Social movements within organizations: an analysis of Occupy-Parties in Italy and Turkey

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1. Parties-movements interactions in the neoliberal critical juncture

Political parties interact with movements through multiple processes. As Stein Rokkan (1999) influentially stated, political parties are born out of cleavages emerged in society, and in turn parties contribute to consolidate these cleavages. Parties also ally with movements in the hope of gaining votes from their activists and sympathizers. Some studies indicate that parties under challenging conditions are sensitive to movements, as they try to adapt structures and claims to the latter’s emergence (Piccio 2011). In this paper, we look at a peculiar type of interaction between movements and parties: the use by party members of social movements’ form of protest that has developed during recent waves of contention (della Porta 2013). We consider the two internal movements that shook the main center-left parties in Italy and Turkey: the “Occupy PD” within the Partito Democratico (Democratic Party, PD) and the “Occupy CHP” within the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People’s Party, CHP). In both countries, base members of these ostensibly center-left parties expressed their unease with official party positions, and mobilized, taking inspiration from the “Occupy” movement.

In what follows, we first present our theoretical model, interpreting these occupations as movements within organizations reacting to party change and party system transformations during a neoliberal critical juncture. We then retrace the emergence of the Occupy-Party movements looking at their organizational structures and action repertoire. We finally explain the main claims raised by the critical party activists as reactions to a perceived betrayal of fundamental party values, an internal undemocratic turn as well as electoral defeats. Our analysis is mainly based on qualitative data coming from original in-depth interviews we carried out with a sample of Occupy-Parties activists and party representatives in both countries.

1.2 A neoliberal critical juncture

The wave of contention we focus upon developed against austerity measures during the Great Recession of the recent years. The influence of anti-austerity protests on party politics has seemed strong in several cases. In some countries in Latin America and
Southern Europe, protests brought about the fast emergence of new parties, which quickly overcame the threshold of representation and even achieved executive power (Roberts 2014). In the US, the Democratic Party seemed to adapt its rhetoric and organization to the Occupy Wall Street movement (McAdam and Tarrow 2010). In the two cases we present here, protests against severe neoliberal policies were mediated through the action of dissatisfied members who occupied the headquarters of their parties in protest against their leaders.

We consider these occupations as reactions to a neoliberal critical juncture, as defined by Kenneth Roberts (2014). Such junctions are characterized by being abrupt, discontinuous, and path dependent. Neoliberal reforms work indeed as an exogenous shock that ended in most Latin American countries through episodes of electoral contestation. In Latin America, political developments in terms of party system stability and types of left-wing alternatives have been linked to the political alignments during the transition to neoliberalism (in particular, the position of the left-wing parties towards austerity policies) (Roberts 2014). In general, neoliberal critical junctures “revolved around the political exclusion or marginalization of labor movements, the retrenchment of states’ social and economic functions, and the demise or adaptation to market principles of historic labor-based populist and leftist parties. Whereas labor-incorporating critical junctures inaugurated an era of economic nationalism in Latin America, neoliberal critical junctures were marked by political and economic adjustments to the constraints of market globalization. The essence of neoliberal critical junctures was to dismantle the legacies of earlier labor-incorporating critical junctures” (Roberts 2014). Parties that had relied upon the roles they could play within social welfare in order to build ties with their electorates were challenged by neoliberal structural adjustment that “fragmented labor markets and undermined lower-class collective action, thus altering the ways in which parties organized popular constituencies, processed societal demands, and mobilized voters” (ibid.).

Similarly to what happened in Latin America, a new neoliberal critical juncture seems to be challenging parties and party systems in Europe and beyond, marking (a) the crisis and restructuring of mainstream parties; and (b) the emergence of new types of parties. Following this theoretical framework, the party occupations in Italy and Turkey that we analyze here are seen as a reaction to mainstream parties’ transformations in the context of the crisis of neoliberalism.

2. Occupy-Parties as movements within organizations

When the Occupy-Party Movements emerged, both the PD and the CHP were typical examples of big social-democratic parties facing a deep organizational, strategic, and electoral crisis within a neoliberal critical juncture. Their transformation into light organizations, prone to compromise with the center-right forces and neoliberal agenda,
accelerated during the Great Recession, co-occurring with, if not directly resulting in, electoral defeats and/or a constant loss of membership. This crisis was located within a broader process of party system restructuring. In Italy, there was a decrease in electoral support of mainstream parties and the emergence of a third competitor the Five Stars Movement (M5S). In Turkey, there was an electoral potential on the left that had not been filled by any party for several elections. This electoral space was subsequently contested by the pro-Kurdish-cum-leftist People’s Democratic Party (HDP) in the 2014 presidential elections and 2015 general elections. Both Occupy-Party campaigns developed after a longer period of discontent against the choices of the party leadership, and were eventually triggered during and shortly after elections. In the Italian and Turkish cases, activists lamented their parties’ lack of a left-wing commitment and internal democratic deficit.

