Making the Syntagma Square protests visible. Cultures of participation and activists' communication in Greek anti-austerity protests

Making the Syntagma Square protests visible. Cultures of participation and activists' communication in the social media age.

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Abstract

This article addresses the following general question: how do movement cultures of participation shape activists' communication strategies in the construction of visibility for their protests? While other scholars have tackled this issue at the theoretical level, in this article I address this enquiry through a concrete case study – the Greek Indignants (Αγανακτισμένοι) and, more specifically, the occupation of Syntagma square – and employing the lens of culture at the analytical level. Overall, the main theoretical claim behind this article is that we cannot consider movement cultures as a monolithic construct transversally affecting activists' usages of both digital media and non-digital media. First, there is the need to understand social movements' cultures as embedded into their broader context. Second, as the empirical analysis shows, movement cultures related to a specific type of practice – i.e. the one of participation – hold more explanatory power when we split them into different subdimensions to then understand how each of them intertwines with a specific aspect of activists' communication strategies.

Introduction

In the past decade, hundreds of thousands of citizens have revolted against the consequences of the global financial crisis that began in 2008. Anti-austerity and pro-democracy mobilizations have hit several countries across the world: from the uprisings in the MENA region to the Occupy Wall Street protests in North America and the so-called *Indignados* mobilizations in Southern Europe (Ancelovici et al. 2016, della Porta and Mattoni 2014a, della Porta 2013, Flesher-Fominaya and Cox 2013). In many studies on the topic, scholars

have focused on the shared characteristics of mobilizations that occurred in different geo-political areas: anti-austerity and pro-democracy protests deployed similar grievances, blaming corrupt elites for the economic crisis and the anti-austerity measures that followed, which mostly impacted on ordinary people (della Porta 2013); protesters in these mobilizations used comparable contentious performances, such as occupations of major city squares (della Porta and Mattoni 2014b, Gerbaudo 2012); finally, these mobilizations saw activists' pragmatic and massive appropriation of social media platforms and a good wealth of literature argues that social media was indeed extremely important in making the protests possible.

For instance, Castells (2012) suggests that, while not sufficient, the presence and diffusion of social media platforms and other forms of Internet-based social networks are "a necessary condition for the existence of these new social movements in our time" (ibidem, 226) to organize protest. In a similar vein, Gerbaudo (2017) asserts that social media platforms function as effective "public megaphones" for activists who want to reach the general public beyond the social movement milieu (ibidem, 137). Bennett and Segerberg (2013) note that social media platforms put the individualized experiences of activists at the forefront of mobilization, leaving the collectivities that constitute social movement processes in the background. Finally, Kavada (2015) explains how social media plays a distinctive role in creating the collective actor behind anti-austerity and pro-democracy movements.

These scholars cast light on how social media platforms – and other digital media – have been relevant in making protests happen and, even more importantly, how they act as constitutive agents in the making of social movement processes that sustained the mobilizations in point. In this article, I expand the findings of such literature further in seeking to address the following general question: how do movement cultures of participation shape activists' communication strategies in the construction of visibility for their protests?

While other scholars have tackled this issue at the theoretical level (cfr. Milan 2015), in this paper I address this enquiry through a concrete case study – the Greek Indignants (Αγανακτισμένοι) and, more specifically, the occupation of Syntagma square – and employing the lens of culture at the analytical level.

The article is structured as follows. I first discuss the analytical framework guiding the investigation, reviewing the literature that addresses culture in social movement studies and proposing an operational definition of movement culture of participation. I then present the methods of data gathering and data analysis employed in the empirical study on which this article is based. The two subsequent empirical sections then, first, discuss the main characteristics of the culture of participation in the Greek anti-austerity protests and, second, link them to the construction of visibility for the mobilization in point. The concluding section summarizes the main findings and suggests further lines of inquiry.

Movement culture of participation as an analytical lens

Social movement scholars embraced the field of cultural sociology and some of its main concepts from the 1980s onwards (Fuist 2013, Jasper 1997, Hart 1996) to understand the dynamics that characterize political opportunity structures, the role of resources for mobilizations, and the meaning of success for social movements – going beyond the structural and instrumental approaches that dominated the field until that time (Polletta 1997). In summarizing the scholarly literature on social movements and culture, Fuist (2013) suggests that social movement scholars tend to deal with the cultural dimension by focusing on three main features.

