotland played its part as one of the oppressors within the British colonial system, they were victims of that system too. They regularly pointed back to the Highland Clearances and the history of Scottish culture being repressed by the British/English in these kinds of arguments.

⁴¹ Interview Pam with Christian, 27 March 2019

⁴² Christian has now been elected as MEP (*Member of the European Parliament*) for the SNP

⁴³ Interview Pam with Kevin Stewart MSP (SNP), 11 February 2019

⁴⁴ Talk by Stewart Hosie MP (SNP), 10 March 2019

*I'm in a cosy pub in Dundee with Jack, the convener of the northeast branch of Young Scots for Independence, the SNP's youth wing. We're drinking tea and chocolate milk, and we're talking about national identity and Scottish independence. "My national identity doesn't come into why I approve of independence," he says. I struggle to hear what he's saying over the background noise. "I'm Scottish and I'm European," he continues. "But you wouldn't see me waving a flag. I want independence because I think our decisions, our voice needs to be respected, not because I think we're better than England. We're not."*⁴⁵

As Jack says here, his national identity is not why he desires independence. When looking at Scottish identity markers, I found that these were of minor importance to independence activists. Being Scottish, to them, did not rely on a checklist of identities, but it was seen as a widely shared collective feeling that also became adopted by New Scots. Scottishness was generally viewed as fluid, existing in different degrees. That way, it also became possible for New Scots to become accepted as Scottish.

The only identity marker that people could come up with was language; having a Scottish accent or speaking Scots or Gaelic was something that made it possible to identify other Scottish people when abroad. In the daily life of our informants, it was however not seen as something of much significance, which can be connected to what Kiely et al noted; Scottish national identity is mostly implicit and seen as of little immediate relevance. There is an area of tension in this, because the Scottish (SNP) government did make a point of funding Gaelic schools. It could be said that they were trying to re-introduce a sense of pride in the Scottish national identity. There is, according to informants, an automatic assumption that everything that is Scottish is inferior. "I'd just like folk in Scotland to stop thinking they're shit," an informant said. They saw this mechanism of the loss of pride as a specific way of controlling culture.⁴⁶ Measures such as funding Gaelic schools can be seen as attempts to restore that pride in Scottish national identity. Through these measures, however, Scottish national identity also became politicised.

It was often stressed that Scottish independence did not have much to do with an anti-English sentiment. Historically, there has been tension, oppression and difficulty surrounding the relationship between England and Scotland. According to informants, however, independence

⁴⁵ Interview Pam with Jack O, 20 February 2019

⁴⁶ Guy and Fiona during our focus group, 1 April 2019

was about self-determination, rather than Scottish exceptionalism or anti-English sentiments. This connects to the concept of civic or progressive nationalism.

Civic nationalism

“We’re not nationalists in a sense, we are civic nationalists who just want to be able to make our own decisions,”⁴⁷ a parliamentarian said. Scottish nationalism was also called ‘progressive nationalism.’ Many independence supporters struggled with the word ‘nationalist’ or did not identify as such, because of the negative connotations of the word. Whereas many agreed that objectively seen, the term did apply to them, they did not want to be associated with the, often automatic, link with ethnic nationalism, and it was very important to them that their nationalism would not be framed as such. While they wanted to distance themselves from the British system, informants highlighted that the English were not an ‘other.’⁴⁸ It was not about ethnicity that the two countries did not work together, but rather about economic, social and political systems that were incompatible with each other, as was touched upon earlier. Some independence activists would therefore rather classify themselves as ‘internationalists’ instead, highlighting the interconnectedness of Scotland with the rest of Europe and the world. “*I do think Scottish nationalism is different from a lot of nationalism in the sense that generally speaking, (...) it has been quite welcoming,*” an informant said.⁴⁹ The open, inclusive view of Scottish national identity seamlessly flowed into Scottish nationalism, which coincides with theories on civic nationalism; striving for a nation “composed of all those (...) who subscribe to the nation’s political creed” (Ignatieff 1993, 3).

Independence supporters’ reasons for pursuing an independent Scotland were, thus, mostly based on civic considerations about policy and economy. There was a sense of Scotland’s wealth and natural resources being used by the Westminster government. They also thought there was a huge disconnect between the policies that were invented and implemented by the UK government and the day-to-day realities in Scotland. These policies were seen as London-centric: they were supposedly being made with the south of England in mind. This policy problem did not just apply to Scotland; informants noted that there were big similarities with the north of England

⁴⁷ Interview Pam with Gillian Martin MSP (SNP), 22 March 2019

⁴⁸ Interview Pam with Jack B, 14 February 2019

⁴⁹ Interview Pam with Guy, 12 February 2019

in the ways they were neglected by the London government.⁵⁰ The essence, for independence supporters, was that these policies tended not to work for the Scottish reality. For Scotland, the independence activists saw independence as the only viable option. In what remains of this chapter, we will look at the specific reasons to support an independent Scotland, building on the basis of civic nationalism.

Democratic deficit

“[Brexit] highlighted the democratic deficit. So, it’s highlighted the issue of Scotland voted to remain, and England didn’t. And you know, before, you could probably have made an argument and there wouldn’t have been much empirical evidence to say Scotland and England weren’t fairly similar. But now actually, the result in the EU referendum made very clear that the two populations do have very different views on some things.”⁵¹

In Scotland, 62 percent of voters voted to remain in the EU. However, in the UK as a whole, roughly 52 percent of the population voted to leave⁵², forcing Scotland to do the same. For activists, these results pointed to a profound difference between the political identities of Scotland and England. Scotland was more progressive, informants said, with different policy needs to the rest of the UK. Because of England’s much larger population, though, the way Scotland voted often was not reflected in the decisions made by the Conservative Westminster government. Brexit was a prime example of how Scotland and the rest of the UK voted differently and thus were politically incompatible.

The feeling that England and Scotland are not equal partners was related to this. Various informants have said that both countries, being in a ‘union of equals,’ should be on a level playing field with each other, but that they were not in the UK political system. The way the Westminster system works means that each voting constituency chooses a representative in Parliament. Because Scotland made up only 10 percent of the population of the UK, it did not have as many MPs as England. One informant said he believed that “in that current situation, it is perfectly right for England to have a much larger say within the UK as a state than the other three countries put together. However, while I believe that’s fair within the construct of that state, if Scotland was out with that state it would be an equal partner. And that’s what I believe should be

⁵⁰ Focus group, 1 April 2019

⁵¹ Interview Pam with Kirsty Blackman MP (SNP), 2 March 2019

⁵² BBC, *EU referendum results*, <https://www.bbc.com/news>

the case.”⁵³ Under the current makeup of the British state, it was impossible for Scotland to get what its representatives voted for because of the constituency voting system. Thus, this formed the primary reason why people want Scotland to be independent.

