

Like, comment, share: belonging and exclusion in the protest community

Gustar, comentar, compartir: pertenencia y exclusión en la comunidad de protesta

Kostas Maronitis

(University of Greenwich) [K.Maronitis@gre.ac.uk]

E-ISSN: 2173-1071

IC - Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación
2013, 10, pp. 99 - 119

Abstract

This paper focuses on the Facebook community of the Greek Indignants and contrasts it with John Dewey's vision of democracy as social cooperation, which orients citizens toward pluralistic associations and discourses. Instead of Dewey's democracy the Indignants' community forges a Web enhanced regime – defined here as Communitarianism 2.0. The direct democracy envisioned by this regime is closer to Schmitt's constitutional theory in which homogeneity is a necessary precondition for democracy.

Resumen

Este artículo se centra en el análisis de la comunidad de facebook de los indignados griegos para posteriormente compararla con la visión de democracia propuesta por John Dewey, quien la entendía como una forma de cooperación social donde la ciudadanía se orienta hacia una pluralidad de asociaciones y discursos. Sin embargo, la comunidad de indignados parece haber creado en el espacio web un régimen democrático mejorado, que en este texto se define como "Comunitarismo 2.0" y que no se asemeja tanto al ideal de democracia de Dewey como al concepto sobre la misma que subyace en la teoría constitucional de Schmitt, en la cual la homogeneidad es una condición necesaria para la democracia.

Keywords

Democracy; Communitarianism 2.0; Media Sociology; Dewey; Schmitt; Indignants; Facebook

Palabras clave

Democracia; Comunitarismo 2.0; Sociología de los medios; Dewey; Schmitt; Indignados; Facebook

Summary

1. Introduction
2. The Media Space of Protest and Indignation
3. The Social Experiment of Real Democracy
4. Indignation: "To Show Them What it Means to be Greek"
5. Order and Democracy in the Facebook Community
6. Conclusion

Sumario

1. Introducción
2. Medios de comunicación como espacio para la protesta e indignación
3. El experimento social de la democracia real
4. Indignación: "Mostrar qué significa ser griego"
5. Orden y democracia en la comunidad de facebook
6. Conclusión

1. Introduction

Mass media are constantly reminding their audiences that the markets dictate in unprecedented ways how ostensibly sovereign and democratic states need to reorganise their societies and what kind of services and welfare will be provided to their citizens. As a result, citizens perceive their governments, not as their public servants but as those of other states, namely Germany, or of supranational organisations such as the ECB, IMF and the EU immune to or less affected by electoral pressures than member states. The political and social expectations that Eurozone members, such as Portugal, Italy, Ireland, Spain and Greece, are now facing from their new financial administrators are increasingly impossible to meet.¹ Political parties across the ideological spectrum which oppose the implementation of austerity measures must be defeated in national elections, and both government and opposition must direct their programmes and strategies towards a balanced economy otherwise the cost of borrowing will rise dramatically.

The EU as the first political experiment towards the constitution of a transnational democracy is being transformed into an arrangement for implementing “a kind of post-democratic bureaucratic rule” (Habermas, 2012, p. 52). Democracy as a political value and as an institution is as much in danger as the economy, if not more. With the introduction of austerity measures and the unfolding of a multifaceted crisis – social, political and economic – the capacity of nation states to mediate between the rights of citizens and the requirements of what has been named the *Troika* in exchange for access to the markets, membership to the Eurozone and ultimately their European identity has been severely affected. Parliamentary procedures and elections in which citizens have no effective voice, generate perceptions of corruption, impartiality and betrayal, which may cause a degree of political disorder, from riots and occupations to new and extreme political formations (Mason, 2012).

Where as the European Union has become synonymous with the implementation of austerity policies and the notion of European identity has been distorted by disparate living standards and a cultural fragmentation of north and south, core and periphery, debtor and creditor, the search for a European public sphere remains a major social and political concern. Such a search neither draws on the promotion of reasoned debates by mainstream media, and what Habermas (2009) calls the “quality press” nor on the restructuring of national and European parliaments respectively. Instead, the organisational structure of protests against austerity and lack of European legitimacy, and the communicative practices of the protestors attest to the need for the formation of a European public sphere independent of mainstream media, policies originating in Brussels and national parliaments.

1 These member states were later dubbed by financial analysts as “PIGS.” Besides the construction of an acronym out of the initial letters of each country, the sobriquet indicated the deep cultural divisions within the European Union.

The social phenomenon of austerity protests in south Europe and in Greece is mainly addressed according to the themes of hope and resistance. Frequently, soaring Euroscepticism and populist anti-European politics are intertwined with demands for transparent democratic procedures and social protection. While theorists like Castells (2012) and Douzinas (2013) acknowledge the surge of nationalism, racism and xenophobia as by-products of defensive individualism and the widening gap between citizens and government, they view the values emerging out of the formation of new political formations and activism as progressive and transformative. Castells develops a theoretical and empirical framework in which contemporary social movements proliferate and are largely dependent on social media. By using the Indignants as one of his case studies, he argues for the vital importance of Internet communication for the creation of what he terms “networks of outrage and hope”. “The more the movement is able to convey its message over the communication networks, the more citizen consciousness rises, and the more the public sphere of communication becomes a contested terrain” (Castells 2012, p. 237). Similarly, Douzinas views the resistance of the Greek and Spanish Indignants as an informal international solidarity against the suffering caused by the neo-liberal restructuring of national economies. Their common demand is that the corrupt political elites who brought their countries to the edge of social and economic collapse should go. Douzinas (2011; 2012) notes that the participation in political debates of those with no particular qualifications for ruling – whether they be wealth, power or education – is the closest contemporary Europe has even been to democracy in practice. Parliamentary democracy, he argues, has reached its limits throughout Europe and must be supplemented with its more direct version. The occupation of squares by the Indignants “revived the direct democracy of classical Athens” (Douzinas, 2013, p. 3) and provided the Left with a more positive even victorious orientation.