First is the reciprocal relationship between social movement cultures and broader cultures within societies, which is analyzed in a diverse range of contexts, including: how

culture shaped the strategies, resources and biographies of social movements in the United States after the Civil Right Movement (Jaspers 1997); how the existence of specific cultures of emotions had an impact on the democratic practices of activist groups in the Global Justice Movement (della Porta and Giugni 2013); how social movements produce change beyond the political and societal levels, hence how activists are able to bring forward cultural change in societies (cfr. Rochon 1998, Earl 2004).

Second is cultures within specific sites that can either exist before the creation of social movements or be nurtured by social movement themselves. An example of the latter are the 'free spaces' (Polletta 1999) and 'social movement scenes' (Creasap 2012) as sites of emergent movement cultures. The former, instead, focuses on sites like Black Churches and their relevance in the mobilization of the civil rights movement in the 1960s (Morris 1986).

Third is the analysis of culture and cultural processes as resources within social movements to understand how the cultural dimension intertwine with other features of mobilizations, like for instance the ability to mobilize protest participants. In this regard, scholars have investigated culture as mobilizing forces for social movements, but also processes more immediately related to the cultural dimension, such as collective identification processes within social movements (Melucci 1992) or framing processes through which mobilizations acquire distinct meanings (Snow and Benford 1988). At the more concrete level of cultural production, some scholars have focused on cultural artifacts and their contents to the employment of artistic productions to support mobilizations (Eyerman and Jamison 1998).

More recently, scholars interested in the nexus between protest politics and digital media have looked into the cultural dimension of social movements to grasp how it is linked to the communicative dimension of social movements. Kavada (2013) illustrates how three sub-dimensions of movement cultures – strategic, organizational and decision-making

cultures – are linked to distinct activists' Internet cultures in the case of European Social Forum. In a similar vein, Costanza-Chock (2012) considers the relationship between activist cultures and the use of digital technologies in the Occupy Wall Street mobilizations. Juris (2008) showed the strong continuity between the networking affordances of Internet-based services in the early 2000s, from mailing lists to alternative websites, and the culture of networking typical of the Global Justice Movement. Barassi (2015) investigates activists' media practices, sustained through web technologies in the daily lives of three activist groups belonging to different social movement milieus – the UK labour movement, the Spanish environmental movement and the Italian post-autonomous movement. In doing this, she uncovers the tensions that arise from the encounter between activist cultures and digital capitalism and suggests that activists' uses of web technologies are linked with activists' cultures through the imaginaries that they develop with regard to their politics. These scholars began to unpack the relationship between movement cultures and how they can orient the activists' appropriation of digital technologies. In this paper I follow a similar approach, while not focusing on digital technologies exclusively. Rather, I am interested in understanding how the movement culture (of participation) of the Greek Indignants shaped the activists' communication strategies in the construction of visibility for the Syntagma Square occupation. Before going further with the analysis, though, I shall use the remainder of this section to provide an operational definition of movement culture (of participation).

James Jasper (1997) defines culture as an ensemble of shared cognitive, emotional and moral understandings and their concrete embodiments, and points out that, while some of these are more commonly shared and become part of the general culture of a society, others are linked more with specific groups of individuals, such as activist organizations, for instance. In this sense, then, we can speak about the existence of "activist subcultures" functioning as "repositories of cultural materials" (McAdam 1994) that go beyond specific

mobilizations and nurture different generations of activists, and hence persist over time. Moreover, according to James Jaspers, culture can be seen simultaneously as a dimension in itself, with its own features and elements, but also as a dimension that is able to shape other features that characterize social movements, like strategies or resources (Jasper 1997). As Kavada (2013) also shows, when analyzing the culture of specific movement organizations it is fruitful to break them down into sub-dimensions that would allow a more fine-grained investigation of how culture intertwines with other dimensions of social movements, including their organizational patterns and their communication strategies. In the same vein, della Porta and Mattoni (2012) discuss how distinct cultures of participation in social movements might lead to activists' different approaches to, and interpretations of, alternative media.