For independence supporters, Brexit confirmed that Scotland’s needs were not properly being considered by the government of the UK, and that this would never happen because of the democratic deficit. Every constituency in Scotland voted to remain in the EU,⁵⁴ but to no effect. Independence supporters very deeply felt that they were not given a voice in the Brexit debate, which made them feel angry and frustrated. “If you don’t live in London, it doesn’t matter,” Rune was told by an informant. “The Brexit thing was the first opportunity for the English to express how discontent they were with the status quo. Brexit, for me, is seeing what is wrong with the system.”⁵⁵ The trust in the UK political system crumbled away since the EU referendum, with people feeling the way the UK government was handling it was “a complete laughing stock.”⁵⁶ This alienated independence supporters even more from the idea of a United Kingdom, seeing its politics as broken and its symbols as superseded.

Tensions within the Scottish nationalist movement

We are at George Square, a spacious square close to the centre of Glasgow. On the walk from the train station to the square, we pass people carrying the Scottish flag, blue with a white cross. We walk the block and decide that now is the moment to put our independence buttons that we got from our informants on our coats, to blend in with the crowd at the demonstration. I also attach a saltire flag with EU stars to my yellow backpack. We walk back to the square, where a small crowd has gathered in front of a black podium. People wave their saltire flags in the clear blue sky. The organiser of the rally climbs onto the stage and holds a speech. He speaks very loudly in the microphone, shouting his message to the crowd beneath him. Then, we hear a roar. After a moment, dozens and dozens of motorbikes drive into the square. They make a few rounds around the square, filling it with noise. Then, they join the crowd, which has grown significantly. We climb on top of a statue in the back of the square to be able to oversee the crowd and we look down at a sea of blue beneath us. The afternoon is filled with speeches and Scottish music, to the

⁵³ Interview Pam with Jack B, 14 February 2019

⁵⁴ BBC, *EU referendum results*, https://www.bbc.com/news/politics/eu_referendum/results

⁵⁵ Interview Rune with Mike, 6 April 2019

⁵⁶ Interview Pam with Maggie Chapman, co-convener Scottish Green Party, 1 March 2019

*acclaim of the crowd, who react enthusiastically. They scream that Nicola Sturgeon has to demand a second independence referendum. “You’ve got a mandate. USE the mandate!” the organiser shouts from the podium. A standing ovation follows.*⁵⁷

The vignette above is from an independence rally we attended in Glasgow, organised by Hope over Fear, a non-party political organisation. The rally had the title “Use the mandate, launch the lifeboat,” referring to the mandate that the SNP had to hold another independence referendum after winning several elections on a manifesto that included a second referendum. Independence was seen as ‘the lifeboat’ out of Brexit, providing a chance to stay in the EU. Whereas we did not look at Hope Over Fear specifically during our research, it can be used as a case study to show the differing kinds of nationalism that people employ.

There were tensions within the Scottish independence movement, both between and within the institutional and non-party political sides. On the institutional side of the movement, people were often unhappy with what they called a ‘flag waving’ kind of nationalism, such as what we saw at the rally. Furthermore, there were disagreements between people who wanted the independence referendum to be held as soon as possible (“Use the mandate!”) and the ‘gradualists.’ Between the different independence-supporting political parties there were also various debates and disagreements. The same phenomenon applies to the non-party political groups, where some groups are in so much disagreement with others that this was referred to as ‘infighting.’ This is not just due to differing group identity, but also to differing strategies. We will come back to this later in our discussion of activist strategies in a time of liminality. However, activists hope to find common ground in their shared future vision: an independent Scotland.

⁵⁷ From the independence rally organised by Hope over Fear in Glasgow, 24 March 2019

Chapter 5. Anticipation of the future (Rune Sassen)

Now that we have covered that nationalism is both a coping mechanism and a way to avoid the temporal disorientation, we will cover how activists imagine the future. To do this, we first need to explain temporal disorientation again, and ask why activists are able to still look forward, into the future. To do this, I would like to start with a metaphor. Knight's (2017) temporal disorientation can be imagined as if it were a mist. People are driving on a misty road to the future, and the mist is so thick that some people need to stop their car: they are unable to see the road ahead. Like we have seen in the previous chapter, nationalism is used as a tool by the activists, which functions like a flashlight to be able to navigate their way forward. Nationalism, and actively imagining a future independent Scotland in the process, provides activists with the right mechanisms to see the future that lies ahead: independence for Scotland after Brexit.

In chapter one, we have already covered what we mean by temporal disorientation and how it becomes difficult to imagine the future in a Time of Brexit. Kirsty Blackman, member of the UK Parliament for the SNP, explained how a time of Brexit changed the independence movement:

*"I think there is more uncertainty. People don't know what the future's going to look like. And I think it's quite difficult for anyone who's campaigning for anything actually, to say, my future will be better. Because you can't tell what the current future's going to be. (...) We're not trying to challenge the status quo. We're trying to challenge the most likely potential vision of the future."*⁵⁸

The independence movement in Scotland is therefore in an odd position. The future is very uncertain, making it harder to challenge a particular potential status quo that might arise after Brexit (or after a deal is agreed upon). This provides the activists with a different framework to what they are used to. The activists are only capable of fighting a *potential* future, or a potential status quo, which means they need to speculate on the outcome of Brexit. Because there was uncertainty on a possible future that would potentially be bad, Kirsty continued to explain how this could also be an advantage for the movement:

⁵⁸ Interview Pam with Kirsty Blackman MP (SNP), 2 March 2019

“In independence campaigning we’ve always been challenging the status quo before. And actually, potentially it makes it easier for us to campaign for independence because we are challenging something that most experts agree isn’t going to be as good for the status quo. So, you know, that’s kind of a bit of a different position for us to find ourselves in than we’ve been in before.”⁵⁹

Because the status quo is already at stake with Brexit, the independence movement suddenly find themselves challenging a ‘soon-to-be’ potential post-Brexit status quo that most Scots fear and do not agree with, looking at the EU referendum result. However, the word *potential* is key here, because no future was certain at the time, and it still is not. ‘Challenging the most potential future’ means also being able to imagine how it can be better, which entails imagining the capabilities of an independent Scotland. The way in which potential futures of Scotland and the future campaign are imagined will be discussed in this chapter.

Bryant and Knight (2019) made clear that we all anticipate our own futures on a daily basis. We expect certain patterns; we hope for better futures and we speculate. Often, people are not really thinking about anticipation, as it is something that comes naturally in Times of Peace (Ibid.). However, it is tough to anticipate a future country when you do not know what you are working with. Or in our case, whether Brexit will be a messy no-deal, a hard Brexit, or a soft one, it will be the foundation of an independent Scotland. Like we covered, the Brexit crisis changed daily, which meant the activists needed to speculate on the potential futures Kirsty Blackman talks about.