Yet, the progressive and transformative effects illustrated by Castells and Douzinas are not necessarily presented or even experienced by social actors within the framework of austerity protests; and the protesters might feel misrepresented or offended by such observations. In contrast to these theoretical positions, this paper pays attention to the activities and critical competences of social media actors. The point here is to start from the social media actors’ critical capacities and demands and use the sociological meanings of community and democracy in order to make them explicit.

The purpose of this article is twofold. First, it elucidates the potential of Facebook communities to form a public sphere and realise democracy as a notion that transcends instrumental processes of choosing and electing political elites. The focus is on the austerity protest movement in Greece Indignants in Syntagma and on its Facebook presence and activities from 26th of May 2011 to 23rd of May 2012. Second, through a media sociological analysis, the idea is to illustrate what kind of democracy and socio-political order the Facebook

community of the Greek Indignants advocates for by making use of its sense of justice, democracy and the discrepancy between politics and society as they are and as they should be in order to satisfy popular expectations; that is, an attempt to analyse the network of political formations and mobilisations, ideas, emotions and institutions. This time frame captures the formation and organisation of austerity protests under the aegis of the Indignants, the potential of Facebook communities to form public opinion and political consciousness outside the confines of political parties and mainstream broadcast media up to the general elections of May 2012, which were stigmatized by the popular acceptance of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn.

2. The Media Space of Protest and Indignation

Sociologists and political officials initially perceived austerity and the crisis that followed as temporary social problems. Social discontent and violence should be battled by international agreements, negotiations between governments and trade unions and by means of responsive economic policy towards economic revival. Yet, Michel Wievorka's (2012) reading of Edgar Morin's reflections on the concept of crisis indicates that the crisis should also be examined according to its dynamic and transformative character. In the mid 1970s, Edgar Morin, reflecting on a different type of capitalist crisis, considered crises to be events, which both reveal and have certain effects at the same time. Crisis is a moment of truth; an event that reveals what usually remains concealed and forces social actors and citizens alike to confront things that they do not want and never wanted to confront. Wieviorka (2012) in line with Morin's arguments states that the crisis reveals elements, which are constitutional parts of organisational structures and lived experiences and not just mere accidents. The crisis is not only a force of decomposition and disorganization but also a force of reorganisation, transformation and mobilisation.

The most influential and well documented of these new political formations materialised on the social and political platform *Democracia Real YA* (Real Democracy Now) in 50 Spanish cities on the 15th of May 2011. Inspired and influenced by protests and riots in Arab countries for civil society and parliamentary democracy, participants demonstrated that it was possible to mobilise a great number of people in a short amount of time without many resources through the use of social networks and micro-blogging, namely Facebook and Twitter. These protests and their participants were later named "The Spanish Revolution", and the 15-Movement also known as the Indignants.² It was the latter name that provided an international dimension to protests against austerity measures in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece; corporate and political corruption in Brazil; shortage of affordable housing and economic inequality in Israel.

² The pamphlet *Indignez Vous!* (trans. Time for Outrage) by resistance fighter Stéphane Hessel was an initial inspiration due to its polemic tone, sense of urgency and title.

The novelty of the movement does not derive from its official political rhetoric as illustrated in the Spanish Indignants' manifesto: "Democracy belongs to the people (demos=people, kratos=government) which means that government is made of every one of us. However, in Spain most of the political class does not listen to us". Democratic, advanced societies require "the right to housing, employment, culture, health, political participation, free personal development and consumer rights for healthy and happy living". The Indignants target a certain class of professionals, as well as political incidents, for the gradual disintegration of social cohesion and of people's rights: "concerned and angry about the political, economic and social outlook which we see around us: corruption among politicians, businessmen, bankers, leaving us helpless and without a voice" (Democracia Real Ya, 2011). The manifesto clearly attempts to engulf political progressives and liberals as well as conservatives and people with defined or undefined political ideologies, therefore constructing a movement that is inclusive, apolitical and ultimately populist since it is comprised of and addressed to the people.

Instead, the Indignants formulate a new set of ideological beliefs and constitute a new political subjectivity in two distinctive yet interconnected ways. First, as opposed to traditional massive demonstrations and rallies, protesters camped in the city centres, like Madrid's Puerta del Sol and Athens' Syntagma Square reclaiming urban spaces from technocrats, planners and businesses as spaces for the formation of democratic procedures and public opinion. Second, the Indignants have used the Internet and its applications in a completely different fashion. Traditionally, the Internet served as a space for the distribution of information and organisation of demonstrations. Moreover, the websites serving these particular purposes usually existed outside the commercial and corporate domain. As Gerbaudo (2012) indicates, political activists have always used websites like Indymedia as a depository of information on riots and protests and as mailing lists. Contemporary activists, and more specifically the Indignants, are using corporate social networking sites for the organisation of their protests and dissemination of their messages and ideas, and consequently dissolving the boundary between digital and urban spaces because they have made it possible to belong to and act in both simultaneously. The Indignants and their subsequent political activities demonstrated that the only space where rejection of the austerity measures and discussion of political and social form seemed to be possible were the city squares and social networking sites as opposed to mainstream broadcast media and the parliament.

These changes perfectly encapsulate the transition in the understanding of the role of networks identified by Geert Lovink (2011). They suggest that current political events such as the protests against austerity measures and the appropriation of social media by movements such as the Indignants demand a completely different understanding of digital social networks. Instead of focusing on the "network organisation" – an instrumental view of networks as tools for

organisation, the dissemination of information, and the exchange of views and experiences – the focus should be on “organised networks” which formulate identity (ies), realise projects through collective action and problematise the space where politics and culture are produced and practiced.