Although the Occupy-Party campaigns developed within the boundaries of an organization, they differ from the typical modes of expressing an internal conflict, like that of forming a fraction. These campaigns were indeed characterized by the use of movement-like forms of action, as well as an attempt to build a collective identity around opposition to the party leadership. From recent social movements, they also imported a loose organizational structure, with local roots, large use of new media and limited attempts at coordination. While lacking the requisites of continuity that denote social movements proper, they resemble phenomena that have been labeled as “movements within organizations” (Morrill and Chiarello 2013, Davis et al. 2008, Davis et al. 2005, Morrill et al. 2003). After reconstructing the events of these protests, we single out the main characteristics of the activists’ grievances. These characteristics resonate well with the challenges posed to parties by the neoliberal critical junctures.

3. Occupying parties as a reaction to party crises

3.1 The PD in the crisis and the emergence of Occupy PD

In the spring of 2013, members and sympathizers of the Italian PD symbolically took over several local party headquarters. Converging on a platform called Occupy PD, they diffused pictures of themselves holding posters criticizing their party’s recent choices. In particular, the Occupy PD activists were indignant about the party leadership’s management of the parliamentary election of the President of the Republic. They slammed their party’s refusal to vote for leftist highly reputed figures (Stefano Rodotà and Romano Prodi) in order to elect a compromise candidate agreed with Berlusconi’s Popolo della Libertà (People of Freedom, PdL). They were indeed outraged at the final bipartisan re-election of Giorgio Napolitano, who had sponsored Mario Monti’s unpopular government (2011-2013) and afterwards acted in favor of a PD-PdL
agreement. The activists objected to this unholy alliance between center-left and center-right, also denouncing a lack of transparency and internal democracy in their party. In the face of the unexpected electoral defeat of the PD in the general elections of February 2013, they blamed the failure on the party leaders’ “irresponsible and suicidal” choices (interview 1).

Occupy PD was thus an initiative fuelled by deep internal discontent. PD members reacted to the external “shocks” (interview 9), i.e. the bad electoral result and the mismanagement of the presidential election, by starting a “series of occupations in the whole Italy” (interview 6). Their action was directed against their leaders, guilty of “having built a party made only of fractions and power agreements” (interview 4). The conflict between a dissatisfied base and its leadership influenced the composition of the movement that was run by rank-and-file activists, rather than party functionaries: “by a very large majority Occupy PD is done by simple members, very few people have formal roles” (Interview 2). Consequently, the movement appeared as a grassroots campaign that started inside the party and used the web to reach “sympathizers of the PD and leftists” (interview 10), whilst it did not mobilize any party funds or structures, except the local headquarters.

An informal network model was adopted to link members and sympathizers, trade unionists, the youth branch of the party, and some associations (interview 3). The local headquarters of the party all over Italy served as material hubs for the network, thus giving the movement a national dimension: “I count about 50 cities and provinces where there is a small nucleus of young people who participated in this mobilization” (interview 6).

The networked structure was praised for opening spaces of dialogue within and outside the party, avoiding any intervention from the top level and the bureaucracy. Indeed, none of the party’s top bodies supported the movement: “really no one, except the young MPs under 35”. In this context, the networked structure facilitated horizontal processes of interaction:

“There was no will to close the movement: we did not nominate an official spokesperson and an official coordination committee, we kept it as a network […] Occupy echoed in all the party components, but in particular among the militants and those voters of the center-left that culturally are suspicious of parties, but felt they could participate in our movement” (interview 6).

The movement could count on some material (the local headquarters) and communication resources in the form of both old and new media, and face-to-face channels of recruitment. Mass media devoted high levels of attention to this unexpected form of protest: “the occupation of the local headquarters had immediately interested the national media. After the first period, several local and national television channels asked for interviews from many of us” (interview 9). The movement was also mediatized through its wide use of social media: Facebook and Twitter were intensively exploited to
publicly debate and spread grievances, and also to recruit new individuals for non-virtual actions. However, social media did not substitute the importance of personal networks for recruitment processes (Snow et al. 1980; Diani and Lodi 1988), as activists also “exploited some contacts that came from party activities” (interview 9). Media were considered relevant in spreading information, but less in mobilizing, as “a full Facebook event does not mean a lot!” (interview 1). Thus, off-line and online communication and decision making “alternated in the first month of activity. In Turin, we have held at least three real traditional assemblies” (interview 9).

The movement also organized two large national assemblies, and a protest in Rome while the official party assembly was electing a pro tempore secretary. Some local circles also refused to forward the money they collected to the national party, rather preferring to donate it to NGOs.

2.2 The CHP in crisis and the emergence of Occupy CHP

On 30 March 2014, a loose constellation of young members and sympathizers for the CHP declared an internal rebellion against their party. Disillusioned by the failed promises of internal reform after the Gezi protests, the final straw was the failure of the party to promote young and progressive candidates, and the following electoral defeats. As one of the activists in Ankara recalled,

“After the Gezi protests, we had great expectations, also for the CHP. But the CHP chose a mayor candidate for Ankara who had been in the far-right nationalist MHP before, Mansur Yavaş [... the protests] happened everywhere, against local candidates. We were not happy with the candidates of the CHP in general, because they did not accept any leftist candidates. And this impression was reinforced and confirmed with the Presidential election, when İhsanoğlu was the joint candidate for the CHP and MHP” (interview 13).