Combining the work of these scholars, in this article I define movement culture of participation as an ensemble of shared cognitive, emotional and moral understandings and their concrete embodiments towards the social practice of participation either within a movement organization or within a movement mobilization. The movement culture of participation provides some shared rules-of-thumb for activists to understand which are the accepted and supported forms of participation in a given activist context. While they might orient the social practice of participation in social movement settings, cultures of participation should not be seen neither as monolithic nor as immutable: Engaging in social practices of participation, activists rather appropriate and hence might have the willingness and abilities to modify cultures of participation across time and space. In the next section, I further specify the methodology that I employed to investigate cultures of participation and its intertwining with activists' communication strategies for the visibility of the Syntagma Square occupation.

Methods for data gathering and data analysis

This article is based on a research project that employs a cross-national comparative research design to investigate how activists interacted with different types of media technologies, organizations and outlets in Italy, Greece and Spain during anti-austerity protests.[1] To this end, we collected data on patterns of mediated communication through in-depth interviews with activists involved in anti-austerity protests, as well as in other waves of protests that preceded and followed them, prompting activists' stories on the interactions with a wide range of media technologies, channels, outlets and professionals. We gathered 60 in-depth interviews (N=20 in Greece, 19 in Italy, and 21 in Spain), each lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. In the specific case of Greece, we interviewed activists who participated in the Syntagma Square occupation within the bottom side of the square. We did this mainly for reasons of access to the interviewees and to ensure the comparability of the Greek case with the other two countries. Indeed, it was in the bottom side of the square that the Greek protests were more similar to what happened in Spain and Italy, while in the upper side of the square, nearer to the Parliament, participants represented their grievances in a more "carnivalesque [way] that emphasized direct action and conflict with the government" (Kavada and Dimitriou 2017, 78), without engaging with general assemblies, working groups and the method of consensus.

The in-depth interviews revolved around "activist media practices" (Mattoni 2012), used as a sensitizing concept to understand how activists in the three countries engaged with the broad array of digital and non-digital media during anti-austerity protests. Open questions on activist media practices were the same in each country context, but we deliberately kept them broad so as to trigger open narratives about the role, significance and interpretation of

digital and non-digital media in each country context and for each type of activist that we interviewed.

While I have also engaged in a comparative analysis of activist media practices in the three countries in another work (Author forthcoming_a), in this article I focus solely on the Greek Indignants and the occupation of Syntagma square. This choice rests on two reasons. First, at the empirical level, focusing only on the Greek Indignants sheds light on a case of anti-austerity protests, which received far less academic attention at the international level than other contemporary protests, especially when it comes to the communication strategies that they employed. Apart from some exceptions (i.e. Kavada and Dimitriou 2017), most of the scholars who dealt with anti-austerity and pro-democracy protests by looking at their communication strategies did this with a focus on the Spanish Indignados (Anduiza et al 2014, Postill 2013), the Occupy protests in the USA (Author forthcoming b, Kavada 2015, Costanza-Chock 2012), the UK Uncut mobilizations (Cammaerts 2018, Gerbaudo 2017) and protest in the MENA region (Zayani 2015, Howard and Hussein 2013). Second, at the analytical level, as I will show below, the Greek Indignants and the occupation of Syntagma Square in particular proved to be emblematic in shedding light on the intertwining of cultures of participation and activists' communication strategies for the visibility of the occupation.

For the data analysis, I developed a thematic analysis of the culture of participation that characterized the occupation of Syntagma Square as it emerged from the interviews with activists who took part in the protests (N = 20). The thematic analysis started from the operational definition of cultures of participation provided in the previous section, with the aim of developing some of its aspects further; as a second step, it focused on how activists linked their understanding and experiences of cultures of participation in Syntagma Square with communication strategies to ensure the visibility of the mobilization in Athens. Overall, therefore, the thematic analysis revolves around two themes that were then given with their

specific meaning in the framework of the protest against investigation, following an inductive approach.

The culture of participation in the Syntagma Square occupation

The occupation of Syntagma Square began on the 25th of May 2011, part of a much longer stream of protests that occurred in Greece from 2008 onwards, when massive demonstrations and violent riots erupted due to the assassination by a policeman of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, a 15-year-old student living in the Exarchia neighborhood in Athens. These protests denounced the police for their brutality, but also addressed more general economic and political problems, including youth grievances, in a country characterized by high levels of unemployment (Andronikidou and Kovras 2012). When the debt crisis and its consequences began to hit Greece severely in 2010, it was the same generation of young activists who had mobilized in 2008 that took to the streets again, together with participants in long-term activist groups – anarchist-libertarian and radical-left groups – as well as many lay citizens who took part in protest activities for the first time in their lives. The opposition to austerity measures was indeed wide and it developed according to four stages, each of which featured distinct forms of protest and political actors as della Porta and her co-authors argue (2016). In the first stage – more traditional mobilization – strikes and street demonstrations prevailed (May 2010 – May 2011); the second stage was a more innovative stage of square occupations (May 2011 – September 2011); the third stage featured diffused contention, in which peoples' acts of civil disobedience spread (September 2011 – June 2012); the fourth and final stage comprised social solidarity to counter the concrete consequences of the anti-austerity measures (June 2012 – December 2014).