3. The Social Experiment of Real Democracy and the Community of Protest

As it becomes clear from the manifesto of the Indignants, the promise of living in an interconnected world through social media communications enhances the democratic possibilities of the excluded, the underprivileged, those whose lives have been greatly affected by the imposition of austerity in European societies. The democracy envisioned in their statements and actions is a real democracy where the people (the demos) have direct access to institutions through unregulated channels of communication and participation.

The idea of a participatory, direct democracy has been the major epistemological concern of pragmatist sociologist John Dewey, whose theorising on democracy remains largely underexplored in the wake of social media protests and political mobilisations. Dewey insisted on the importance of context and in particular on the need for democracy to emerge from the concerns, values, habits and practices of cultural groups. Democracy, therefore, is not a top-down affair and cannot be imposed through non-democratic procedures such as war and colonialism. In *The Public and its Problems*, Dewey sets out the task to reconstruct democratic communities and cultivate and sustain democracy in an epoch dictated by global interactions. He illustrated the challenges that democracy faces in a manner resonant with the Indignants’ global appeal, the “Facebook revolutions” and Europe’s burgeoning social, political and financial problems:

The new era of human relationships in which we live is one marked by mass production for remote markets by cable and telephone, by cheap printing, by railway and steam navigation. Only geographically did Columbus discover a new world. The actual new world has been generated in the last hundred years. Steam and electricity have done more to alter the conditions under which men associate together than all the agencies which affected human relationships before our time (Dewey, 1989. p. 323).

Dewey believed that the democratic action of citizens under these circumstances can be paralysed and he attempted to develop a theoretical model for the formulation of a better society – a “Great Community” that can

come into existence not only in theory but also in lived practice. The associated activity experienced in the spheres of global trade and communication requires new ways of living together which would allow self-fulfillment and community growth. States, publics and communities always evolve and they cannot simply be formed and conserved. Instead, Dewey states, they have to develop and adapt in relation to changing living conditions, economic circumstances and methods of communication. Democracy in that respect appears to be an ongoing socio-political experiment towards collective improvement of methods of communication and problem solving, as well as the education of citizens for a better understanding of their interdependence with others.

Dewey's comments can be translated as being directly opposed to a conventional and, at times, banal understanding of democracy – democracy as a rational procedure of electing leaders, knowing and demanding civil rights and paying taxes. Democracy in this theoretical framework should not only be the mechanism that guarantees government legitimacy and change through free elections, but also a culture comprised of formal and informal rules, safeguarding over time individual and collective interests, the free expression of diverse opinions and, most importantly, their subsequent interplay. Democracy, therefore, becomes the ideal form of social life where all citizens and social participants realise the necessity to cooperate for their individual fulfillment. “Democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (Dewey, 2011, p. 90).

In order to create more democratic relations between citizens and institutions, Dewey identified three particular dispositions for the realisation of this ideal social life. Democracy should be conceived and approached “experimentally”, “pluralistically” and “fallibly”.

According to Dewey, democracy requires constant attention and reformulation. It is not a set of rules and regulations that can be passed from one to generation to another. Each generation of citizens has to realise democracy according to their needs, problems and socio-political conditions. Drawing on the pragmatist orientation of his sociology, Dewey argued that ideas are tools with which to experiment. When they no longer work for the desired goal, citizens and social actors need to experiment with new ideas, relationships and modes of communication.

The ongoing experimentation of ideas is followed by pluralistic thinking and the desire to accommodate diverse viewpoints. There is no unique or correct way to be democratic. In effect, Dewey's vision of democracy is based upon a commitment to sustain diverse ways of life and interaction amongst diverse cultural groups. Only through “mutual respect” and “mutual toleration” (2011, p. 303) can social actors learn to live together and, at the same time, achieve their individual and collective potential.

The beliefs actors, political figures and institutions have with respect to the type of democracy needed may be flawed or perhaps too narrow and no longer viable. For Dewey, no social or political theory can be wholly accurate and final and certainly cannot be applied to all social and political conditions. Ideas and theories derive from lived practice and they need to be constantly altered or even rejected according to relevant conditions and issues. Fallibility will ensure that all beliefs about democracy should be held cautiously instead of dogmatically.

The Indignants attempted to practise direct, participatory democracy and repair the torn social fabric not only through the use of organised networks but also within the organisational and ideological aspects of community. Yet, the discourse of community is not used and articulated as irretrievable and therefore utopian but as a concept that can be recovered and implemented. Community and communal relationships are seen as values and qualities that have been lost with the dominance of the markets in the economy and society, corrupt political systems and with the increasing role of impenetrable European institutions in the political and social life of nation states.

The recovery of community within the protest politics of the Indignants is used as an all-encompassing concept – a concept that can unite people of diverse social classes and political and ideological inclinations against this encroachment. Antony Giddens' (1998, p.124) remarks on the reappearance of community in the political sphere perfectly illustrate the apolitical and inclusive character of the Indignants: "On each of the political spectrum today we see a fear of social disintegration and a call for a revival of community".

In the past technology was seen as one of the major forces behind the decline and disintegration of community. Yet there have been certain theorists who have developed a theory of community that is not antithetical to technology and to mediated communication in particular but, on the contrary, is defined by and articulated through them. The works of Benedict Anderson and Howard Rheingold, respectively, are indicative of this trend. Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" as products of mass communication correlates the rise of the reading public in Europe with the birth of nationalism. In pre-print Europe and elsewhere in the world, Anderson argues that the diversity of spoken languages was so immense that it was not possible for print capitalism to exploit every single one of them. What happened instead was the formation of an assemblage of all those idiolects within a defined limit into far fewer print languages. According to Anderson, these languages provide the platform for national consciousness; they create a unified field of communication and cultural exchange between speakers of a huge variety of languages (a variety of French, English, Spanish and Greek) who might find it difficult or even impossible to understand one another in conversation but possible via print and paper. In the process, the reading public became aware of the thousands or even millions of people who read and write in the same language, and at the same time only those thousands or millions

so belonged. “These fellow readers, to whom they are connected through print, formed in their secular, particular visible invisibility, the embryo of the national imagined community” (Anderson, 2006, p. 44).