As some of the CHP leaders picked up on the dissent, the disillusioned CHP sympathizers were invited to “occupy” the CHP’s headquarters in Ankara. The first event, which lasted for two days, was publicized through the twitter hash tag #OccupyCHP. The event was repeated one month later, this time with significant press coverage. Occupy CHP never formalized any core principles through a central leadership or membership-based voting, but centered on demands for increased shares of youth and women in the party’s central positions and as candidates, as well as a more open and flat organizational structure.

The Occupy CHP started off as a social media phenomenon, with a particularly active following on Twitter. Originally initiated in Ankara, the occupations quickly spread to other cities. Facebook groups for the Occupy CHP were created for all 81
provinces in Turkey, with those in Ankara and Istanbul being the most active. The core initiators met frequently in Ankara as well, but avoided any formalization of the group. Neither did the group create any collaborative networks with other movements: “We only thought about [creating collaborative networks], but practically we did not nourish any strong relations” (interview 13).

The Occupy CHP held two house occupations at the CHP’s headquarters. After the second occupation however, the core organizers of the Occupy CHP group feared that their initially genuine protests had been co-opted and exploited by the party leadership. As one activist noted,

> “From the very beginning we were thinking that they would try to exploit and assimilate us to their own agenda, and as we talked with them this impression was reinforced. So we decided it was better to work from outside to influence them. But we were wrong in doing this too, because nothing happened. They did not listen to us anyway” (interview 13).

The Ankara-based core of the group therefore sought to distance themselves from the party, and function more as a pressure group. They made posters advocating progressive policies, visited the mining town Soma after the 2014 accident, and called for a higher social profile from their party.

3. Three causes of protest and proposed solutions

The Occupy PD and Occupy CHP were driven by similar frustrations over the parties’ leaderships. We argue that the underlying causes of the internal mobilization were due to a progressive shift towards the center their parties undertook in the new neoliberal critical juncture in both countries. First, the parties’ choice of embracing neoliberal solutions to the crisis was angering parts of their membership, as it was perceived as a betrayal of fundamental social-democratic values. Second, the lack of opportunities to vent these frustrations internally, due to the non-transparent and hierarchical leadership structure, pushed this segment in the direction of mobilizing outside the traditional channels. Finally, in both cases, electoral results and the parties’ decisions in relation to these, were the final straw for these party segments, and triggered the protests.

3.1 Party detachment from founding values

Party activists perceived a detachment of their organization from its founding values.
Born in 2007 from the merger of the two most important parties of the center-left coalition – the Democratici di Sinistra (Democrats of the Left, DS) and La Margherita/Democrazia è Libertà (The Daisy/Democracy Is Freedom, DL) – the PD is a unique attempt to combine the post-communist and Christian democratic traditions. At its birth, indeed, almost all the leaders of the PD came from the two major parties of the First Republic – Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democratic Party, DC) and the Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party, PCI) – and its members “continue to nourish strong ties with the identities of the past” (Bordandini, Di Virgilio, and Raniolo 2008, 304). Conceived as a light party centered on its leader, the new party had been created to overcome the previous divisions and thus provide the center-left with a modern organization to compete with the strong center-right coalition that had coalesced around Berlusconi and his party Forza Italia (FI). In the intentions of its founders, this modern party could have avoided forming coalitions with culturally distant parties, thus simplifying the political system and introducing a two-party competition also in Italy.

Occupy PD maintained that, since its unusual origin, the party had showed a “pale identity” (interview 2), due to its internal heterogeneity and incapacity to discuss:

“What happened with the election of the President of the Republic was an epiphany: this was not the crisis, but the phenomenon that unveiled it. The crisis of the party lies in its incapacity to discuss [...] hiding dissent behind some agreements and a false unanimity has led to this moment [...] it is difficult to explain that for a party [Fiat manager] Marchionne and his workers have the same legitimacy and the same need to be represented! [...] The point is that the idea that there are different ways of thinking from which to start in order to build mediation was never accepted inside the party. We started from the mediation, without even debating with each other” (interview 4).

This original “lack of a clear identity” (interview 5) was reflected in the absence of determination in promoting party values:

“Many values and contents have not been expressed with the clarity and the determination that are necessary in this historical period [...] I assign this lack of radicalism not only to Bersani’s 2013 electoral campaign, but to all the positions of the PD since its birth. There has always been hesitation, a well-known ‘maybe yes, but maybe no’ that brought the party to a sort of stalemate without ever taking clear positions or firm actions, without being able to mobilize the passion for values that is needed [...] the brakes were applied when the party said ‘we ally with the PdL’ notwithstanding its electoral promises” (interview 7).

The PD-led grand coalition government sworn in on 28 April 2013 was thus seen by activists as the apex of a long run cultural crisis that became more and more visible since the party had given its parliamentary support for the Monti government, which implemented severe austerity policies. Activists perceived their party as lost in addressing
the issues posed by other forces, with the symbolic peak the acceptance of the budgetary balance in the Constitution. In the words of one activist,

“Under the last Berlusconi’s government we ran after ‘their issues’. Then, we ran after Grillo [Five Stars Movement’s leader]’s issues, like the high costs of politics […] leaving aside a long series of social issues […] then] there was the support of the Monti government, during which we did not implement the principle of political and cultural autonomy: we voted for the budgetary balance […] this was the first clear signal of a deep cultural crisis because we accepted the idea that the budgetary balance was elevated to the rank of a constitutional principle […] at that moment we lost all sense of what it means to be progressive” (interview 2).

