

Media and Collective Action in Greece: From Indignation to Solidarity

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This article explores the role of media and communication processes in the organization of collective action in Greece within the context of the Aganaktismeni (Indignant) protests and subsequent solidarity networks. Theoretically, the paper employs the concept of communication ecology in order to highlight the complex intertwined network of different media platforms within which collective action is embedded. The concept allows us to explore collective action both within the specific cultural and political context of Greece, as well as beyond specific moments of political mobilization and across time. Based on interviews with activists from a variety of solidarity networks in Athens, we discuss the use of media and unmediated communication practices employed for the organization and mobilization of collective action. We argue that these practices need to be explored beyond the moment of protest in order to better understand how collective action moves across social and political sites.

Keywords: collective action, protests, communication ecology, social movements, solidarity networks, collective identity

Inspired by the Spanish Indignados, the movement that was first launched in the Spanish squares on May 15, 2011, the Greek “Aganaktismeni” (*Indignants*) made their appearance a few days later, on May 25, at Syntagma square in Athens. Similarly to their Spanish counterpart, Aganaktismeni was an expression of citizen indignation against the austerity measures implemented to tackle the euro crisis as well as against the political establishment (Giovanoulos & Mitropoulos, 2011). Despite its short-lived presence in the Greek squares, which ended by a forced evacuation in August 2011, the Aganaktismeni helped ingrain a sense of collective identity in Greek people and has been regarded as a significant moment in contemporary politics (Stavrides, 2012).

The Indignados and Aganaktismeni are one expression of the global “movements of the squares” (Gerbaudo, 2012) that started with the Arab Spring revolutions in 2011 and continued with the Occupy movement later that year. Central to academic discussions about these movements and subsequent similar political mobilizations has been the role of digital and, in particular, social media. Facebook and Twitter have been instrumental for mobilization and organization purposes both for the Aganaktismeni protests (Theocharis, 2016) and the Indignados movement overall (Gerbaudo, 2012). In this context, social media has been approached as instrumental for collective action.

In this article, we explore how the communication practices of Aganaktismeni enabled the transposition of the political claims of the protest movement into solidarity networks operating within the city of Athens. These practices, we argue, are not restricted to the use of social media but need to be observed in relation to the broader communication ecology within which the protesters and activists are embedded. We employ the concept of communication ecology here to highlight both the complexity of mediated and interpersonal networks within which activists operate, as well as the continuity of their communication practices that not only enabled the emergence of collective action but also sustained it through time. We argue that in order to explore media practices in political mobilization we should look beyond the moment of protest and see how collective action moves from one social site to another (Prentoulis & Thomassen, 2014). The aim of the paper is, therefore, twofold: Empirically, we provide an exploration of the theoretical concept of communication ecology put forth by social movement scholars in recent years (Treré & Mattoni, 2016); analytically, we argue for the study of collective action as rearticulated in different sites, which activists themselves see as continuous. These sites can be conceptualized both in spatial terms, describing the movement from the squares to different grassroots hubs in Athens, and as spaces of political activity developed and transformed over time.

The discussion below draws upon interviews with activists that were involved in both the Greek indignant movement and later solidarity networks. We start by setting the theoretical background for the analysis. We explore the concept of communication ecologies in relation to social movements and describe the Greek context within which the study is situated. The review of the empirical material illustrates the continuity of collective action from the Aganaktismeni movement to solidarity networks through complex communication practices.

Social Movements and the Media

A plethora of studies have explored the relationship between social movements and the media over the last decades. The networked nature of digital media and participatory potential

of Web 2.0 have inspired significant debates about whether and how such characteristics of communication technologies enable more horizontal and inclusive forms of political participation and resistance. Drawing upon cases such as the global justice movement (Della Porta & Mosca, 2005), the Occupy movement (Kavada, 2015) and anti-austerity protests (Gerbaudo, 2012; Treré & Mattoni, 2016), such studies have explored how collective action is enabled and reinforced through digital technologies, and especially social media, which allow for practices of collective identification, as they become “a source of coherence as shared symbols, a centripetal focus of attention, which participants can turn to when looking for other people in the movement” (Gerbaudo, 2014, p. 266).