Imagining an independent, post-Brexit Scotland, however, takes the process of speculation one step further: it potentializes everything Scotland can be, and do once it is an independent country. Scotland will probably only become independent once Brexit has taken place, which means that the future Scotland is chronologically further away from the present than Brexit.⁶⁰ This meant that, in an everyday situation, the imagination of potential futures was hard to separate from imagining a potential Brexit outcome and imagining a potential independent Scotland. As someone explained: “The outcome of Brexit will be the canvas you have to work

⁵⁹ Interview Pam with Kirsty Blackman MP (SNP), 2 March 2019

⁶⁰ Interview Rune with Alex, 8 February 2019

with in Scotland.”⁶¹ For the sake of this chapter, we will however separate this, focusing more on the imagination of an independent Scotland and the way to get there through a campaign.

We will discuss how potentiality and speculation of the future, as teleological and philosophical activities, exist within the activist communities on two levels. Firstly, activists imagine the future nation of Scotland. What would an independent Scotland look like? Secondly, we also look at how independence activists speculate the future campaign to achieve an independent Scotland.

Imagining a future nation

“Imagine yourself as new recruits of the borders and customs union on the first day of an independent Scotland,” says a somewhat large, white-haired man in front of a small crowd of 9 people that sit scattered across a small, dark room. At the front of the red-carpeted room, the man stands next to a projector. He introduces himself as Bill and explains he has a broad international customs CV. He continues by showing a map of Scotland’s land and sea borders. Even though there are still a few empty seats, the speaker tries his best to engage the audience. For instance, at one point, he asks us to partake in an online quiz on our mobile phones, and regularly asks if Pam and I understand what has been said as English is not our native language.

*Bill, talking loudly, then goes on to explain why tax evasion is the biggest problem of the UK at the moment. This can be altered in an independent Scotland. All people present are listening, captured by the figures that appear on the slides. It seems like everyone in the room believes, for this moment, that they need to change the customs regulations to secure revenues for an independent Scotland. And in time, they will do just that.*⁶²

At first, it may seem illogical to be so preoccupied with a future Scotland, before a referendum or campaign is even announced. After all, is it not more important to first focus on the way to get there [a campaign], before filling in the blanks of what an independent Scotland should look like? Why is it that activists are so focused on a future that might never become a reality?

Yes Aberdeen 2 particularly did a lot of work on anticipation of specific elements of state organisation in an independent Scotland during our research period. For instance, one event was

⁶¹ Interview Rune with Nick, 6 February 2019.

⁶² Bill Austen, Common Weal event: Borders and Customs in an Independent Scotland, 28 February 2019.

about a fairer land tax system that could be implemented in an independent Scotland. This may sound like a specific topic, but still there were about 60 people present, which is a relatively large number of attendees for such an event. The people in the room were indeed captivated by the topic of tax. The Q&A-section almost lasted twice as long as the talk itself, with a lot of people involved, contributing ideas. For instance, when the speaker proposed to calculate the amount of tax members of the audience would have to pay in this land value taxation system, almost everyone wrote down their details in order to inquire the amount later on.⁶³ Another event was all about currency and on how the flow of money works. This talk went on to explain why it is crucial for Scotland to get its own currency and let go of the pound. The topic was discussed and debated on by the 17 people at the event. In-depth questions were asked to really understand currency and economics.⁶⁴

At first, I was not quite sure why these topics were discussed so fiercely, but as I went to more events and asked the organisers about their reasons behind certain events, I came to understand. As Avery explained: “These events are good for community building. We build the way for thinking outside the box, the way we are told we should think. We are normally so stuck in our own way of thinking and at these events we are able to let go.” Independence themed events provide space for a different way of imagining the future, which in day to day life can often look bleak and dreary, especially in a Time of Brexit (Bryant and Knight 2019, 194). Through these events a speculated version of a future is presented, giving the activists hope. Additionally, it can also open up a new temporality for a ‘doubter,’ someone who has not yet made up their mind on the independence question. “We will not convince hard no’s [no-voters, at events]. They simply won’t show up. But we can try to show doubters that there is another way.”⁶⁵ Trying to convince doubters to vote yes, by showing how governance can be done differently, gives even more motivation to the activists.

These events, especially the events on the customs union and the land value tax, create unity in anticipation. The speaker provides the audience with an idyllic future. This future functions as a myth on what could happen in an independent Scotland. The attendees share the same myths, they share the same stories or try to find consensus on what could or should be in

⁶³ Yes Aberdeen 2 event: Land and its value to an Independent Scotland, 8 March 2019

⁶⁴ Yes Aberdeen 2 event: Economics talk for YA2 on Modern Monetary Theory (MMT) with Q&A, 27 February 2019

⁶⁵ Interview Rune with Avery, 12 March 2019.

the Q&A-section of the talks.⁶⁶ The Q&A is even said to be the most important part of the talk, because here, the audience engages and really make up their own mind.⁶⁷

In a future Scotland, for instance, there is room for a new and improved tax system, because this new independent nation is a blank canvas on which anything can happen. By speculating out loud on the possibility (or potential) an independent Scotland could bring, a new temporality is made possible. It opens up the anticipation or speculation for the multiplicity on possibilities that could happen in an independent Scotland. It temporarily transports the people present to a specific future of an independent Scotland. Through speculation and anticipation, a future gets temporarily temporalized into the present (Bryant and Knight 2019). In this sense, through events focusing on an independent Scotland, the future is brought into the present. This motivates activists and gives them a clearer picture on what to fight for in a campaign. It provides a way to imagine a better future, escaping from the reality of the present.

The events that focus on the future also have a more practical reason. A member of Yes Aberdeen 2 describes it like this: “We organise events to raise money, with what we sell at the raffle and with merchandise, we can use the money for more events, leaflets and perhaps even anew gazebo.”⁶⁸ She explained that, of course, only ‘yes-voters’ would buy merchandise or raffle tickets. Therefore, it is logical that Yes Aberdeen 2 mostly tried to keep activists happy and motivated, especially at this stage of the ‘campaign.’ Through events that help give the independence activists motivated, this can be done the best way.⁶⁹

All in all, at events like the land tax event, specific futures in the shape of myths are presented to the public. When potential futures are imagined, it is clear what to strive for; the futuristic myth functions as a motivation and an ultimate goal (Wingfield 2005). Still, even though futuristic myths are not always shared (e.g. issues of currency), there is often a shared ideological solution in membership of the EU and the place of immigrants in an independent Scotland.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Interview Rune with Avery, 12 March 2019

⁶⁷ Interview Rune with Hester, 12 March 2019.

⁶⁸ Interview Rune with Cara, 27 February 2019.

