

# Social and political transitions at the local level: The case of Dersim, Turkey

- Socialism, transition and 'real utopias'
- The Dersim case
  - Context
  - Practices
  - Limitations
- A transformative 'real utopia'



# Socialism, transition and 'real utopias'

Transition: Legislated stage or latent tendency?

- Marx and transition
  - Paris Commune - Break from stagism
- Western Marxism
  - Althusser and Balibar
    - *décalage*
      - Lags among lines of economic, ideological and political social reproduction

→ The 'utopian' as a mode of non-temporaneity

- Bloch
  - *Noch nicht*
    - Utopia as anticipation
    - Opposing the external unity of the Now



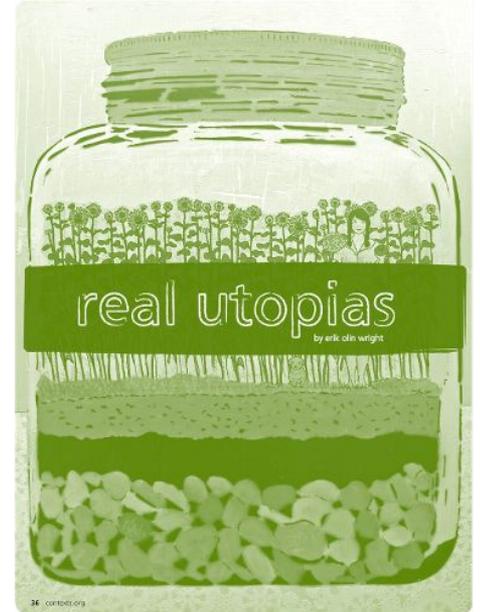
# Socialism, transition and 'real utopias'

## 'Real Utopias' and socialist transition (Wright, 2010)

- Much of human suffering is due to social structures
  - Things could be done differently for different results

→ Holding up an example: 'Real utopia' as transitional praxis

- eg. co-operatives, participatory budgeting, and popular assembly



# The Dersim case

## Context

- Dersim or Tunceli?
  - ‘Turkification’
  - Dersim Rebellion (1937-1938)
  - Forced evacuation, village burning, and food embargo (1994)
- Contemporary Dersim
  - Zaza people - Minority within a minority
  - Predominantly Alevi population
  - Rich and contradictory political heritage
    - Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu - former leader of Republican People’s Party (CHP)
    - Sakine Cansız - co-founder of Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)



Seyid Riza statue

# The Dersim case

## Context

‘The communist mayor’: Fatih Maçoğlu

- 2014: Local governance experience in Ovacık
- 2019: Municipal election victory
  - Communist Party of Turkey (TKP)
  - Federation of Socialist Assemblies



# The Dersim case

## Practices

- Emphasis on transparency and accessibility
  - Initially implemented in Ovacık
- Collective consultation
  - 'Open door' policy
  - Removal of walls around city hall
- Official statements regarding misinformation

*I listen to people. I listen to them and figure out what they want, and then look at the tools that I have.*

TUNCELİ BELEDİYE BAŞKANLIĞI		
08.04.2019 - 31.12.2019 TARİHLERİ ARASI BÜTÇE GELİRİ		
08.04.2019 - 31.12.2019 TARİHLERİ ARASI BÜTÇE GELİRİ (Önceki Dönemden Gelir)		
Sıra	Geliş Türü	Net Tutar TL
1	İnşa Vergisi	246.713,51
2	Araç Vergisi	612.119,59
3	Arazi Vergisi	138.970,93
4	Çevre Kuvveti Vergisi	489,44
5	İnşaat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	855.788,65
6	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	17.236,34
7	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	58.887,94
8	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	1.274,16
9	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	12.092,55
10	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	138.147,61
11	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	274.489,97
12	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	122.110,85
13	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	17.090,46
14	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	314,08
15	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	200.880,00
16	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	228.760,97
17	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	110.227,02
18	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	5.133,00
19	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	2.180,00
20	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	5.994.455,00
21	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	218.522,27
22	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	677.396,38
23	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	372.602,09
24	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	1.023.336,74
25	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	1.057.938,61
26	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	780.132,65
27	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	140.142,43
28	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	448,03
29	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	13.060,84
30	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	17.914.501,44
31	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	65.309,75
32	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	61.223,22
33	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	64.187,62
34	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	5.481,99
35	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	226.205,50
36	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	66.311,00
37	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	36.201,38
38	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	604,8
39	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	176,25
40	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	632.033,70
41	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	366.153,31
42	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	32.209.749,61
43	İmarat ve İmarat Fakültesi Vergisi	989.783,51
<b>KURUMLARDAN ALINAN BAĞIŞ TARDIMLAR ÖNCEKİ DÖNEMDE SPOR TOTO TEŞKİLAT BAŞKANLIĞININ MUNZUR ÜNİVERSİTESİNDEKİ GOLF SAHASI İÇİN YAPTIĞI BAĞIŞDIR.</b>		
<b>TUNCELİ BELEDİYE BAŞKANLIĞI TOPLAM BORCU:</b>		<b>BORÇ TUTARI TL</b>
08.04.2019 TARİHİ İTİBARI İLE BELEDİYEMİZİN TOPLAM BORCU:		68.498.654,28
31.12.2019 TARİHİ İTİBARI İLE BELEDİYEMİZİN TOPLAM BORCU :		65.981.790,47

Municipal balance sheet including revenues, expenditures and surpluses

# The Dersim case

## Practices

- Eschewing formal procedures and privileges
  - Limited of use of mayoral privileges
  - Communal savings account



Komünist Başkan Maçoğlu Koruma Ordusuyla !



‘The communist mayor with his army of bodyguards (!)’

# The Dersim case

## Practices

- Cooperatives
  - Public lands opened to cooperative use
    - Some established by dismissed teachers
  - Tenfold increase in agricultural output
  - Reduced unemployment
  - Profits used to
    - Assist low-income families
    - Provide scholarships (now for all students in Ovacik)
- Social services
  - Free public transportation
  - Subsidised municipal water
  - Public libraries
  - Art and music programs



## Turkey's first 'communist' grocery chain goes global

Led by Turkey's first and only communist mayor, the small town of Ovacik boasts a flourishing farming cooperative whose organic products have taken customers across the country by storm.



Customers visit an Ovacik store in a picture uploaded Oct. 31, 2018. - Twitter/@SenolAkdag.

# The Dersim case

## Limitations

- Challenges of heterogeneity
  - Internal strife within local left
  - 2019 election contested among three left forces
- Generalisability and issues of scale
  - Charismatic leader
  - After local district and municipal government?
- Centralised political system and repression
  - National security paradigm
  - Economic oversight and authority



# A transformative 'real utopia'

- Parallel with Paris Commune

*The great social measure of the Commune was its own working existence. Its special measures could but betoken the tendency of a government of the people by the people. (Marx, 1871)*

- Utopia as process over product
- Recognition of provisionality and necessary failure
- Break from stagism
- Lags among lines of economic, ideological and political social life
  - Alternative economic model
  - Nation-wide interest (including from non-leftists)
  - Blurring hierarchies of political representation
- Non-contemporaneity and anticipation
  - Enacting the 'future'



# A transformative 'real utopia'

→ 'Real utopias' are transformative.\*

*These programs were the result of criticizing the system we're living in.*

- Praxis of empowerment
  - Enacted critique of the system
  - Practical relevance over sectarian debate

\*The need to 'level up' must be borne in mind



Snowdrop in Dersim:  
Solitary, yet rooted and defiant