At the same time, however, these studies have also extensively questioned the potential of digital media for the formation of collectivities conducive to political action. The ability of social media to aggregate individuals behind causes rapidly but with no necessary long-standing commitment has been criticised for allowing merely shallow commitments and the “dispersion of critical energy” necessary for a “coherent opposition” to social inequality (Dean, 2012, p. 126). Furthermore, the commercial nature of social media platforms, which capitalise on the data generated by users and activists, embeds collective action within capitalist frameworks and shifts the emphasis from the use value of shared messages to their exchange value (Kaun, 2016; Loader & Mercea, 2011). Given actual uses to which social networking is put, Fenton and Barassi (2011, p. 191) argue that social media politics are actually an expression of individualistic politics reproducing neoliberal ideas.

Despite the presence of such critical perspectives and the increasing move away from the early “digital exceptionalism” (Marwick, 2013) that approached the Internet as radically different from other forms of communication and inherently democratizing, there still seems to be an overemphasis on the “new,” when it comes to studies of the relationship between social movements and the media, which ostensibly overlooks continuities in political organizing (Kaun, 2016). Although research has insightfully illustrated the complexity of communication dynamics in online-mediated activism (Bennett, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Kavada, 2015), digital technologies remain the starting point of enquiry into the organisation of social movements. Relevant arguments continue to be largely web-centric, paying little attention to the persistent role of offline forms of mediated communication and neglecting the reinforcing relationship between digital technologies and offline organizing forms (Wolfson, 2014).

Anthropological approaches to the study of social movements have illustrated the intersecting nature of digital and offline communication dynamics. In his study of the development of Indymedia, Wolfson found that the creation of physical spaces and offline swarming was central to the building of social relations and, therefore, equally important to activists as the use of online spaces such as websites and listservs (Wolfson, 2014, p. 169).

Indeed, the “absolute openness” of the online world was criticised by some activists as leading “to the domination of an upper-middle-class white voice” and direct work with specific communities with no internet access or digital literacy was preferred instead (Wolfson, 2014, p. 172). Barassi (2013) also argues that grassroots organizations remain attached to material forms of communication, such as activist magazines, that construct a feeling of belonging and cohesion. Besides such activist media, mass media can also play a role in the organization success of alternative political action, as Costanza-Chock found in their study of “Day without an immigrant” in the U.S. in 2006, when the scale of protests were largely due to the participation of commercial Spanish-language broadcasters (Costanza-Chock, 2014). What these studies highlight is how digital technologies, traditional media and offline communication intersect and often work together within social movements. In a similar vein, what we argue here is that the study of intersecting communication practices provides us not only with a better understanding of collective action but also a clearer overview of the transformation of this action from one site of political engagement to another.

Collective Action in Complex Communication Ecologies

It is the above considerations that scholars of social movements take into account, when arguing for the employment of the concept of “communication ecology” in the study of social activism. The concept emphasizes the fact that information technologies and other forms of communication operate and are intertwined with other social movement practices within specific environments—and, for our purposes here, with interconnected but different social sites (Altheide, 1994). It, therefore, highlights the complexity of the relationship between social movements and media technologies and moves beyond recent privileged analyses of single platforms or technologies over others (Treré & Mattoni, 2016, p. 291). It also avoids the overestimation of the democratic potential of digital technologies and the assumption of their inherent horizontality and transparency (Norval, 2006, p. 102). It is for these reasons that we employ it as a framework here to illustrate how collective action within the communication ecology of the Aganaktismeni protests transformed and was re-articulated in the form of solidarity networks in the city of Athens.

The metaphor of ecology has been employed in a range of ways and from different traditions—illustrated in the variety of similar terms such as “media” (Fuller, 2005), “communication” (Mercea et al., 2016) and “information” (Nardi & O’Day, 1999; Treré, 2012) ecology—in a way that makes it virtually impossible to provide a univocal definition of what communications ecologies are (Treré & Mattoni, 2016, p. 295). We appropriate here Nardi and O’Day’s definition of communication ecology as “a system of people, practices, values, and technologies in a particular local environment” (Nardi & O’Day, 1999, p. 49). In this conceptualization “the spotlight is not on technology, but on human activities that are served

by technology” (Nardi & O’Day, 1999, p. 49.). These are situated within networks of mediated, interpersonal and organizational connections, which function both as a context and as resources for individuals “to construct knowledge and to achieve goals” (Broad et al., 2013, p. 328). Accounting for the significance of locality, the ecological trope alludes to the specific cultural, social, political and technological characteristics of spatially circumvented contexts. Placing the focus on social practices for the achievement of goals, the approach also allows us to look at how the evolution of such goals is reflected on the development of processes and technological uses and within specific structural constraints and opportunities in ways that (re)articulate the collective over time (Treré & Mattoni, 2016).