⁶⁹ Interview Rune with Joey, 30 March 2019.

⁷⁰ Interview Pam and Rune with Bethany, 5 March 2019

Timing

A topic on which there is a lot of disagreement is timing. It is perhaps one of the most tangible aspects to think about: when will Scotland become independent? It can be difficult to speculate about the timing of a referendum, as the outcome of Brexit will probably influence the course of the future historical event of the creation of an independent Scotland.⁷¹ The timing of both the referendum and the precedent campaign has to be perfect, as activists do not want to lose the momentum.⁷²

Of course, as independence activists, most people would prefer independence to happen as quickly as possible. Realistically, however, there are differing ideas on what year the referendum can be held and how long the campaign should be. 2021, 2023, 2025, or even the day after Brexit is finalised are stated as possible ‘right times.’⁷³ Personal wishes on when Scotland can be independent also play a part, like Fiona illustrates:

“I have a giant bag full of different badges for different things. I think that... I hope that one day they will all be obsolete and in a museum somewhere. (...) Hopefully, one day, we would be like: oh, remember when we had to fight for that? (...) I am actually looking forward to, someday, taking my kids to a museum (...) and be like: ‘Look, this is the thing I’ve been fighting for.’ That’s why I’m like: you have to call it [the independence referendum] by 2021, because I will be 40 then and before that I am NOT having kids. There is the weight of being responsible as well. Is it responsible to bring a kid into a country which is about to tear itself to shreds?”⁷⁴

Fiona believes that, with the state the UK is in, it is irresponsible to have children, because of the deteriorating NHS and education system. Her willingness to wait with having kids in order to grant them a better future intertwines her political and personal anticipation of the future. It shows the impact the imagination of the future has on the present actions people choose or do not choose to undertake (Bryant and Knight 2019).

⁷¹ Interview Rune with Sarah, 12 February 2019.

⁷² Annie during our focus group, 1 April 2019.

⁷³ General discussion during our focus group, 1 April 2019.

⁷⁴ Interview Pam and Rune with Fiona, 14 March 2019

Imagining a campaign: “We need to be an inclusive movement.”⁷⁵

Before there can be independence, there first needs to be a successful campaign. Ideas on how a majority in support of independence can be achieved are discussed and thought about. Whilst thinking about a new campaign, some activists can remember the 2014 campaign like it was yesterday: they talk about it with such passion that you would wish you had been there with them at the time. An example that comes to mind is my interview with Mike. Being a born storyteller, he explained his feelings of happiness, joy and pure hope that led to the eventual sorrow. As he told his story, he smiled, he laughed, he cried and, in the end, he thanked me for letting him re-experience that moment in his life.⁷⁶ 2014 might have been a political lifetime away, but the campaign still has not lost its effect. When thinking about a future independence campaign, the 2014 campaign is inevitably used as a frame of reference.

On the 24th of February, AIM organised their conference ‘Forward: Building a North East Plan For Independence.’ At this conference, there were various panels, workshops and talks on how to create an effective strategy. The whole day, attendees brainstormed on what the next campaign should be like. It should be a local campaign, as *central beltism*, too focused on the area of Glasgow and Edinburgh where most people live, was considered a problem in 2014.⁷⁷ A frequently used term was ‘inclusivity,’ which meant treating all people with respect. The movement should be inclusive, and it should be able to reach and welcome a diversity of people, of all ethnicities, ages and political backgrounds, as discussed by a hall of older, white people.⁷⁸

To Peter, a co-convener of AIM, the next campaign is all about change. His pitch at one of the workshops was on ‘the best way to move the movement forward’:

“But if our movement can’t embrace change, then how can we expect others to change their mind and change minds we must. So, the thing I propose we change is YES, this word has had its day, It says we have not moved on, are not open to new people, it says division, it says 2014, it says we

⁷⁵ AIM Conference ‘Forward: Building a North East Plan For Independence,’ 24 February 2019

⁷⁶ Interview Rune with Mike, 6 April 2019.

⁷⁷ Dave at the end talk of the AIM Conference ‘Forward: Building a North East Plan For Independence,’ 24 February 2019

⁷⁸ AIM Conference ‘Forward: Building a North East Plan For Independence,’ 24 February 2019

*lost. [...] get back to treating everyone as just people and voters. It's time to leave the past behind, or if you can't you will be left behind yourself.”*⁷⁹

Peter would like to see the words ‘yes’ and ‘no’ gone out of the independence activists’ rhetoric, because it refers to the lost campaign. Peter claims that we need to forget 2014 in order to move on; a somewhat controversial opinion to people who have put their hearts and souls into the word ‘yes’ five years ago.⁸⁰ For instance, at a meeting of Yes Aberdeen 2 on their rebranding to Aye Aberdeen, a member did not understand why the organisation wanted to get rid of the ‘Yes’ in their group name: “We need to change the word yes? What’s wrong with yes?” he spoke emotionally. “The name change was not about the Yes at first. We started this process because we didnae like the number ‘2’ in the name, we thought it was confusing.”⁸¹ Generally, though, the group liked the word Aye better, as Aye is Scottish and means ‘always.’⁸²

All in all, it was clear to most in the Scottish independence movement that there was a slight shift in favour of independence due to the Brexit crisis. Even when there is no campaign, more people are gradually moving towards independence, according to Hester: “Well, it does not go quick, but gradually one or two people are joining. It does not go fast like in 2014 yet, but it’s getting there, and the movement is growing. I can feel something’s changing. (...) We’ll be ready when it’s called.”⁸³

⁷⁹ Pitch ‘Re-setting the movement,’ at ‘Forward: Building a North East Plan For Independence,’ 24 February 2019. Based on an online transcript of the pitch.

⁸⁰ Talk by Robin McAlpine at Aye Ellon, 26 February 2019.

⁸¹ Yes Aberdeen 2 rebranding meeting, 6 March 2019

⁸² Yes Aberdeen 2 AGM, 13 February 2019

⁸³ Interview Rune with Hester, 12 March 2019.

Chapter 6. Liminal activism in a Time of Brexit (Rune Sassen)

“I feel like everything is going backwards. I feel like... I don't feel personal threat, but I feel like we can be doing so much better. I feel like it's literally, we're just squandering so much time. I feel like, things are going the opposite direction to which they should be going. It is a sense of despair, I guess. I thought the fact that literally things move backwards. Yeah, there is not even a lack of progress anymore, there is a reversal. There is a general feeling of going backwards, which is not nice. (...) Definitely a sense of despair though, that is just so annoying, because you see that it shouldn't be happening and yet it is happening, it's out of your control, or it seems to be, and it is just, yeah, always out of my control.”⁸⁴

Craig, here, describes a sense of despair, or temporal disorientation. He describes a feeling of being in a place that does not ‘feel right,’ like he is not supposed to be there at that moment in time. It disrupts with his sense of progress of modernity. It makes it harder to look into the future, because there is no real future in sight. Temporal disorientation is a mist, clouding the possibility to look forward. There is a sense of despair, but there is also a way out:

“C: It is just despair, because it is like it should not be happening, but it has been happening and it is continuing to happen.