While it was preceded and followed by different stages of protest, the occupation of Syntagma Square on 25th of May 2011 and the subsequent rise of the so-called Greek Indignants became one of the widely recognized symbols of anti-austerity protests in the country. Overall, the culture of participation that characterized the Greek Indignants who gathered in the lower part of the square was consistent with some of the traits that characterized anti-austerity and pro-democracy movements that developed in the MENA region, in Spain and, later, in the US. Amongst others, a common trait was the emphasis activists put on transparency and inclusivity in the decision-making process, which activists managed through the method of consensus during the protest camps' general assemblies (cfr. della Porta 2013). While, generally speaking, the culture of participation offers some rules-of-thumb to activists with regard to the social practice of participation, the thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews revealed three main aspects as particularly relevant to appreciate the shared understandings amongst activists who participated in the occupation of Syntagma square. These related to the questions of who could take part in the mobilization, what participants could do to contribute to the occupation and how the resultant differing patterns of participation could bundle up.

First, activists explicitly addressed the issue of who could participate in the mobilization. Instead of being anchored to and tailored on just one long-lasting movement culture – i.e anarchist, libertarian, communist – the occupation of Syntagma Square was based on inclusivity: from the very beginning, it was clear to activists that all people affected by the austerity measures were welcome to participate. The loose group of activists who issued the call to action for 25th of May were indeed seeking to address all kinds of Greek people with encompassing statements, as this activist explains:

> "We started sending out calls with maps, digital maps, saying things like 'we need people to take the square' or, 'let's meet there and see what we can do' with actually a narrative that says that 'we are everyday common people and we need to find a way out of all that', 'we need to make the question: what's next, we need to organize ourselves and we need to stand up and fight for what's going on and make our stands'". (Interview GR_16, Athens, July 2015)

The call to action that circulated on Facebook for the 25th of May action in Syntagma Square reflected the intended openness of the Greek Indignants. Indeed, other activists perceived the initial organizers of the Syntagma Square occupation as something different from the usual movement organizations active in Greece:

> "[they were] a group of activists that went into the Spanish assemblies, in solidarity to the Spanish movement. And from Facebook they called for a protest in Syntagma Square on the 25th of May 2011, but these activists were not traditional activists of the left in Greece. They were more like … hipster kind of activists..." (Interview GR_12, Athens, July 2015)

The important role of activists who were not considered to be the usual Greek protesters, coupled with the presence of a strong blogger community in the country also contributed to spark the occupation of Syntagma Square. In this case, the blogger community was independent from the strong political identity cleavages that otherwise characterize the more traditional movement organizations of the country, as this activist recalls:

> "the blogger community was kind of very lively between 2008 and 2011. So, it was not really just political bloggers, there were general people, they were online and tried to mobilized a little bit people online [, but] it was unstructured" (Interview GR_02, Athens, July 2015)

The activists who worked towards the occupation of Syntagma square and those who then took part in the mobilization grew a shared, inclusive attitude towards participation in the protests. As with other anti-austerity and pro-democracy movements (cfr. della Porta et al 2016), the opposition between the elite and the people suffering from the elites' misbehavior at the political and economic level triggered a genuinely welcoming frame of mind towards all kinds of protest participants.