Following this line of progressive shift towards neoliberal policies, in the 2013 electoral campaign not only the party leadership “underlined continuity with the Monti government […] whilst] Italian people strongly punished its policies” (interview 2), but also presented a catch-all program instead of promoting redistributive policies:

“We [the party] did not clarify our concrete programmatic points to change people lives, we limited ourselves to saying: ‘we represent everybody a bit for an Italy that’s a bit more equal’. This discourse is wrong […] we should have said: ‘I want to worsen the life conditions of those who have many houses and are really rich because that wealth, in this moment, is a privilege, not a simple well-being. Given that it is a privilege, I want to tax them because this is my idea of a fairer Italy’” (interview 1).

The Occupy PD activists called for giving more weight to some traditional values of the left (like defense of labor rights, and social justice), as well as to emerging social problems (such as precarious work). They advanced the claims of weak social sectors, especially young workers, suffering from a lack of representation and social protection:

“We do not believe the story they told us, that young people are suffering because old people are too privileged. This triggered a war among the poor […] we think that we have been left without social protection and the trade unions also abandoned the young precarious workers” (interview 2).

Starting from this social analysis, the movement enlarged from the party base to associations and trade unions, also indicating the priorities for the PD:

“Here today [at the national assembly of Occupy PD] there are representatives of the precariat, of the associations that try to organize those worlds: the VAT people, the small innovative enterprises, the precarious workers, the sustainable economy. There are people that try to give voice to and represent a part of the country that is too often unheard. There must be the will to organize these worlds and a political interlocutor to listen to their claims. We are trying to tell the party that it has to be this political interlocutor” (interview 1).
Similarly, in Turkey, the Occupy CHP activists were angered by the lack of ideological commitment to leftist values, which was rooted in a long run identity crisis. The oldest party in Turkey, the CHP was Mustafa Kemal’s organizational basis for the state building in the Turkish Republic in the 1920s and 1930s. This early republican historical legacy is central to the party’s self-perception as the persistent guarantor of the Kemalist tradition (CHP Seçim Bildirgesi 2011; Ciddi 2009). However, in the Fifties, bad electoral results forced the party to move towards the socio-economic left of center (Güneş-Ayataş 2013, 103–104), provoking the ideological schism that persists in the party today: while its core identity derives from nationalist nostalgia, the official self-assessment is social democratic.

As all other parties, the CHP was shut down after the 1980 military coup. When political parties were allowed to reopen, the membership body had split into two: a part entered the Democratic Left Party (Demokratik Sol Partisi, DSP) found in 1984, while most former members joined the CHP again when it reopened in 1992. After a string of bad elections in the 1990s, the CHP’s bad fortune changed when the economic crisis declared in 2001 lead to the collapse of the DSP-led coalition government in 2002. While all of the parties in the former government were voted out, the CHP re-established itself as the main opposition party. However, as its return had been caused more by the misfortune of others than its own reforms, the CHP’s identity crisis would continue to haunt it: at its heart lies a struggle between the traditional and the modern, the conservative and the progressive, and the nationalistic and the liberal.

Ever since its half-hearted ideological restructuring in the 1950s, the party’s self-labeling as leftist has not been debated, but there have been considerable more disagreement regarding what this leftist should consist of. Was it defined by the classic cleavage of economic intervention, or did it also encapsulate socially liberal issues, such as the struggle for gender equality or the rights of minorities? The latter have been particularly problematic due to Kemalists’ skepticism towards the fronting of the rights of alternative ethnic identities. Since its resurrection in 1992, the conservative nationalist wing of the party occupied the most powerful posts in the party. With the election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as leader in 2010, the party was assumed to be pulling towards the left. Yet few structural changes were made that indicated any large-scale party reform (Kömürcü 2011; Updegraff 2015).

When the Gezi protests erupted in 2013, the left wing of the CHP tried to bind the party to many of the protest’s socially progressive demands, in the hope that the momentum of the protests would push the party leftwards. One informant, a parliamentarian from Ankara and belonging to the progressive left in the party, underlined that the Gezi events had been a wake-up call, but that the progressive shift of the party could take a long time. Vice chairman in the party, Osman Faruk Loğoğlu, noted that the CHP had raised the quota for women within the party and for their representative posts, after seeing the demands that were raised in the protests. But much
of CHP’s ideological shift did not appear in any more fundamental or tangible way. Many of the issues that were lurking behind the calls for human rights and democracy, such as the rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey, were left untouched.

Occupy CHP underlined the long neglected ideological contradictions of the CHP as a fundamental problem, and lamented its lack of clear principles. One organizer noted that the conservative wing of the party resisted their internal protests and any reform of the party:

“The nationalists believe the George Soros conspiracy theories [that Occupy CHP were funded by him]. They think the Occupy CHP is a Trojan horse. For the CHP nationalists, criticism of anything Ataturk stood for is a taboo […] we want them to become stricter and stronger as a leftist party, and stop being a wobbly centrist party. They have tried to put forward rightist candidates for instance, but never succeeded. It is enough of this now” (interview 13).