R: Is there a solution to this? How do you deal with that sense of despair?

C: That depends. I suppose I campaign. I try to change it. And that's probably the reason why I support independence: I can't just keep saying I don't want these things and not do anything about it. I feel like I need to try and change something. Obviously, I am just one little cog in the machine, but you know, if you try, if you do something, then you can't say you didn't.”⁸⁵

For Craig, it is very important to campaign and to do something, especially in a Time of Brexit (Bryant and Knight 2019, 90). He campaigns in order to overcome his feelings of despair. Campaigning, then, almost becomes a coping mechanism to battle feelings of temporal

⁸⁴ Interview Rune with Craig, 6 February 2019

⁸⁵ Ibid.

disorientation. How is this feeling of ‘wanting to do something’ expressed in a Time of Liminality? This is what we discuss in this chapter.

The active liminal present

Even though there was no certainty at the time, the feeling of ‘having to do something’ for a specific, but imagined future was present and is still, to some extent, acted upon. As Craig mentioned, for instance, he chose to campaign in order to overcome that feeling of temporal vertigo. After Brexit, activists felt that they could and should do something again, like coming together and organising some events again. There was a ‘2’ added to the group name of Yes Aberdeen, as they now actively worked towards indyref2. Even at a time where there was nothing to guide them yet, people felt a need to take up action, to show that there are still people active to fight for independence.

Liminal activism is different from regular activism, because activists find themselves in a state of liminality and uncertainty at the same time as doing their actions, and therefore are unable to plan ahead politically. Still, when it comes to liminal activism, there was foremostly a lack of top-down guidance, which you usually see in nationally organised campaigns. This is, of course, because there was officially nothing to guide yet: there was no official campaign and thus no official ‘futuristic myth’ to hold onto (Wingfield 2005). Locally, the ‘foot soldiers,’ or the people on the streets, still would like to ‘start fighting again.’

This lack of guidance and the struggle on what to do lead to various groups of activists having distinctive liminal strategies. I will explain why and how these strategies are different and how they came into being, through examples we have encountered in the field.

Liminal activist strategies: how to ‘do something’ in a Time of Uncertainty

When explaining the differences in strategies amongst independence movements, I find it useful to make a distinction in organisational structures of networks, as referred to by Appadurai. I will both look foremostly at AIM and the SNP as vertebrate organisations and at Yes Aberdeen 2 as a cellular organisation. All three groups remain busy in a Time of Uncertainty, although the level of activity depends on each group. A common goal of all three groups is visibility: they want ‘the people’ to know that they are still there, trying to achieve an independent Scotland.

Liminal strategies in a vertebrate organisation: AIM

AIM and the SNP can be considered vertebrate structures, though there are definitely some cellular aspects within both groups. AIM consists of a number of executives, each with their own abilities and qualifications.⁸⁶ They call themselves a campaigning organisation and prefer to ‘keep things local’ in their strategies. This means, among other things, focussing on topics that are important in the area, such as energy and business. Peter, one of the co-conveners, explained it in the strategy of AIM at that moment:

“We might be organizing an event, or something like that, but at the moment we don't really got any. (...) Our events make money, so you'll always need events to make money, but we're now at a stage hopefully we don't need to do that. At events we'll not really change minds. We will now start to go and change minds rather than preaching the converted. Hopefully we'll still do training events and move into that sort of things sort of more. We've got a realm of activists who know what they are doing, which is always good, because you can't have enough of that. (...) We're always trying to have one event organized and go from there, so have one organized and another one in the pipeline. (...) We're moving towards the campaign mode. We're kinda waiting as well. We'll see what happens. If we go into campaign mode, everything changes.”⁸⁷

Peter expressed the group’s choice to wait with doing something during this Time of Uncertainty. They did not need events, because they had started up a crowd funder, for which they did a lot of promotion on their Facebook page and through a YouTube video.⁸⁸ Events were thus seen as unnecessary in order to win independence at this stage, as they only reach those who are already convinced. For Peter, training events were more appropriate during this limbo period. Training events were most useful, as they give independence activists the tools to convince and reach others. They are going to focus on campaign skills and generally raising the ‘level of professionalism,’ trying to create more competency amongst AIM’s members.

Only one open meeting of AIM took place when I was in the field. The original plan was to watch a documentary and have a workshop. However, when I arrived, there were only one

⁸⁶ Interview Rune with Graham, 19 March 2019.

⁸⁷ Interview Rune with Peter, 1 March 2019.

⁸⁸ AIM campaign video “We can win in Aberdeen,” posted to YouTube on 21 February 2019 by Unchained Media Scotland, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zreP391K_A4

other attendee and three executives of AIM sitting in a room with about 30 empty seats. It was soon noticed that there were no other people coming that evening, so Peter proposed to just begin with a short brainstorm on which strategies should be best. He and Graham had already discussed a lot of ideas which they wanted to share with the people that would have come tonight. For instance, the executives were stating their dislike of marches and flag-waving, stating that they did not make a difference. To counter these marches, other events were proposed, like beach clean-ups and action community days, in order to make an independent Scotland the place you would like to live in. These events generally have nothing to do with independence but can function as positive publicity for the group. Other proposed ideas on future events included educational talks, for instance on Scottish identity, heritage and language. "I hate to say it, but Yes 2 really has a good event on this," Graham says, referring to a Yes Aberdeen 2 event on Scottish history later that week.

All in all, AIM was not busy organising at the moment of our research. They wanted to do an occasional stall and produce leaflets to hand out, but this was not done at the time. *"Once a campaign starts it's gonna be very different. There is a lot of people with other positions. There is only a few of us who don't have other positions, so we understand that. It's more SNP and stuff and that is more important at the moment. Come a campaign it is sort of different things. At the moment it is mostly [executives of AIM] who don't have any positions in the SNP."*⁸⁹

It is hard to plan ahead when it is unclear a new stage of campaigning might begin. Most of the AIM executives are also very involved in the SNP. This means that in a time where there actually is 'nothing' yet, no campaign or real overhauling campaign structure, it is hard to persuade these qualified executives. Being a professional campaigning organisation without a campaign is simply not viable.

⁸⁹Interview Rune with Peter, 1 March 2019.