Second, another relevant dimension of the culture of participation related to the patterns and/or degree of involvement in the Syntagma Square occupation. As another activist remembers, the call for action did not present any relevant political connotation and, as such, was able to attract a diverse range of participants, joining the day of protest as individuals without any strong political affiliation or experience:

> "I was involved in individual terms at the beginning, as I think everybody else, more or less; everybody else was involved in individual terms, after reading a call that had been made from Facebook, for the 25th May. It was a call without any specific political identity; it was just a call for a reunion, an assemblage around the Parliament Square, Syntagma Square." (Interview GR_01, Athens, July 2015)

Many participants in the Syntagma Square occupation were there first as individuals who wanted to make their contribution to the protest. In this regard, the very type of protest event – a long-lasting occupation of a public space in the city center – also attracted the support of many Greeks who wanted to contribute to the protests:

> "After some ten-fifteen days, that thing started growing with lots of people participating, lots of volunteers trying to come in and find things to do. People bringing us stuff from old

couches and chairs, to pencils, pens, paper, old PCs and so on" (Interview GR_16, Athens, July 2015)

As these interview extracts also evoke, activists in Syntagma Square developed a culture of participation that was multiple: it valued both the smaller and bigger contributions that each participant could make to keep the mobilization going, welcoming not just collective actors but especially people who joined the mobilization as individuals.

Third, another relevant dimension is the level of cohesiveness that characterized participation in the Syntagma Square occupation. The participants in the mobilization did not develop a monolithic attitude towards the way in which people should live the occupation. Rather, the culture of participation was mosaic-like. Syntagma Square, indeed, brought together individual participants with different values and beliefs: many scholars, for instance, pointed to the division of the square into two sectors (cfr. della Porta et al. 2016, Kavada and Dimitriou 2017, Kaika and Karaliotas 2016), as this activist also explained when thinking about the composition of the occupation:

"In Syntagma Square, you can say that occupation was somehow divided into the upper square and the bottom square. In the upper square, it was mostly people who were more nationalist; there were people with Greek flags, shouting about politicians being traitors, also people who supported conspiracy theories. While in the bottom square, there was an ongoing assembly and it was more, let's say, somehow more linked to the left tradition, more linked to direct democracy" (Interview GR_06, Athens, July 2015).

A cleavage could certainly be detected between these two types of the Greek Indignants, but they stayed side-by-side within the same public space, with tensions increasing towards the

end of the occupation (Kalika and Karaliotas 2016); many protest participants considered the two sectors to be part of the same mobilization in any case (Kavada and Dimitriou 2017).

Furthermore, Syntagma Square brought together individuals who were participating in a protest for the first time with activists who had already participated in previous waves of protest. This became more and more evident some days after the beginning of the occupation, during which some of the activists' previous political experiences was relevant in transforming the gathering in Syntagma square into a more stable occupation:

> "Some of [the protest participants] were previous activists for solidarity campaigns on Zapatistas issues. So it was this mix mixture between the new activists […] and previous activists coming from campaigns of solidarity to Zapatistas and they meet each other and they started to think to…to think about how this protest will go along. […] They had been already involved in movement organizations so they had this vision of organising protests, not just, you know, make an event and then go back to their places. And so [they took] the decision to organize the everyday life of the square, to make something on the square." (Interview GR_01, Athens, July 2015).

These movement organizations had indeed already been active against austerity measures since 2010, when several protest events hit the country (Rüdig and Karyotis 2014), and they entered in contact with the individual activists who participated in the Greek Indignants mobilization. While Syriza silently embraced the occupation of Syntagma square providing resources and yet remaining in the background, left-wing anti-capitalist organizations and anarchist collectives had a more visible role in the mobilization: they provided resources, but also understanding of how to participate in an occupation (Kanellopoulos et al. 2017). As this activist explains, the result was an encounter between different cultures of participation

within the same space and time of political unrest, in which individuals with very different backgrounds came together with already experienced activists:

> "[there was this] multitude without previous knowledge [of street mobilizations], but we transferred the practices of social movements to this multitude and this multitude started to act as a social movement. It was a really popular protest because there were people also very conservative that had just lost their jobs, lost their homes, lost everything and they were involved in this multitude as well" (Interview GR_01, Athens, July 2015).

Such diffusion of knowledge of how to perform many of the activities linked to the occupation of Syntagma Square was not always smooth, though, as I will also show below.

In sum, the thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews contributed to the refinement of the meaning the cultures of participation acquired in the framework of the Syntagma square occupation. Three aspects emerged as particularly relevant in this regard, each linked to a specific quality: (1) an inclusive understanding of who could participate in the mobilization; (2) a frame of mind that valued the acceptance of multiple patterns and/or degrees of participation; (3) a positive orientation towards a mosaic-like cohesiveness that rested on the assemblage of individual and collective, newcomers and experienced participants. In the next section, I will show how these traits of the culture of participation interlaced with activists' communication strategies for the visibility of the Syntagma Square occupation.