There was no doubt that the message from the Occupy CHP participants had been received in the higher echelons of the CHP. A party advisor in Ankara noted that he was fully aware of the frustration over the unresolved division of CHP’s ideology, but they would need to have more patience:

“It is true that the CHP in Ankara has not gone much to the left, and I understand that [occupy CHP activists] are considering leaving the party. We do not respond to all their demands, and we did not give them all that they wanted. Anyhow, you know, changes cannot happen that fast in our party. We need time to change the party; it cannot change as fast as movements want. We cannot fulfill everyone’s wishes straight away, like the movement wants” (interview 16).

3.2 Perceived lack of internal democracy

The second factor triggering Occupy-Party movements was the lack of internal democracy. The perception of base members being marginalized is consistent with empirical studies' findings of a reduction of participatory spaces and of membership influence on party lines that accompanies the progressive transformation of mainstream parties into light organizations.

In Italy, activists highlighted three main organizational weaknesses that in their opinion prevented a sane democratic life within PD: the autonomy of elected representatives from collective bodies; the internal division into personal fractions; the leadership’s disregard for the grassroots. The events of April 2013 had first showed that the PD was suffering a lack of coordination in two areas: the “party in public office” and the “party in central office” (Katz and Mair 1995). During the elections of the President of the Republic, the refusal of many democratic MPs to vote for two of the founding
fathers of their party, despite the decision agreed in a collective assembly, first testifies that, in line with recent developments in contemporary parties, elected PD members had great autonomy, making it difficult to implement a unitary party line within the public institutions. Second, it revealed the lack of cohesion within the central organization, showing the great weight the internal factions had assumed and their distance even with regards to major goals.

Occupy PD criticized both these aspects (prominence of the elected representatives and incapacity of the factions to agree), seen as the causes of a top-down decision making that undermined the members’ possibility to influence the party line, and the respect of official decisions. As an activist stated:

“Within a party many different views can exist, but when a party assembly, in which all the internal areas are represented, takes a decision, then this decision has to be respected by all the components and the party representatives within public institutions. It is unthinkable that each fraction has to re-discuss a decision taken by one of the top bodies of the organization, because a party cannot work like that!” (Interview 6).

Disrespect for official organs resulted in an elitist and opaque decision-making, found on hidden compromise between currents. The activists shared a deep distaste for personalized fractions: “they would be acceptable if were based on a different vision [...] but our factions have ridiculous names, that they take from their leaders: Fioronians, Dalemians, Renzians, Bersanians. This is not acceptable!” (interview 7). An interviewee even described the “fireplaces” around which a few leaders met and decided:

“I have never seen internal democracy within the PD! There has never been a consultation of the base and what the National Direction and the National Assembly decided has never been taken into serious account [...] within the PD the decisions have been always taken around a fireplace by five or six “cape bastone” [i.e. the leaders of the factions]” (interview 2).

Finally, party leadership's disregard for the rank-and file was also stigmatized, and located in a long term decrease of membership confirmed by party scholars, who signaled a drop from 791.517 members in 2009 to 469.086 in 2012 (Damiani and Dominici 2013). In activists' account,

“a real exodus of members started a long time ago, when we stopped giving continuity and importance to our territorial encroachment, which is when you think only of appearing in the media and do not give any role to the single member. In Turin, for example, there are only 3.000 members, and I remember that the DS had about 5.000 members in only one neighborhood of the city, less than ten years ago!” (interview 1).
The formation of the great coalition government triggered further losses and a reduction in rank-and-file activism (interviews 1, 2, 6, 7, 9, 10). Leadership's propensity for a “party of voters” (Bordignon 2014, 4) constantly frustrated the attempts of members to contribute to the elaboration of the party line. For instance, in Apulia, the complain was:

“the base of the party has difficulty influencing its choices. We are the first party at the regional level […] but we – the base of the PD – have rarely been able to express our opinion on the policies to be implemented at the regional level. This demonstrates that [...] for a long time, there was a base that pressed in order to obtain more weight in internal decision-making processes” (interview 10).

Occupy PD stressed the need for fundamental changes that would give voice to the grassroots:

“since I became a card-carrying member of the PD, I have wanted the party to really listen to active militants, who care about the PD […] we say reasonable things, like: let's re-start from the grassroots, from those who care about this party, let's start from the “Circoli” and not from the election of the Secretary following a top-down mechanism!” (interview 5).

The call for a more participatory decision-making was linked to the refusal of the light organization model and the suggestion for a structured party, well rooted at the territorial level, and open to interaction with society and other collective actors. A renewal of the leadership was seen by many militants as a precondition for a new model to be adopted.

In Turkey, similar critiques were raised: young members denounced a lack of internal democracy that prevented the generational renewal of CHP leadership, and resulted in a hierarchical and inefficient organization. It took a personal scandal, leaked to the press from the CHP ranks, to remove the CHP leader Deniz Baykal in 2010. The CHP leadership, and Baykal in particular, had long been criticized for stifling the inflow of young blood to the party, thereby causing increased voter apathy among large segments of the population. The election of Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu as party chairman in 2010 therefore raised the hopes among many that the party would go through a process of leadership renewal. Despite the hopes of a youth revolution in the party, younger elements continued to be held away from the most important posts. The average age of CHP parliamentary deputies in the period of 2011-2015 was 50, much higher than the other three parliamentary parties.