Complementing the significance of media for the understanding and formation of community, Howard Rheingold’s *The Virtual Community* (1995) studied the impact of the Internet on the formation of communities. Instead of supplementing existing human and organisational relationships, the Internet, according to Rheingold, offered a significantly different level of interactivity. His enthusiastic response emanated from the Internet’s ability to construct “alternative realities” in relation to “real” reality from which people could escape. Virtual communities are defined by Rheingold (1995, p. 5) as “social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace”. However, virtual communities are not exclusively the result of technological progress and an enthusiastic public reception of the Internet but also of loss and recovery. Rheingold (1995, p. 6) notes that, “one of the explanations for this phenomenon is the hunger for community that grows in the breasts of people around the world as more and more informal public spaces disappear from our real lives”. What is characteristic about Rheingold’s theoretical framework and empirical analysis is that virtual communities are communities that exist on the Internet and not in everyday life. The postulation here is that the Internet enables the constitution of communities that would not otherwise exist. Following Rheingold’s case studies it becomes evident that the participants of these virtual communities have decided to withdraw from an everyday life unfolding in an actual – “real” – space in order to be part of a utopian world of mutual understanding and strong emotional bonds. Consequently, virtual communities are superior to the increasingly diminishing actual ones.

The two theoretical formulations of community developed by Anderson and Rheingold respectively address community as something extraordinary, instead of explaining how community has become a constitutive part of socio-political debates and also how it shapes understandings of the state and political power. Anderson, in his definition of the nation as an “imagined community,” invests in a conceptual understanding of community by highlighting issues of belonging, (national) consciousness, comradeship and affinity, but fails to address an actual one; patterns of behaviour, habits and everyday life rituals are absent from Anderson’s otherwise excellent correlation between media capitalism and nationalism. While Rheingold establishes a boundary between life on the Internet and actual everyday life, his empirical observations focus on the habits and behavioural patterns of the participants of virtual communities. Paradoxically his view of community derives from the conception of and belief in real communities. As a result, Rheingold undermines the novelty of virtual communities by presenting them as mediated technological versions of traditional ones.

Instead of developing just another theoretical model of community that possibly addresses habits and behavioural patterns and, at the same time, extends beyond traditional conceptions, I would like to address how community is understood and realised on the domains of protest politics and social media. Following Amit's (2012, p.4) theoretical and methodological suggestions community should be employed as a broad concept that is "good to think with". The use of Facebook communities by the Indignants as an organisational and political platform perfectly encapsulates both the novelty of protest movements to use corporate media and the need to create and sustain organised networks of common experiences and interests. Facebook, by following through its mission to help "people making connections", added the feature of "Community Page".

Community pages are a new type of Facebook Page dedicated to a topic or experience that is owned collectively by the community connected to it. Just like Official Pages for businesses, organizations and public figures, Community Pages let you connect with others who share similar interests and experiences (The Facebook Blog, April 2010).

In the first instance, Facebook's explanation of community does not significantly differ from established theoretical definitions of community (such as Anderson's and Rheingold's) where certain important elements must be held "in common". Values, norms, symbols, interests and experiences must be held in common but, at the same time, these elements constitute basic criteria for classification for community members as well as for outsiders. These definitions, including Facebook's attempt to define community for the promotion of its Community Page feature, do not necessarily raise any questions of when and how these elements are deployed in social interaction and in particular in times of crisis and political mobilisation. Yet, the activity of the Indignants on Facebook and the formation of their Facebook Communities do not only illustrate what sort of meanings, symbols and values must be held in common for reinvigorating democracy and defending sovereignty, but also how "what is held in common" is deployed in social interaction for making sense of the crisis, of friends and enemies involved in the crisis and of how to assert a sense of national identity and belonging.

In order to think with the Indignants' Facebook communities and to explain how common values, meanings and symbols are deployed in social media protests, a certain methodological distinction needs to be established. This distinction is informed by Jeffrey Alexander's (2006; 2011) theoretical manoeuvres to differentiate cultural sociology from sociology of culture. Cultural sociology indicates that every action, regardless of whether it is instrumental, reflexive or coerced, is set within a "horizon of affect and meaning" (2006, p.12). Building on

Alexander's cultural sociological foundations, the Facebook communities of the Indignants should be approached by a media sociology as opposed to a sociology of media. Sociology of media is not primarily concerned with the interpretation of collective meanings, values and emotions, but tries to explain their formation as manifested in the protest communities as products of hard data such as the disparate financial and political relationships in the Eurozone, the democratic deficit, political corruption and austerity politics. Media sociology, on the other hand, reverses this explanatory order and deploys collective meanings, values and sentiments on Facebook protest communities in order to explain these data.

With the purpose of avoiding a purely economic understanding and instead encapsulating social action beyond reason and deliberation, the space of Facebook community is seen here as a public stage. On this stage, social actors project performances of their emotions, anxieties and aspirations to specific audiences whose response through the applications of *Like*, *Comment*, *Share* increasingly become legitimate references in political and social conflicts. Clifford Geertz's (1973) "thick description" supplements media sociology by identifying the meaning that particular social media performances have for protesters and then states what the knowledge from these meanings demonstrates about the society in which they are found. "Thick description" establishes the analytical autonomy of protest activities and performances and then discovers how they intersect with other issues and institutions such as the economy, democracy and national identity.