The SNP's liminal strategy

The SNP is a political party with a top-down 'traditional' vertebrate organisational structure, although there is a huge 'foot soldier network' that can be seen as organised in a more cellular manner. Being a political party, the SNP's main goal was to convince people to vote for them, which is a goal that continued to be important even in a liminal time. This means that even though the SNP's main goal is independence, even in a Time of Liminality, there was something to 'do': governance and local politics. This is, then, also what makes the SNP different from the two non-party groups that are discussed in this chapter.

The main liminal activist strategy is done on the grassroots level, coordinated from above: canvassing. This means going door-to-door with a standardised survey in order to gain usable data for the party. In a vignette by Pam in chapter three, a small section of a canvassing session was highlighted. Through canvassing, the local SNP showed that they are still around, even at a time when politics could seem daunting.⁹⁰ It was mostly, however, the grassroots 'foot-soldiers' that undertook the action to do something. It was them that went outside and canvassed. This cellular aspect of the party allows it to 'get something done' in a Time of Uncertainty on a local level.

⁹⁰ From field notes of Aberdeen SNP canvassing sessions Pam attended on 9 March, 16 March, 30 March and 4 April 2019

Cellular liminal activism



Picture 2: Brexit hour protest of Yes Aberdeen 2. Source: Erskine Logan Photography

“Pheeeee,” goes the whistle of a woman with short hair, waving her blue flag with a white cross in the air. It is dark, and the grey-stoned square is mostly empty, with the exception of some seagulls and the thirty, flag-waving people clustered together next to a statue. Behind them, a massive enlightened grey building stands firm, yet most faces are turned towards the deserted grey square. The white-crossed blue flags are waving in the icy wind. On the left side of the group, there is a statue of a man on a horse with a pamphlet in his hands. It is Robert the Bruce, who had fought in the ‘war of Scottish independence’ against the English in the 14th century. A white-coloured board saying “TICK TOCK it’s time for independence” leans against the statue and about 10 candles stand in front of it. A silver-haired woman close to the statue cries out “Aye, we can! Aye, we can!” holding her carton board depicting the same message. Another woman with blue badges on her coat blows a long, plastic, orange horn, making a loud vibrating, but rhythmic and almost triumphant sound, whilst her neighbour waves a two-meter-long flagpole with three colourful, blue-white flags on it.

The whistles, blares and shouts the group produces are getting louder, filling the otherwise vacant square with noise. A tall man walks forward, swinging his red flag with three white towers in the air. He yells: “What do we want?!” “Independence!” replies the crowd.

“When do we want it?” goes the man in the front again. “NOW!” The horn’s buzzing sound highlights the necessity of the last statement while seagulls cry and fly in the air, trying to avoid the multitude of flags.

As the guy in the front asks a question on when Brexit will happen (the answer being “NEVER!” as responded loudly), a group of three girls with short skirts, panther print leggings and high heels pass by crying “Yeeaaaah, independence!” whilst almost tripping in the process. The wind is getting colder, but the girls are saluted with passionate cheers as they walk by. The square is icy and empty but is filled with the heartfelt warmth of the activist community simultaneously.⁹¹

It was already dark when about thirty members of Yes Aberdeen 2 gathered in the night of the 29th of March 2019, the original Brexit deadline. Even though it was already clear Brexit was going to be delayed at least two weeks at that time, the anti-Brexit protest was still going to take place. The group wanted to make a statement against Brexit, and therefore it was held late at night, because the original Brexit deadline was at midnight, European time.

At one point, the police also came by, as described by Joey, the co-chair of Yes Aberdeen, in a busy coffee place on a Saturday afternoon the day after the protest: *“They asked how long we were gonna be there. There were no residential properties near [the square of the protest], so they said: ‘Ah don’t worry ‘bout it, as long as you’re only here for half an hour.’ That was the cue to really start shouting, which was good for the live stream. Before that, it was a bit subdued, because we didnae know what was allowed. (...) They were a bit worried that thousands of people were gonna show up. I said to them that was not going to be the case. Maybe next time, though.”⁹²*

He explained that it was not as popular because Brexit had not happened yet. When it would, though, people would be out on the streets and more people would have showed up, he believed. Next time perhaps, when Brexit had taken place, there would be more people protesting. Only when Brexit had truly happened, everyone would know the consequences and more people would join the movement.

⁹¹ Yes Aberdeen 2 Brexit hour protest at Marischal Square in Aberdeen, 29 March 2019.

⁹² Interview Rune with Joey, 30 March 2019

The time ‘in between’ was used to full extent. At their monthly meeting, the group also tried something new: small discussion groups were formed in order to ‘get everyone talking.’ At the meetings, three groups were formed, each covering different topics, like ‘General Strategy,’ ‘Strategy Pensioners,’ ‘Merchandise.’ Every attendee chose which they found most interesting. People brainstormed and discussed their ideas in a more approachable way. Afterwards, the groups explained the others what they had come up with and ideas were further extended, depending on how much time was left.⁹³ The group tried this at the last two meetings I visited and generally, it was seen as a good way to inspire some creative, out-of-the-box ideas on new potential strategies to use now and during a campaign.⁹⁴

In the meantime, however, Yes Aberdeen 2 continued to do leafleting and organised their monthly general meeting. In summer, there is a stall every Saturday in a busy area in the city. At the time of research, there were no Yes Aberdeen 2 stalls, although the preparations for the weekly stand had already begun. The group wanted to motivate a few volunteers to be at the stall almost every week, making them a group of ‘stall experts.’ It was hard to get volunteers at some point, as it was seen as quite a commitment. “I can make it one or two hours a week, but not four. That’s just too much,”⁹⁵ Hester said.

In the end, of course, all independence enthusiasts decided for themselves how much time they wanted to spend doing various activities. At the focus group, Caitlyn evaluated the behaviour of the group in general: *“I guess we’ve been fairly busy, especially last few months, we’ve been busy, and we got bigger, it’s hard to kind of try and focus. We’re trying to find campaign strategies (...). Yes, the same problems as everyone else. Quite hard to focus, but we’ve been busy to prepare, get ourselves ready. A lot of events, educate people. Not much else we can do.”*⁹⁶

Time definitely did not stand still for the cellularly organised Yes Aberdeen 2. They organised events and tried to keep busy, even at this stage of limbo they found themselves in. Of course, they too experienced that it was hard to keep motivating activists to do something. Activist fatigue, here too, played its part.⁹⁷

⁹³ Meetings Yes Aberdeen 2 on 13 March 2019 and 10 April 2019.

⁹⁴ Interview Rune with Caitlyn, 26 March 2019; member check with Yes Aberdeen 2 activists, 7-8 April.

⁹⁵ Interview Rune with Hester, 12 March 2019

⁹⁶ Caitlyn during our focus group, 1 April 2019

⁹⁷ Guy and general discussion during focus group, 1 April 2019.