The Gezi protests were ostensibly a turning point for the CHP in this regard. More than anything else, the CHP leadership saw them as a strong message of the importance of youth’s demands. Vice chairman Loğoğlu later claimed that “the protests changed the whole paradigm of political engagement in Turkey. We finally understood the critical importance of youth, and that you don’t have to be part of a political party to be
political.” Yet, the youth reform of the party was not evident to observers. A year after the first Occupy CHP initiatives, the party had not made any major changes of leadership personnel. As one young CHP voter and later Occupy CHP activist noted,

“during Baykal’s time as head of the party, the idea of democracy was very closed. Ataturk’s ideas constituted the only way to look at politics, and there was no discussion. Kilicdaroglu is different in this regard. He is more open, but the problem is that he lacks charisma, he is not leadership material, so the youth have grown frustrated with him too” (interview 13).

Similar to the Italian case, activists criticized the CHP for its hierarchical organization, top-down structures, and outdated internal workings. Several activists also stressed the general sense of antagonism against a whole class of politicians as a driving force for both the Gezi protests and the Occupy CHP (interviews 1, 3, 4). One Occupy CHP participant, who was working as an advisor for a parliamentarian from Ankara, compared the lack of professionalism and logistical organization of the CHP with the perceived efficiency of the Islamic party, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party, AKP):

“for the local elections 31st of March [2014], we had 5 or 6 young advisors like me working for the CHP. We invited young people to come and count votes, and tweet from the ballots. But it was so disorganized. Around 3 am, around 3000 young people were protesting against the fact that the CHP did not have observers and delegations at all ballot stations. Here in Ankara, people who had voted for CHP’s candidate saw that no one was overseeing the counting from the CHP. In the AKP on the other hand, these things are very well organized. The party is paying delegates for food and transportation” (interview 11).

She further noted that the AKP had confronted and prevented the accumulation of elderly men in their party, and that since 2011 they had several deputies in their twenties in parliament.

Finally, the negative campaigning and lack of proposals of the CHP leadership annoyed Occupy CHP activists, and has frequently been noted by members of other parties and analysts alike. While the pro-Kurdish-cum-leftist HDP emerged as the new and fresh party on the left following the Gezi protests in the Summer of 2013, with constructive solutions and an optimistic tone, CHP was seen as the negative mirror image of the AKP: whatever the government introduced, the CHP would go against it, with no alternative suggestion (interviews 11, 13, 14, 19). The Occupy CHP activists demanded instead a party that concentrated on its own organization, and made tangible reforms. Some of the organizational innovations brought forward by the movement were raising women’s and youth quotas, making the party more transparent, and force representatives and deputies to be more approachable and listening to their needs and demands. One participant also noted that the youth needed to see a clear indication from the CHP
leadership that they wanted change: “I could join the CHP if they really changed. But then [CHP leader] Kilicdaroglu should come to see me personally and ask me to run as a parliamentary candidate” (interview 11).

3.3. Electoral crisis

Occupy-Party activists reacted to an electoral crisis. In Italy, the PD did not perform as expected by its founders from the outset: in 2008 elections, the newborn party obtained 33.2%, only 1.9% more than the score of the center-left alliance in the previous national election (2006), thus allowing Berlusconi’s return to government after only two years. Since then, its short electoral history has been marked by a continued loss of votes (at least until the recent Renzi leadership). In 2009 European elections, it collected 26.1%, losing about 6% with respect to the result obtained by the center-left coalition in 2004 (31.9%), and again conceding victory to the center-right PdL. In the administrative round of May 2012, the PD suffered a new hemorrhage of votes; the PdL also fell, and a new ‘challenger’, the M5S, imposed itself in the political system: a scenario anticipating the earthquake of 2013 (Revelli 2013; Verney and Bosco 2013). The outcome of 2013 general elections indeed had important systemic consequences, because for the first time in Italian Republican history three parties collected more than 20% of the votes each. There was a sharp decline in support for PD and PdL, while the recently formed M5S received an impressive 25.6% in its first national electoral participation. The PD ended up with just 25.4%, almost eight percentage points (3.5 million votes) short of its 2008 result. The Second Republic had thus been transformed from bipolarism to tripolarism (Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2013).

Faced with the electoral defeat of the PD – which was expected to win the elections and instead lost 3 million voters and failed to form the promised 'government for an alternative' – party members started analyzing the reasons of the failure. They first blamed their leaders’ lack of capacity. As a protester explained: “I noticed that something was already going wrong during the electoral campaign, which was pathetic! […] Secretary] Bersani did not talk about the issues and when he did, he used barely comprehensible language” (interview 8). Second, they linked the electoral defeat to the party’s loss of identity, which affected its communication strategies, and alliances. So, “the electoral campaign was not effective, I also found it difficult to understand! The main problem is the PD itself: until it has a clear identity… how can we ally with others, if we do not know what we think about things?” (interview 5).

These factors were seen as preventing the party to expand its electoral base, within which older and retired people have been traditionally over represented, and younger cohorts seriously underrepresented (Diamanti 2013; Fava and Girometti 2013). In order to broaden the electorate of the party, Occupy PD pushed for “a renewal of the language and the tools. We do not have to accept that the electoral base of the PD can
only be composed of middle age or old public employees, completely abandoning a portion of electorate that, on the contrary, needs a correct interpretation of its generational needs. Today, we do not talk at all to the young strata of the electorate” (interview 9). The activists also stressed the need for a clear program, one that should emerge from genuine internal debate (not from a fight among leaders) and must focus on some main issues (interview 3).