4. Indignation: "To show them what it means to be Greek"

Despite the global character of the financial crisis and its articulation as a socio-political problem, it has not been and continues not to be evenly experienced in countries of South America, Europe and the Middle East, respectively. Notwithstanding its international character, the movement of the Indignants reflected and, at the same time, adopted distinctive national characteristics with respect to its social media activities and street politics. The Greek Indignants declared their presence as a protest movement with the Facebook community Indignants in Syntagma. The occupation of Syntagma square and its inclusion in the name of the Facebook community provides an historical dimension to the actions of the movement as well as indicating its inclusive character. A square named after the Constitution that King Otto was obliged to grant due to popular and military demands on the 3rd of September 1843, has since become the commercial epicentre of the city of Athens overlooking the Greek Parliament. On the 26th of May 2011, Indignants in Syntagma uploaded 200 photographs to an album titled "26th of May 2011" referring to the protests and the occupation of

the square on the same day. These 200 photographs, liked by just 81 Facebook users, depict Athens in a state of emergency; protesters and riot police occupy the streets of Athens where no daily routines and activities are visible. The photographs carefully portray protesters who do not fit the media stereotypes of the political activist as a rioter, dressed in black with their faces covered. These are ordinary citizens who occupy the square in order to express their indignation to politicians they previously trusted with their votes. On the 30th of May, after another occupation of the square, the Indignants announced the purpose of their movement and its ideological and political foundations through their Facebook community page. Their announcement clarifies that the idea for this community was conceived by three 18-year-old men who managed to mobilise “people of all ages, of all views, who most probably protested for their first time in their lives” (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ; Monday, May 30, 2011). The comments on this announcement were irrelevant to the organisational aspect of the Indignants and they mostly focused on the moral integrity of politicians. “300 wankers, fascists have humiliated us across the planet, they have made us weak and cowardly. Don’t you think it’s time to show them what it means to be GREEK? Because surely they’ve never been GREEK!!!” (εμη αθανασοπούλου; May 31, 2011).

During the summer months of the same year when no major political events or demonstrations were recorded, some of the comments expressed a particular type of nostalgia – a nostalgia correlated with the living standards of the Greek people prior to Greece’s membership to the Eurozone in 2001. “We want cheese pies that cost 50 drachmas” (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ; June 3 2011) and a photograph of a coin of 1 drachma with the caption “we want our little boat back” (*ibid.*) referring to the symbol on the face of the coin. Both posts received a significant number of *Likes* (197 and 143, respectively), but the comments that followed dismissed this type of mentality as “irrational” (Ανδρέας Γεωργιάδης; June 3, 2006) and “hyperbolic” (Velmahos Ioannis; June 3, 2006).

Towards the autumn months of 2011, trade unions and protest movements were back in action. What is noteworthy from that period is that Indignants in Syntagma had morphed into a stage upon which Facebook users could announce events and comment on issues that were not directly associated with austerity and corrupt politicians. A popular topic of conversation in September 2011 was the inability of the Ministry of Education to produce school DVDs with the Greek alphabet. Reactions to this news item fluctuated from comments on the ignorant Government due to the Prime Minister, George Papandreou’s American upbringing (Stefanos Serafeimidis; September 20, 2001) to suggestions that pupils should not attend classes until the Ministry produced DVDs with the Greek alphabet (Nikos Tsalous; September 20, 2001). During the first days of October 2011, social media were preoccupied with the occupation of squares on a pan-European level on 15th of October. Indignants in Syntagma (October 11, 2011) uploaded

posters stating “World Revolution Now/ We Demand a Real Democracy/For The People By The People” and “The Whole World a Single Square”. There was a clear attempt to align the Greek Indignants not only with other Europeans subjected to austerity cuts but also with citizens around the world calling for a real, participatory democracy. On the 12th of October, the administrators of the community appealed for political mobilisation and activism: “Each and every one of us should send invitations to friends and acquaintances and disseminate Saturday’s protests on (Facebook) walls. The time has come for mobilisation and awakening” (October 12, 2011). Facebook users responded enthusiastically to this call and a significant number of them expressed the need to “protest everyday against the global dominance of the banks” (Zoi Zoiri Darcy; October 12, 2011), and demanded a dynamic presence in the protest in order to measure their powers against “the deep state” (Pad A Zos; October 12, 2011). Days after the occupation of the square and the violent clashes between riot police, the Indignants, and other activists, the administrators posted a digitally manipulated photograph of Prime Minister George Papandreou wearing a bulletproof vest being carried violently by policemen most probably to court or jail; “a day of magic” (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ, October 23, 2011) is the title to the photograph liked by 535 Facebook users. Further proof of the solidarity amongst Greeks against the *Troika* and the political establishment were photographs showing football fans expressing their indignation in stadia around Greece. The comments on these photographs were very supportive regardless of club affiliations and rivalries. The administrators set the mood by posting “even though I support Olympiacos I would like to congratulate the fans of Panathinaikos” (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ, *ibid.*). The Panathinaikos fans were holding a banner that read “Criminal politicians, Parliament of the wealthy you will be drowned by the rage of the outraged.”

The national holiday of the 28th of October, also known as the anniversary of the “NO” when Greeks commemorate the rejection by the dictator and Prime Minister of Greece Ioannis Metaxas of the ultimatum made by Benito Mussolini in 1940 to allow Axis Forces to occupy strategic positions in Greek territory, provided the opportunity to view the crisis through the prism of history. Schools and the military take part in this commemoration by parading in major streets. The administrators uploaded photographs of pupils purposefully ignoring the Minister of Education while parading in the streets of Athens. “Worthy descendants of the 1940 fighters. Dedicated to the memory of my grandfathers... Congratulations to this proud new generation, HOPE and FUTURE of this country” (Stella Amarantou; October 28, 2011). Some endorsed the pupils’ actions because the Minister for Education “is an atheist” (Κατερίνα Παπαδημητρίου; October 28, 2011), while others perceived their gesture as a quintessentially Greek – “a taste of Greece you little ass Americans” (George Paralogue; October 28, 2011).