Tensions

Thus, the various independence groups in the region around Aberdeen are all distinct from each other, both in their organisational structure and in their resulting strategies in time of liminality. Cellular foundations seem to thrive in a liminal phase, whereas the vertebrate structures have it harder, being less flexible in their approach (Appadurai 2006, 20-21).

We have seen that in a time of liminality, there is no 'real' fight yet. Though, sometimes I felt like there already was: both between the two non-party political groups themselves and between the non-party political side and the SNP. As an organisation, AIM would like to distance itself from the cellular Yes Aberdeen 2, said Graham, one of the conveners of the movement, as they differ too much in approach.⁹⁸ The different approach can be deduced from the differing organisational structures, which Appadurai argues, further increase tensions (Appadurai 2006, 20-21). At moments of liminality, *communitas* and a lot of build-up energy can be outed sporadically in a time of normalised liminality (Turner 1967). This also sometimes means public distantiating instead of collaboration and focussing on the betterment of their own liminal group strategy.

Irrespective of its organisational structure, it is clear that the activity of pursuing Scottish independence can be expressed at any time, with or without a campaign and with or without top-down guidance. The amount of passion and excitement that is ignited in the hearts of Scottish independence activists is truly inspiring. It did not die in Times of Uncertainty and temporal disorientation. The uncertainty gave it the spark to continue to fight and make Scotland the country they wanted it to become.

⁹⁸ Interview Rune with Graham, 19 March 2019

Chapter 7. Discussion and conclusion

We have been striving to answer the following research question: *How do grassroots and institutional independence movements in Aberdeen imagine the future of the post-Brexit Scottish nation and how do they actively work towards it?* We have seen that the current limbo situation is of enormous influence on Scottish independence activists' temporality and their activities in a Time of Uncertainty. In this final chapter, we will be discussing how people in the Scottish independence movement are looking at the post-Brexit future in different ways. In all of these different views of the future, we see the effects of Brexit on future imagining. The uncertainty surrounding it has huge influence on the case for Scottish independence, as well as on the activism that is used to get to independence and on the activists' sense of temporality.

Expecting and speculating independence in a Time of Brexit

Bryant and Knight (2019) write that the fiasco around Brexit has given rise to confusion and speculation about collective futures. It has led to a situation of temporal vertigo, in which people are searching for a sense of direction in the elongated crisis situation they are enduring, in a liminal 'in between' period of Brexit (Knight 2017). Knight explains that in a Time of Uncertainty and Brexit, we are no longer able to expect based on previous experiences. Thus, speculation emerges, especially in phases of heightened liminality where the end point is unclear (Bryant and Knight 2019, 89).

In the Scottish independence movements, the condition of temporal disorientation has, to an extent, become normalised. The state of limbo came from the fact that, at the time of our stay in Scotland, the activists found themselves in a temporal moment in between the Brexit vote and certainty about its outcome. Moreover, a new independence campaign had not yet been launched and so there was no clarity on how to overcome the consequences of Brexit. Thus, this made activists and, presumably, a lot of Scottish remain-voters, feel powerless. This feeling of powerlessness is normalised, because of the endurance of the EU negotiations and the many amendments that did not get through Parliament.

Because Scotland's future was so uncertain, it generated constant speculation. We argue that this 'Time of Brexit' created a liminal present, a time that merely had to be endured before the ideal future (in an independent Scotland) could be reached. Waiting for and expecting a

referendum was therefore a prominent thing on the activists' mind. Because a referendum had already been hinted at by Nicola Sturgeon and the SNP, even immediately after the EU referendum, the activists already knew an independence campaign and referendum were up in the air.⁹⁹ "When it becomes clear what will happen with Brexit, she [Sturgeon] will announce a referendum," discussed some activists, whilst arguing on what this truly meant.¹⁰⁰ When was *indyref2* *really* happening? Was this right after a Brexit deal has been made? Or was this right after March 29th, the original Brexit date? Maybe it was a few months or even years after Brexit, when the chaos of leaving the EU would have settled down again? All these things regarding the referendum were unclear and were still up for speculation. In the limbo phase, it did not seem fit to launch a new independence campaign, before there was any certainty on the outcome of Brexit. At the time, all the activists could do was speculate about Brexit whilst potentializing an independent post-Brexit Scotland: waiting for a referendum to be announced, which they could and would win this time.

The future Scottish nation: nationalism as anticipatory tool

In the plans that are made for a future independent Scotland and the hopes that activists had for a different future for the country, we see the intertwinement of three of Bryant and Knight's temporalities: anticipation, hope, and potentiality. The anticipation of their goal of a future independent Scotland pulls activists in the direction of the future (James and Mills 2005). It moves the activists and keeps them active, while also preparing them for that future to occur (Bryant and Knight 2019). In the Scottish independence movements, we can see this in how events and discussions are organised, and policy plans are made to be carried out in an independent Scotland, which provides hope and creates the ability to imagine a future independent nation. This is in line with Anderson's imagined community in the sense that he, too, stresses the importance of communal gatherings and knowledge and intelligentsia when he discusses nationalism and the eventual creation of nations (Anderson [1983]2016). By already imagining the specifics of a possible future nation, the future is pulled into the present (Bryant 2016). Imagining the nation-state already begins now, making the imagination real in its

⁹⁹ New York Times, 25 June 2016. "Scotland Says New Vote on Independence Is 'Highly Likely,'" <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/25/world/europe/brexit-scotland-independence-referendum.html>

¹⁰⁰ Informal conversations during drinks after Yes Aberdeen 2 meeting on 13 March 2019.

consequences, before the future nation-state is legally established (Anderson [1983]2016; Adams et al 2009).

Thus, the future already exists, in the imagination of the activists and in the plans that they are making. Arguably, in a Time of Uncertainty, it was easier to think about far-away futures, rather than the near future, which was still up in the air. The plans that the activists were making in time of liminality and increased uncertainty, can therefore only be on specific ‘far-away issues,’ like currency, business and tax in an independent Scotland. This does not make the imagination less meaningful; these events are foundations of the future nation-state that are put in place, especially at a time of liminal activism. They provide the activist community with hope, which helps them work towards seeing the presented “future’s capacity to become future”: the potentiality of an independent Scotland (Bryant and Knight 2019).

Is there, however, potential in nationalism? Anderson suggests that nationalism cannot bring progress, because it tends to look towards the past (Anderson [1983]2016, 162). Despite this, we argue that Anderson’s view on nationalism is particularly concerned with *ethnic* nationalism, not with the *civic*, progressive nationalism that we identified Scottish nationalism as. We have argued that Scottish nationalism in this political limbo serves as a tool to get out of the temporal imprisonment caused by Brexit and the resulting uncertainties. Familiar frameworks like nationalism can provide certainty in an otherwise uncertain time (Alonso 1994, 388; Appadurai 2006, 2). A new independence referendum, to activists, is the only way out of this Time of Uncertainty, and the only way to put some movement back into the stagnant condition of UK politics. It is seen as “the only opportunity that we’ve got”¹⁰¹ to provide a better future for Scotland. Independence provides a different narrative, through which almost utopic plans are made for in an independent Scotland. In a Time of Brexit/Crisis, this progressive nationalism can provide a futural narrative to hold on to, instead of looking back at the past. Civic nationalism is thus the tool used to anticipate a better future.