Correspondingly, in Turkey, the CHP has faced electoral failure ever since its refounding in 1992. The 2002 general elections may have looked like a success from the outside, considering that the party reentered parliament and gained 178 out of 550 seats in parliament. Yet it was clear to most, not least the CHP leadership itself, that it had returned as a result of protest voting against the incumbent coalition parties rather than as a result of having regained a strong and permanent electoral base. Eager to anchor such a base, the CHP initiated an electoral alliance with the DSP before the 2007 general elections. The party still lost 56 seats in parliament, and only regained 23 of these seats under the new leadership of Kilicdaroglu in the 2011 general election.

The CHP leadership tried their luck with the more conservative voters when allying themselves with the far-right nationalist MHP for a candidate in the Presidential election in 2014. The result was a clear loss: 38,4% against Erdoğan’s 51,8%. This did not equate to losing its electoral base; the CHP’s problem was rather that its electoral base was too small in the first place, and the party was not in an easy position to carve out a larger base either. As one senior analyst noted,

“CHP is very isolated. It is not challenged by right or left, and cannot take that many more votes. I don’t think they lost more than two or three points to Demirtas [Presidential candidate for the HDP] in the presidential election” (interview 20).

The lack of a strong electoral base has lead the CHP leadership away from showing any consistent ideological course, and towards sudden and opportunist shifts to steal votes from the nationalistic right during election times. Knowing that its electoral support was too weak to challenge Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in the 2014 local and presidential election, CHP tried to unite its forces with the rightist nationalist MHP. In Ankara, it put forward Mansur Yavaş, a candidate known for his nationalist and conservative views. A party officer in Ankara justified the choice of Yavaş, believing that it facilitated an electoral upswing: “We have to get a strong candidate, first of all […] and we stole many votes from the MHP in that election, from the conservatives” (interview 16).

Disgruntled (former) CHP voters continued to lament the CHP’s weak electoral base, and its unwillingness to do something to strengthen it: “They know they can never be first, and are happy in their position. That is, they never accept genuine new ideas to change the status quo” (interview 13). Instead, Occupy CHP called for more electable candidates, with charisma and new ideas.
4. Movement outcomes: can light organizations change?

In both cases, the Occupy-Party movements were able to attract media attention and influence the public debate by denouncing the role their parties had in implementing neoliberal agenda and reducing democratic spaces. However, they seem to have been less successful in promoting party change.

Despite gradually rarefying its activities, Occupy PD continued its mobilization until the primaries for the election of the new secretary of the party, held in December 2013. The movement clashed against the party’s resistance to reform itself. The election of Matteo Renzi as secretary, indeed, represented a defeat of the movement’s claims, in cultural, organizational and strategic terms. With regards to the first aspect, activists had already stressed the distance between their ideas and those of the emerging leader:

“Renzi is good for winning the election, but he embodies precisely that idea of the left that is difficult to define as “left”, because he proposes to reproduce Blair’s New Labor in Italy, twenty years later, when Labor, in the meanwhile, with Milliband, is moving in the opposite direction. It has remunicipalized the railways after their privatization under Blair, whilst in Italy Renzi complains because the left has not been able to embrace neoliberalism!” (interview 2).

As for strategic alliances, the new secretary actively supported the grand coalition government with the center-right, and became himself the Prime Minister in February 2014. As a consequence, while Occupy PD considered the leftist party Left Ecology and Freedom a “natural ally” and thought that “the PD should try to discuss with M5S” (interview 4), under Renzi’s leadership, the party further detached from both these parties.

Finally, the current leadership did not encourage the growth of the membership as it supports a “‘light’, ‘open’ and ‘leader-centered’ party” (Bordignon 2014, 9) rather than the structured party model proposed by Occupy PD. In this hostile context, many movement activists followed the leftist fraction when it finally left the party between May and June 2014 to found a new political force (Possibile; Possible).

During the year after its creation, Occupy CHP’s popularity tapered off, and gradually fewer people showed up for discussion meetings. While more than 350 people had shown up to the first Occupy event in the CHP party offices in April 2014, by March 2015 there were only 10-15 active members left. Before the general elections of 2015, the movement had more or less dissolved, as the more organized Gezi spin-off Haziran movement (short for Birleşik Haziran Hareketi; United June Movement) had absorbed many of the Occupy CHP’s former core members. Among activists in the Haziran movement, the Occupy CHP was seen as a positive initiative, but eventually futile due to
the stale and rigid organizational structure of the CHP. As Haziran leader Önder İşleyen noted,

“most of [former Occupy CHP activists] are disillusioned with CHP’s refusal to turn to the left. As a result, there are many young Turkish citizens who find nothing for them within the existing party system. They are instead searching for an alternative outside the system, and that is what we represent. We are organizing events, creating a cooperative, and social networks. We are trying to make a civil society grow stronger in this country” (interview 14).