In February 2012, students, trade unions, political activists and the

Indignants were preparing for another round of protests, riots and occupations. The community updated its status by writing “TAKE YOUR FRIENDS, MAKE APPOINTMENTS... NO ONE AT HOME. WE DEMONSTRATE OUR RIGHT IN THE STREETS” (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ; February 12, 2012). For the first time since the conception of the Greek Indignants, there were open disputes regarding the method of action but not necessarily about the political orientation of the movement. Some of the 18 comments on this update focused on how foreign media reported violent confrontations in Athens by stating that “THERE IS NO REASON TO LOOK LIKE FOOLS INTERNATIONALLY WE CAN DEMONSTRATE IN ALL CITIES PEACEFULLY TO SEND A MESSAGE WE DEMAND SOLUTIONS AND GUARANTEES FOR THE FUTURE” (Stathis Vonitsanos; February 12, 2012). The next day, while the demonstrations and the riots continued the community attempted to distance itself from rioters and violent activists. Again, the way the Indignants are perceived and represented by international media appears to be of paramount importance. “All English-speaking media provide unsubstantial reports – they report that we are burning our historical monuments!” The administrators uploaded a YouTube video in order to prove the peaceful actions and intentions of their movement. The footage of the video is explained by a commentary written in English (sic): “look who burn the city, the cars and the business in the center of Athens, while Greek people protesting peacefully, a team of cops went to fight them and start fighting with them” (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ; February 13, 2012,).

Photographs of the square populated by the Indignants and other protestors had stopped being inspiring and motivational. Facebook users started suggesting that they should be congregating in neighbourhoods and local streets and that Syntagma as an iconic place has lost its momentum. Yet, the community kept active by expressing its dissatisfaction with television coverage (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ; February 29, 2012), demanding that the British government return the Elgin marbles (*ibid.*) and reasserting a sense of Greek cultural superiority by mocking the sartorial choices and eating habits of German tourists in Greece (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ; April 30, 2012).

In May, the focal point of all media was the national legislative elections. National elections were due to be held in late 2013, four years after the previous elections. The inability of the governing Social Democratic Party to maintain a majority in Parliament, as well as implementing the austerity measures due to a continuous social unrest, led to the elections of the 6th of May 2012. While the only coherent political views expressed by the Indignants were an aggressive sense of patriotism and hostility towards the political establishment of Europe and Greece, they wanted to make sure that the elections would adhere to constitutional standards. “IF YOU SEE FOREIGNERS AT ANY ELECTION CENTRE CALL THE POLICE. ACCORDING TO LAW 3838/2010

FOREIGNERS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO VOTE” (ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ; May 5, 2012). Regardless of the validity of this claim, 175 users liked this update. The comments that followed acknowledged that the major political parties used to deploy undocumented migrants for boosting their percentages in exchange for their regularisation (Κωνσταντίνος Θ.; May 5, 2012) but also the impossibility to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate voters (Leonidas Siozos; May 5, 2012).

On the day of the election the activities of the community were limited to the announcement of the election results and to sporadic comments on the voting patterns of Greek citizens. Even though there was no clear winner and for the first time in years a leftwing party – Coalition of the Radical Left – came second with 16.79% of the votes³, there was a sense of disappointment; not only because the political establishment maintained some of their power but also because a neo-Nazi party called “Golden Dawn” received 6.97% of the votes. Most of the commentators understood the rise of a neo-Nazi party as by-product of the “non-democratic” times we live in – of the junta supported by European officials (Γιώτα Γράμμενου; May 7, 2012). A few were of the opinion that an extreme party might provide a shock to the political system and to hold to account corrupt politicians (Manolis Grigoratos; May 7, 2012).

On the 23rd of May 2012, the Indignants celebrated one year of protests, occupations and, most importantly, indignation with the political establishment. The community commemorated its birthday with a status update titled “One year on from the birth of the idea of the Indignants”. The text that accompanies this update attempts to appraise the presence and achievements of the movement. Yet this text is significantly different in tone from previous communications of the community. There is a sense of defeat and the first plural common to a plethora of announcements is at points replaced by the more personal and authoritative “I”.

3 The turnout for the elections was just above 60%. The parties in favour of implementing the austerity programme were punished more harshly than expected. The conservative party New Democracy emerged as the most popular party with 18.9% of the votes, while the Social Democratic Party PASOK came third obtaining just 13.2% of the votes. On the Left, the Coalition of the Radical Left with 16.8% of the votes became the second strongest parliamentary party. The gains of the extreme right wing parties were remarkable; the Independent Greeks, a populist anti European Union party received 10.6% of the votes, while the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn received 6.97%. The outcome of these elections signalled the end to Greece’s political consensus.

I first created the event Indignants in Syntagma which in two days had attracted 10,000 people. Despite the initial and still unexplained removal of our community from Facebook people got stubborn and they declared their presence in Syntagma in a vibrant and dynamic way. The movement continued to expand and managed to mobilise more than 200,000 people, regardless of ideologies, political parties and beliefs, and expressed their indignation with the political system, corrupt politicians and parties.

At this point, the author acknowledges that at the end politicians did not respond productively to this massive mobilisation. After months of protesting and occupying Syntagma square politicians “were either dismissive or ignoring the movement.” Consequently, some decided to end this apolitical and peaceful

movement by using violence and chemicals. At the end, the police started terrorizing ordinary people by attacking the elderly and children. “Looking back at these incidents I wonder about the state of democracy in our country”. The author concludes by expressing how proud he is of “all those people who took part in this movement” and he hopes that “our country will emerge from the economic swamp” so all of us “can look towards the future with optimism and hope”. Most of the 17 comments by community members referred to the movement as something of the past that nevertheless was very important for “giving a voice” to individuals (Meletis Kechaidis; May 23, 2012) and for “excluding communists and trade unionists” from their protests (Kostas Archontakis; May 23, 2012).