Liminal activism as method

If nationalism is used as the anticipatory tool, then liminal activism can be seen as the method. The concept of hope emerges in the gap between the potential future and reality, or “the potential and the actual” (Bryant and Knight 2019, 134). For Bryant and Knight, hope draws the not-yet

¹⁰¹ Interview Pam and Rune with Fiona, 14 March 2019

into the present, giving activists something to work towards (Ibid.). It accesses a sense of having a future, which we see in the positive plans, hopes and dreams that activists have about a fairer, more equal and more sustainable Scotland after independence. Liminal activism serves as a method to keep the momentum going. It prepares the movement for the future campaign and builds the foundations to eventually get to the ideal future that independence activists envision through their anticipatory nationalism. As encountered, liminal activism is different to regular activism, because, in our case, there was no clear idea on when or how independence would be reached this time. There was no real structure or campaign plan and therefore, organisations try to keep the activist momentum going. They tried their best to create visibility and ensure that ‘the people’ knew that they were still around, even or especially in a time of increased uncertainty.

Liminal activism, like we discussed, is the activism that happens ‘in between.’ In our case, liminal activism was carried out in a time prior to Brexit, where it was uncertain what the consequences of leaving the EU would be. This left the activists speculating on what was the right course of action to undertake. It was also before a real independence campaign started, although thinking and potentializing futures of an independent Scotland had already started. Therefore, liminal activism combines both nearby future perspectives (on what will happen with Brexit next week in Parliament) and far-away future perspectives (on what will happen when Scotland finally is independent) in the now.

We also see how *communitas*, the term coined by Turner, can be recognised in the liminal present, creating way for a positive bond amongst activists. As we have seen, however, there is not one but a multitude of independence groups at this time of liminality, and each has own strategies on how to reach the best possible future. *Communitas*, therefore, can lead to a heated atmosphere within the movement itself, where the various liminal activist groups focus their built-up energy on each other. The sense of despair can easily turn *communitas*-energy into something that can work counterproductive in the long run.

Cellular groups thrive in a time of liminality, whereas vertebrate groups are generally not actively getting things done. In the end, both vertebrate and cellular organisational structures are necessary in order to achieve independence. Vertebrate structures are deemed more professional, with a more top-down campaigning approach. The cellular structure is a newer way of organisation and is more flexible, without hierarchies and bureaucracies, making it easier to

motivate ‘normal’ people to do extraordinary things. Each group is different, but also necessary within the independence movement, as “different strategies reach different people.”¹⁰²

A Time of Risk and Possibility

Imagining futures also comes at a cost: when there are multiple perspectives of the future, it is difficult to keep people happy with the outcome. With the imagining of a future, there will probably be disappointments, as imagined futures almost never come exactly as anticipated. In a Time of Uncertainty, there is a lot that can get better, but it can also get a lot worse (Bryant and Knight 2019).

We would like to stress, however, that a Time of Uncertainty and Liminality is also a Time of Possibility. In a way, the current temporal vacuum that the independence activists were operating within made for a positive time to live in. Everyone had (almost) got over the disappointment and trauma of the lost independence referendum in 2014, and people were living with the hope that they, as opposed to other nations within the UK, *did* have a way out of the ‘Brexit mess.’ There was a sense of excitement about the future of an independent Scotland and a new chapter in the country’s history could be opened. Thus, the fact that so much was unknown about the future in the state of limbo also created endless possibilities for the future. Brexit could be turned into something positive; it could serve as a catalyst for the Scottish independence campaign. This, of course, does not change the fact that Brexit still created an everlasting sense of despair in the activist’s hearts, though it created a dual feeling of risk and possibility. Finally, there was a chance to get a new independence campaign.

Conclusion and recommendations

We have been looking at Scottish independence activism in the context of Brexit uncertainty, with activists operating in liminal times without possibility for concrete expectations of the future of Scotland. In the context of Brexit and the uncertainties surrounding that process, Scottish independence formed a possibility to escape the limbo situation and recover some certainty. Brexit was therefore not only a negative circumstance, but also a condition that was actively used to underline the necessity of independence. Independence functioned as a tool to change the situation of temporal disorientation that Scotland was in. We argued that the tool that was used is

¹⁰² Interview Rune with Avery, 12 March 2019

a civic form of nationalism, which underlined connections to Europe, openness to immigration and an international character.

We have seen how activists imagined a future Scotland, keeping the idea of an independent Scotland alive. Not only did activists imagine a future Scottish nation; they also tried to keep their activism alive in a time of increased uncertainty. By organising events on specific elements of a post-Brexit and independent Scotland future, liminal activist strategies were put into action, with plans on how to ‘act’ during the time of limbo, even though there was no campaign running. Liminal activism proves to be a useful term to understand people and their actions as active rather than passive, even in the uncanny present that generally forces people to remain passively waiting. Even though this was impossible to an extent, looking forward was in our case driven by passionate Scottish civic nationalism.

Since our research period from the end of January 2019 until mid-April 2019, a lot has changed in the context of Brexit and the Scottish independence movement. Brexit has, once again, been postponed, stretching the uncertain future of Scotland out until the end of 2019 and possibly even longer. Furthermore, a new date for an independence referendum has not been announced yet, but the official new independence campaign has started again at the end of April 2019. Thus, the context of our research has changed significantly, which might have changed our participants’ sense of temporality. However, we think that our research on the changing temporality and national uncertainty is still relevant and useful, as it is a situation that has not been researched much in the past and it shows a detailed picture of what living in limbo does to nationalist activism.

We therefore recommend that more research should be done in the field of the anthropology of time, especially on the anthropology of the future. Of course, it is difficult to research time and temporality as anthropologists, because it is an ever-changing subject. However, we think that this is exactly why it is important to have an anthropological perspective on time and future. The future is created today, in the minds of people as well as through their actions. It already exists in the ways activists are working towards it, anticipating it and idealising it. Thus, anthropology can provide a valuable perspective on these questions and it is important to do more research within this field.

Lastly, we state that ‘liminal activism’ as a concept has the potential to give insight into how social movements operate in a time of liminality. This can help us to understand (especially

cellular) movements better in their social, cultural and above all temporal and futural contexts. We recommend that more research is done using this point of view, to look at the ways in which people give meaning to their lives in times of uncertainty.

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