Strategies of visibility in the Syntagma Square occupation

Interaction with the media to obtain visibility is one of the long-standing features of social movements, as many studies of mainstream media and political mobilization testify (Sobieraj

2011). Activists, furthermore, have always engaged in the production and circulation of their own media content to represent themselves and their claims in the public space through alternative, radical and autonomous media: from flyers and posters to zines, free radio, and community television (Coyer et al. 2007). At the end of the 1990s, changes at the level of information and communication technologies (ICTs) had already had a strong impact on how activists communicated with their constituencies, potential allies and protest targets (Juris 2008). As noted in the introduction, in the past decade social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have allowed activists involved in anti-austerity protests to obtain a wide reach, with millions of people all over the world interacting daily using these platforms. Despite their global presence, these social media platforms interlace differently with protests, according to the contextual factors that characterize them. In what follows, I will focus on one such contextual factor – the inclusive, multiple and mosaic-like culture of participation that characterized the Greek Indignants – to appreciate how it intertwined with activists' usages of these social media platforms, other digital media, and non-digital media for the visibility of the Syntagma Square occupation.

The Inclusive culture of participation and loose visibility strategies

The inclusive culture of participation rendered the communication strategy towards visibility somewhat loose. While a press/multi-media team was set up during the occupation, the public representation of what happened in Syntagma square was also in the hands of other collective actors who were not necessarily involved in the main organizing bodies of the occupation – that is, the general assembly and the working groups. This activist, for instance, recalls the presence of an independent radio station linked to an anarchist collective:

> "And there was a radio too... that went in Syntagma Square... it was RADIO ENTASI, it was broadcasting live from Syntagma Square, all the time... it was run by Alfa Kappa, from anti-authoritarian movement organization which is kind of mild anarchist... we call them the Syriza of the anarchists, they are very bureaucratic and… some sort of center-left anarchists" (Interview GR_12, Athens, July 2015)

Other types of alternative media collectives, not linked to any distinct movement organization, were also present with the objective of producing information on Syntagma square. This was the case of Dromografos, a collective of photo-journalists that had been founded in 2011 to document the early anti-austerity protests occurring in the streets of Athens through pictures that were posted on the collective's website, Facebook page and Twitter feed (Interview GR_17, Athens, July 2015). Another relevant alternative media outlet was The Press Project, which started as a Twitter account, used to comment on the unfolding of the debt crisis in Greece, but which was soon transformed into a proper informational website, aimed at countering the biased mainstream media narrative about the economic and political events in the country and at offering accurate information to those living outside Greece. As one of the founders of The Press Project explains, they became a rather stable presence in Syntagma square:

> "When this thing started we went to Syntagma Square and they have assembly in the Syntagma Square so went there and we asked them the permission to make a television live-streaming of what was happening and they gave us the possibility of accessing to that. We respect them, for example putting our cameras in a way so if anybody doesn't want to have his face shown in our video and all that stuff. It had a huge impact through international audience. We had about 800,000 viewers every day from the Syntagma square" (Interview GR_18, Athens, July 2015)

Activists allowed the Press Project to be in Syntagma Square to broadcast the general assembly live through their website. The inclusive culture of participation that characterized the mobilization contributed to the embrace of many different alternative media projects that were able to amplify the voice of the square well beyond activist circles and, in some cases, well beyond Greece.

The multiple culture of participation and the plurality of viewpoints

The movement culture was also multiple, accommodating the participation of people as individuals in the Syntagma Square occupation. This feature certainly allowed the occupation of Syntagma Square to express dissent against austerity measures through a diverse range of voices. However, this also posed some challenges for the visibility of the movement. From the very beginning, the Greek Indignants relied on Facebook to spread their call for actions and enable their voice to be heard by a wide audience. Indeed, many Facebook pages were created that were connected to the Indignant movement, none of them being the official one (Kavada and Dimitriou 2017). Speaking about one such page – named 'Indignant of Syntagma Square' – this activist explains that Facebook was in line with the idea of protesters speaking for themselves without the intermediation of any other (mainstream) media outlet:

> "Facebook was considered the most direct, the more horizontal space and the most inclusive place of expression and coordination and also the profile was open and everybody could make comments on the different press releases or announcements or whatever so it was also a space of public debate if you want. It was chaos as you can imagine. It was also an arena for everybody to express his outrage for everything. So even if it was very liberating for people, it

> wasn't really functional because we didn't take into account what was written. We couldn't organize this information, we couldn't organize this chaos so it was just ok for everybody who wanted to feel involved in the debate" (Interview GR_01, Athens, July 2015)

Interestingly, the multifaceted culture of participation had consequences that went beyond social media platforms. It was through the daily occupation of Syntagma Square itself that some individual activists managed their own interactions with mainstream media in an independent way, without consulting the general assembly and with the aim of acquiring their own visibility within the mobilization.