5. Order and Democracy in the Facebook Community

The meanings of the Indignants’ social performance manifest themselves through binary codes that categorise people, behaviours and ideas in moral terms: as good or bad, pure or impure, moral or immoral. When these moral evaluations about politicians, policies and institutions are entangled within practices of communication and community formation, they structure the dynamic social narrative of indignation.

At the core of this social narrative exists the desire for real, direct democracy and its opposite, to wit, parliamentary democracy as practiced by corrupt politicians. Such a desire points toward the idealism of Habermas and Arendt regarding the potential of the public sphere to embrace and express the social whole. The economic world of necessity and corruption and the political world of bureaucracy and rigid political alliances are rejected in favour of a social system capable of altruism and solidarity. Even though the social performance of the Indignants indicates that the movement operates in opposition to parliamentary democracy, it does not reject every single aspect of it. However, what has been rejected altogether is guidance provided by political parties and trade unions due to the fact that they are perceived as the main agents of corruption. This rejection is ensued by the constant expression of negative sentiments instead of supporting a particular political formation or an emerging political subjectivity. The general discontent expressed by the Indignants towards the *Troika*, national and European politicians, as well as derogatory characterisations of powerful nations such as America and Germany, largely define the character of the movement and the activities on their Facebook community.

By situating themselves in opposition to an established political system defined and supported institutionally by parliamentary democracy, the presence and activity of the Indignants on Facebook illustrate the possibility of direct participation, intervention and expression. Whereas European officials, politicians

and their parties are struggling to promote a single coherent view on the current crisis and the terms of the Greek bailout by the *Troika*, the Indignants relied on the promotion of personal views freed from hierarchical structures and the necessity of concluding in common positions.

The real, participatory democracy envisioned by the Indignants is only partially and selectively compatible with Dewey's conceptual understanding of democracy. Similar to Dewey, the Indignants realise the need for democracy to emerge from the concerns, values, habits and practices of cultural groups. It becomes evident that the top-down affair of selecting political representatives and administrators, paying taxes and exercising political rights has given way to both a mode of associated living and a conjoint communicated experience. Still, Dewey's "Great Community" that can come into existence through democratic practice requires the acknowledgement of diverse ways of life and interaction amongst diverse cultural groups. The Facebook community Indignants in Syntagma uses a national, majoritarian frame in order to comprehend and oppose the austerity politics of intranational and national governments. Moreover, the community creates or reinforces cultural and social boundaries that are always pre-existing; the activity of the community aims at the revival of collective memories shaped by former crises and war conflicts such the II World War and the military junta in order to name, blame and shame those being held responsible for the current crisis and the subsequent politics of austerity. Indignants in Syntagma, although a-political and anti-establishment in character, also appears to be xenophobic and anti-European, offering the most nationalistic understandings of and solutions to the crisis. Even though many community members and other Facebook users were disappointed by the increasing popularity of the neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, the xenophobia towards Europeans and especially Germans, the establishment of national pride as a virtue and as an opposing means to austerity in conjunction with the rejection of parliamentary democracy legitimised the rhetoric and practices of the new extreme Right in Greece. This legitimatisation does not only refer to the electoral surge of extreme parties like Golden Dawn but also to the process of presenting nationalism, xenophobia and rejection of parliamentary democracy as views held by the majority of Greek people.

Focusing exclusively on Greece's position in what Birgit Schönau calls "culture wars" [*Kulturkampf*] (Beck, 2013), the Indignants purposefully ignored abuse originating elsewhere, namely in the community they aspired to constitute. Such a focus created a smokescreen for a specific type of activism and a political subjectivity of mobilized citizens, which at same time were instruments of xenophobia and exclusion. The Facebook community Indignants in Syntagma points towards the creation of a total cultural and political order by targeting and opposing external factors to the national majority. The order of the Indignants' community does not direct its members to pluralistic associations but instead to a particular type of a Web 2.0 enhanced regime that I call Communitarianism 2.0.

As a regime, Communitarianism 2.0 neither distances itself from participatory democracy nor ignores the potential of social media to constitute a public sphere where an informed public opinion can be formed. Instead Communitarianism 2.0 is closer to Carl Schmitt's politics of sovereignty and democratic legitimacy than Dewey's social experiment towards collective improvement of communication between diverse groups of people. Carl Schmitt's political theory has always been suspicious of the procedures of liberal democracy such as individual voting rights, the secret ballot and political representation. The belief in what Schmitt (2000) calls "parliamentarism" – government through political debates – belongs to the intellectual tradition of liberalism and has nothing to do with democracy.

A true democratic regime becomes political and exhibits its power by knowing how to refuse or ward off something foreign and unequal that threatens its homogeneity. It is essential to distinguish between the foreigner as a legitimate collective enemy, with whom power relations are established on the basis of equality or competition according to the political and economic division of the world, and the illegitimate interior enemy who disrupts a political, social and cultural order and must be eliminated.