The Occupy CHP had indeed left the CHP’s core unshaken. There was little fear of the Occupy CHP forcing any split in the party. As a young CHP loyalist noted,

“it will not divide the CHP. The CHP is a family. Different views might always appear. This also secures that we make the right choices. It makes the party take another step forward towards everyone’s goal. The views of those who want to participate are important” (interview 17).

When the transformation of the party proved to be harder to impose than first expected, the Occupy CHP activists started looking for alternatives. Generally, defectors had two main destinations: the anti-establishment Haziran movement, and the newly established HDP. One main organizer noted: “By now, many former CHP supporters are thinking about voting for the HDP instead, and I must admit I am one of them” (interview 13). Activists also looked unfavorably at CHP’s future strategic options. The leader of the Haziran movement argued that because the internal movement-strategy had not worked, the best option for forcing a change on the CHP would be to mobilize outside the party:

“I do not think the CHP will do anything on its own accord now. But if the Haziran movement becomes stronger, it will put enough pressure on the CHP to turn to the left, as we want from them. I think our events work quite well to achieve this. For instance, when we boycotted schools for the secularist issue, we forced the CHP and HDP to put this issue on the agenda, we forced them to talk about it’” (interview 14).

Conclusion

In recent years, several social movement scholars have lamented the decline in interaction between social movement studies and studies on parties and elections (McAdam and Tarrow 2010; Kriesi 2014; Hutter 2014; Tarrow 2014). Departing from the assumption that social movement research can no longer treat institutionalized politics (elections, parties, lobbies etc.) as “primary” and the non-institutionalized actions of social movements as mere efforts to influence the former’s decisions from the “outside”, we have tried to bridge this gap by addressing a specific aspect of these
relations: social movements inside institutions. We indeed presented Occupy PD and Occupy CHP as movement-type of mobilizations that emerged from a conflict internal to an organization, and then spread to the outside by adopting a networked structure, and an unconventional repertoire of action, largely inspired by the most recent wave of international protest. With particular reference to the Occupy Movement, not only did these activists adopt the same name, similar tactics (occupations) and means of mobilization (intense use of social media), above all they share concerns related to the crisis of political representation in the context of critical neoliberal juncture.

Our comparative analysis so allowed to reflect on the mechanisms that link movements to electoral politics. In a recent contribution, McAdam and Tarrow (2010) singled out six of such mechanisms:

“• Movements introduce new forms of collective action that influence election campaigns.
• Movements join electoral coalitions or, in extreme cases, turn into parties themselves.
• Movements engage in proactive electoral mobilization.
• Movements engage in reactive electoral mobilization.
• Movements polarize political parties internally.
• Shifts in electoral regimes have a long-term impact on mobilization and demobilization”.

We noted that similar mechanisms developed within parties themselves. In our cases, movements spread a new form of collective action that influenced party life as a result of failure in parties’ electoral campaigns. They also polarized political parties internally, contributing to highlight contradictions within social-democratic parties. Within the party, they engaged in proactive and reactive mobilization that affected internal party balances. Having acknowledged their parties’ resistance to change, part of movement activists joined new political subjects.

Our case studies also address some relevant elements in party studies, supporting trends recently highlighted in the literature and providing insights for future research. First, it confirms the separation of the party on the ground from the party in public office, showing that this trend did not strengthen party leaders. This is especially true in parties divided into powerful internal fractions, where elected representatives often respond to their respective factions rather than the party as a whole. Second, it shows the current organizational weakness of other big catchall parties, as they appear jeopardized by strong centrifugal tendencies. Third, it unveils the further transformation of the social-democratic parties into top-down organizations, making center-left parties a part of the current crisis of democracy. From this point of view, the Occupy PD and Occupy CHP appear as attempts to open democratic spaces within and outside the party. In both cases,
we can interpret the challenges as related with the ways in which the neoliberal critical juncture has affected parties that were rooted in different models of relations between the state and the market.

**Interviews**

Interview 1: Occupy PD activist in Turin, and secretary of Young Democrats in Piedmont.

Interview 2: Occupy PD activist in Bari, simple member of PD.

Interview 3: Occupy PD sympathizer and trade unionist.

Interview 4: Occupy PD activist in Florence, and secretary of Young Democrats in Tuscany.

Interview 5: Occupy PD activist in Prato, simple member of PD.

Interview 6: Occupy PD activist in Prato, simple member of PD.

Interview 7: Occupy PD activist in Emilia Romagna, trade unionist and secretary of the local circle of PD.

Interview 8: Occupy PD activist in Emilia Romagna, secretary of the Young Democrats in his city.

Interview 9: Occupy PD activist in Turin, and member of the provincial executive body (‘Direzione’) of PD.

Interview 10: Occupy PD activist in Bari, secretary of Young Democrats in Puglia.

Interview 11: Occupy CHP participant and advisor for a CHP MP.

Interview 12: CHP MP and Occupy CHP sympathizer.

Interview 13: Leading Occupy CHP activist.

Interview 14: Leader, United June Movement (Birleşik Haziran Hareketi).

Interview 15: Former head of CHP in Beyoğlu district, Istanbul, and current congress delegate.

Interview 16: Economic and political advisor, CHP Ankara.

Interview 17: CHP youth wing member.

Interview 18: Vice-chairman, CHP.

Interview 19: Researcher, SETA.

Interview 20: Office Director, German Marshall Fund, Ankara office.
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