> "Some people involved in the protest had some personal interests and so they invited their media of their taste, they made interviews with very ambiguous mainstream media. So we insisted to have a control on this and we went to the general assembly saying that people inside the protest make their own personal campaign by inviting the media they want, so if we don't decide collectively, we don't avoid media, we just give the power to different people to make their personal campaigns." (Interview GR_07, Athens, July 2015)

The plural culture of participation accommodated different degrees of involvements with regard to the construction of meanings on the occupation itself, too, through a wide range of media technologies. The production of media coverage was not in the hands of certain specific activists, but, rather, was spread among a diverse range of protest participants who took pictures, shot videos and wrote accounts of what was going on during the demonstration. As this activist makes clear, the role of the press/multi-media team was not so much that of coordinating the production of such materials, but rather of curating them into meaningful assemblages:

> "It was working in a [unintelligible] way... everybody would go out and produce whatever articles or photos or videos they could and distribute in the way they can. And in the end there would be... I mean everyday there would be a meeting of the media center team... and another smaller group would form, that would shift through all this material and try to make some selections and remix it and push it more strongly in other social media like Facebook, or blogs, and of course the official website of Syntagma Square." ." (Interview GR_06, Athens, July 2015)

The work of curation at the collective level of the press/multi-media team within Syntagma Square became crucial for organizing the visibility of the movement in a consistent narrative, something that was otherwise difficult to achieve despite the richness of the bottom-up media coverage of the mobilization.

The mosaic-like culture of participation and the recombination of voice

The culture of participation was not only inclusive and multiple, but also mosaic-like, since it aimed at keeping together individual participation and collective participation in the Syntagma Square occupation, as well as at reconciling the presence of different movement cultures linked to the long-standing movement organizations.

Cleavages were present in the press/multi-media team with regard to the participation of individuals at their very first experience alongside those who had a long-time involvement in movement organizations. This activist explains that this created some difficulties in the coordination of the multi-media team itself:

> "We had two different groups of persons. Those with any previous political experience who did not have the mood to make things together, to act collectively and they thought it was a

> very personal challenge. And those with previous militant experience, with experience of acting collectively, and I was one of them. It was very difficult for us to explain to the others that it was not something personal, but collective and that we needed to discuss about different problems and to reach consensus and not each taking decisions by oneself…" (Interview GR_01, Athens, July 2015)

At the same time, the press/multi-media team also experienced some challenges with regard to its role in creating a cohesive "voice of the movement" while respecting the decision-making bodies of the Syntagma square occupation:

> "It was a very difficult job because you had to obtain the approval of a huge general assembly even to post a silly thing, you had to pass through the assembly to do everything, so this made the work a lot more difficult than if you just followed the political line. But on the other hand this was a lesson for everybody there to try to be at the same time confident with the ideals of the square, direct democracy and so on, and on the other point of view to also be effective, you had to find a middle ground." (Interview GR_02, Athens, July 2015)

Furthermore, the use of a social media platform like Facebook, which assigns a lot of power to individuals in its management, intersected in problematic ways with the mosaic-like culture of participation, in which individual participants combined with the broader collectivity of the mobilization. As with other contemporary mobilizations in Spain, the UK and the US (cfr. Mattoni 2018, Gerbaudo 2017, Kavada 2015), the Greek Indignants also had to face problems related to the administration of the official website of the Indignant movement (Kavada and Dimitriou 2017) and to the administration of the Facebook pages related to the mobilization. This activist, for instance, recalls that:

> "the admin of the Facebook page was a guy completely individualized that didn't participate in… you know, in writing documents and things like that. He just wanted to impose his technical abilities and within his abilities to impose also his personal view. He told us that he could dominate, that he could decide for everything and as you can image, it was a big issue of dispute between us. But at the same time we couldn't put this disagreement in front of the general assembly because everybody was…we didn't want to discourage people. We wanted to create the feeling that [the Facebook page] was something that was produced in collective terms, that we are all together and we are going to fight together" (Interview GR_05, Athens, July 2015)

The presence of individual participation in the framework of a multifaceted culture of participation, coupled with the technical opportunities presented by social media platforms, rendered its management even more individualized. However, as the activists also explained, conflicts relating to the administration of the Facebook page were kept private so as not to disrupt the image of a mobilization that was able to keep everybody – individuals and groups alike – together in the collective effort of the Syntagma Square occupation.