Despite their proclamations of being an apolitical movement, the Indignants are quintessentially a political movement by making the distinction between friend and enemy. Indignants in Syntagma contextualises the leading Eurozone members and intranational institutions as legitimate enemies with respect to the structure of the Eurozone and the imposition of austerity politics, and at the same time targets the national political establishment as the interior enemy for not sharing the same civic virtues as the majority, and for not being able to protect the majority in question against their (legitimate) political and economic European enemies. The identification of both legitimate and illegitimate enemies and their subsequent contextualisation as heterogeneous elements is a vital process for the functioning of any true democracy. Communitarianism 2.0 in synch with Schmitt's political theory exploits the interactive features of Web 2.0 and Facebook in particular for keeping at arm's length or eliminating from political participation everything and everyone that threatens homogeneity such as the Euro, trade unions, political parties, European people, and the undocumented migrant voter. "The equality of all persons as persons is not democracy but a certain kind of liberalism, not a state form but an individualistic-humanitarian ethic and *Weltanschauung*" (Schmitt; 2000, p. 13).

The apparent lack of hierarchical structures, the openness to participation, the national majoritarian view, the constant motivation to overcome passivity and isolation, and most importantly the direct democratic organisation of the Indignants ultimately attempt to define and be "the people". Within Communitarianism 2.0 "the people" express themselves directly as a mass by opposing austerity and its political agents without creating the impression they want to play the role of

the expert. Nevertheless, their lack of scientific or political expertise does not prevent them from appearing as the sovereign subject and, by extension, from challenging parliamentary democracy. Schmitt argues that the attempt of liberal constitutions to dispense the bearer of sovereign authority has not been and cannot be successful because there cannot be a functioning legal order without one. In liberal democracies, the people are subject only to the determinate and predictable demands of the law, and not to the authority of specific individuals. But in order for the law to be effective, there needs to be an authority that deals with issues arising out of disputed interpretations. Yet the content of the law does not determine the bearer of sovereignty but instead a sovereign authority needs to exist prior to the law itself. The Communitarianism 2.0 of the Indignants is a contemporary call for a strong, popular executive power unconstrained by the legality of the police, national governments or European institutions.

The sovereign subject for Schmitt is always the subject who has the power and decides to create a new constitutional order. For a limited time, the Greek Indignants through their Facebook community became the bearers of sovereignty by creating a new communication order in which national and cultural homogeneity, together with virtue, is the necessary precondition for protest and political participation.

6. Conclusion

This paper has examined the possibility of the Facebook protest community Indignants in Syntagma to realise direct, participatory democracy. Focusing on the critical capacities and demands of the social media actors, what has been argued here is that, instead of a network of hope and a revival of classic Athenian democracy, the Indignants constituted a Web enhanced communication regime termed Communitarianism 2.0. Communitarianism 2.0 facilitates direct intervention and acknowledges the need for democracy to emerge out of concerns and habits, but this democracy can only be practiced by a national homogeneous group and can only be directed against external and internal enemies. Indignants in Syntagma accommodated a great heterogeneity as regards political beliefs and ideologies. But this heterogeneity could only be sustained by a homogeneity created and supported by a sense of national superiority, as well as by hostility towards representative democracy and European institutions. This sense of superiority and hostility is incompatible with the Dewey's participatory democracy based on the theoretical and practical dispositions of experimentation, mutual respect and fallibility.

The nationalistic and xenophobic frame of the arguments and demands prevents the community from constituting a public sphere on a national and European level. Instead of developing communicative practices towards European

democratic legitimacy and transnational cooperation, the Indignants protected a very rigid sense of national identities and hierarchies. The struggle against the current post-democratic administrative actions of the EU should not only serve as inspiration to redesign the public space of political dispute but also to challenge, even delegitimize, rhetoric, actions and mentalities that give advantage to majorities and generate competition between nation states as a central category of political categorisation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **ΑΓΑΝΑΚΤΙΣΜΕΝΟΙ ΣΤΟ ΣΥΝΤΑΓΜΑ** (Facebook Community); available from <https://www.facebook.com/AganaktismenoiStoSyntagm>
[a?ref=ts](https://www.facebook.com/AganaktismenoiStoSyntagm)
- Alexander, Jeffrey C. (2003). *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*; Oxford: Oxford University Press.
——— (2011). *Performance and Power*; Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Amit, Vera and Rapport, Nigel (2012). *Community, Cosmopolitanism and the Problem of Human Commonality*; London: Pluto Press.
- Anderson, Benedict (2006). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*; London: Verso.
- Beck, Ulrich (2013). *German Europe* (Rodney Livingstone trans.); Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Castells, Manuel (2012). *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*; Cambridge Polity Press.
- Democracia Real YA! (Manifesto in English); Available from <http://www.democraciarealya.es/manifiesto-comun/manifiesto-english/>
- Dewey, John (1989). *The Public and its Problems*; Ohio: Ohio University Press.
——— (2011). *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*; South Carolina: Simon and Brown.
- Douzinas, Costas (2013). *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis: Greece and the Future of Europe*; Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Facebook Blog (The) (April 19, 2010). "Connecting to Everything You Care About"; Available from <http://blog.facebook.com/blog.php?post=382978412130>
- Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*; New York: Basic Books.

- Gerbaudo, Paolo (2012). *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*; London: Pluto Press.
- Giddens, Anthony (1998). *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics*; Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen (2009). *Europe: The Faltering Project*; Cambridge: Polity Press.
- ——— (2012). *The Crisis of the European Union: A Response* (Ciaran Cronin trans.) Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lovink, Geert (2011). *Networks Without a Cause: A Critique of Social Media*; Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mason, Paul (2012). *Why It's Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*; London: Verso.
- Rheingold, Howard (1995). *The Virtual Community: Finding Connection in a Computerized World*; London: Minerva.
- Schmitt, Carl (2000). *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Ellen Kennedy trans.); London: MIT Press.
- Streeck, Wolfgang (2011). "The Crises of Democratic Capitalism"; *New Left Review*; 71: September - October 2011.
- Wieworka, Michel (2012). "Financial Crisis or Societal Mutation?" in Castells, Manuel, João, Caraça and Cardoso, Gustavo (eds.) (2012) *Aftermath: The Cultures of the Economic Crisis*; Oxford: Oxford University Press.