In short, the mosaic-like movement culture of participation caused several challenges in managing communication strategies to obtain visibility. Many activists found it especially challenging to recombine the different people that were able to coexist in the occupation of Syntagma Square in a unified voice. What seemed particularly difficult was to keep together the individual and the collective levels of participation in the production of visibility, as well as the multi-media team and general assembly's decisions on what to render visible and how.

Conclusions

In this article, I explored the nexus between the culture of participation and activists' communication strategies for the visibility of the Syntagma Square occupation. I thus

positioned my analysis at the level of the overall moment of mobilization that is labelled with a specific name – the Greek Indignants –, which acquires distinct temporal boundaries – there is something before and something else after the occupation of Syntagma Square – and develops a specific culture of participation – that goes beyond distinct movement cultures, such as the anarchist culture or the left-wing culture. As a first step in the analysis, I disentangled the main features of the culture of participation that characterized the Syntagma Square occupation: its inclusiveness, multiplicity and mosaic-like nature. I then examined how such traits intertwined with activists' communication strategies for the visibility of the mobilization.

The development of an inclusive culture of participation led to a loose control over those entitled to speak on behalf of the Syntagma Square occupation: alternative media collectives who were not part of the mobilization in the first place were free to access the occupation and to speak about it to their publics. Then, the forming of a multifaceted culture of participation welcoming many patterns and/or degrees of participation led to the multiplication of the viepoints on the mobilization that crystallized into a wide range of media contents. Activists were then forced to engage in a continuous work of curation to construct a consistent narrative of Syntagma Square, collecting and selecting the many accounts that individual participants produced daily in the site of the occupation. Finally, the presence of a mosaic-like culture of participation allowed for the combination of individual and collective actors, newcomers and experienced activists who sometimes had difficulties in recombining their communication work within the framework of the Syntagma Square occupation. In particular, the individualization of protest visibility management, both in social media platforms and through face-to- face interactions, were relevant challenges. More specifically, the activists who participated in the multi-media team also had to face the slow pace of the general assembly in reaching common decisions, which contrasted with the multi-

media team's willingness to construct a continuous live narrative of the Syntagma Square occupation.

Overall, this article contributes to the literature on social movements' cultures and communication technologies that aims to refine and specify further the elements that characterize movement cultures. The main theoretical claim behind this article, indeed, is that we cannot consider movement cultures as a monolithic construct transversally affecting activists' usages of both digital media and non-digital media. First, there is the need to understand social movements' cultures as embedded into their broader context – that is, a context of mobilization in which a wide range of social practices emerge. In this regard, movement cultures can be linked to the social practice of participation, as I did in this article, but also to other things, like, for instance, the social practice of organization or the social practice of protesting. Second, as the empirical analysis shows, movement cultures related to a specific type of social practice – i.e. the one of participation – hold more explanatory power when we split them into different sub-dimensions to then understand how each of them intertwines with a specific aspect of activists' communication strategies. While the development of an inclusive understanding of who can participate in a protest is telling on the openness and looseness of the communication strategy for the construction of visibility, it is not able to explain the challenges that activists faced with regard to some of the individualization patterns that characterized the public face of the mobilization. This aspect, though, could be appreciated by taking into consideration the emergence of a mosaic-like culture of participation in the Greek Indignants. In sum, to appreciate the manifold interactions of activists with the media in an age of media abundance, we should employ an approach to social movements' culture that is able to grasp the nuances of activists' shared cognitive, emotional and moral understandings and their concrete embodiments of what it takes to make a social movement occur, develop and thrive. In this article, I have made some

preliminary steps towards the development of such an approach, the strength of which should be further explored through the empirical investigation of other countries and other types of mobilizations.

[1] Details on the project to be insterted here.

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