We understand here collective identity as “an interactive and shared definition produced by a number of individuals (or groups at a more complex level) concerning the orientations of their action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which such action is to take place” (Melucci, 1996, p. 70). Collective identities, therefore, emerge in the process of collective action (Melucci, 1985), as well as processes of communication among participants (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2014; Kavada, 2015). In this context, collective action develops in interconnected and overlapping sites of communication and conversation, with varying spatialities and temporalities (Kavada, 2015, p. 876). Examining the role of media in collective action requires, therefore, to look at processes of communication, both online and offline, that allow for movement participants to reflect on their vision and membership, as well as the platforms through which this communication takes place and their norms and regulations (Kavada, 2015). At the same time, we are interested in how such expressions of the collective are re-articulated and, therefore, sustained in different spatial and temporal contexts beyond particular moments of political mobilization. As the movement develops and evolves, its aims change and so do its communication practices within its communication ecology. Its collective identity is thus re-articulated in different actions and processes.

The collective identity of the protest movement of the squares, we argue below, was re-articulated in solidarity networks that operated after the end of the Aganaktismeni demonstrations in August 2011. We understand networks here as “a set of interconnected nodes” and as “open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network, namely as long as they share the same communication codes” (Castells, 1996, p. 470). In the case of solidarity networks, the nodes are groups of various sizes and levels of formal organization, consisting of individuals actively engaged in remedying the effects of the financial crisis in Greece and providing for those in need. As Podolny and Page (1998) have argued, network forms of organizations, in the absence of a legitimate organizational authority, are forming relationships and engage in exchanges based on a distinct ethical behaviour. Solidarity in the groups of Athens-based activists we study here expresses this ethical behaviour and functions as an active principle that challenges

the competitive nature of neoliberalism with an emancipatory aim. In this sense, solidarity is an expression of political action in a broader sense.

This centrality of solidarity as an active, political principle differentiates the networks we are discussing from both non-governmental organizations offering relief and other charitable institutions, such as the Church, which not only are structured according to organizational authority and hierarchies but also provide services that are not antagonistic to the existing socio-economic reality. In effect, the lack of organizational coherence and resources of the Greek indignant movement has produced in consecutive years solidarity networks as “hidden” forms of resistance (Scott, 1990) or as “submerged networks” (Melucci, 1989) that produced a particular form of collective action.

Aganaktismeni and Solidarity Networks

We approach the Greek crisis as the context and fertile ground for the formation of new collective identities, expressed through the movement of Aganaktismeni and the concomitant solidarity networks. Touraine has argued that social movements emerge as a response against the threat to the ability of a social group to make decisions (Touraine, 2002, p. 90). The financial crisis of 2008 has posed a threat to this capacity for social groups and national populations alike. The signing of the first bailout package in 2010 by the then Prime Minister George Papandreou placed Greece under the economic - and by implication political - control of the troika, comprising of the Eurogroup, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The further announcements of new austerity measures in 2011 led to an “organic crisis” in Gramsci’s terms: a generalized crisis of social identities (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 136). This crisis can be also understood as what Laclau has called a dislocatory event, namely an event that puts in question the whole (even if only “imagined”) order of society (Laclau, 2005, p. 280). The “holes” created in the symbolic order of sociopolitical reality by such an event are experienced as sentiments of discontent. It is within this context that the Aganaktismeni protests emerged and new collective identities were articulated.

Stavrakakis and Katsampekis identify the mobilizations of the squares as the product of a dislocatory effect that “loosened the ties of a large part of society with the established parties” but also established new subject positions and political subjectivities (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis, 2014, p. 127). In doing so, it opened up the possibility of new forms of collectivity. Although Stavrakakis and Katsampekis locate the latter in the populist discourse of SYRIZA, the Greek left party that embraced the demands of the popular movement of the squares, and ultimately came into power in the general elections of 2015, this paper proposes a more thorough investigation into the grassroots politics of the protests, the solidarity groups that followed them and the collective formations they produced.

The use of social media for the protests of Aganaktismeni has been noted as a characteristic unique in the history of political mobilization and organization-based protests in the country (Theocharis, 2016). Political activism in Greece had been traditionally organised by the “usual suspects” of trade unions and politically affiliated activists (Rüdig & Karyotis, 2013). The self-organization and coordination enabled by the use of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, allowed for the mobilization of a different and much broader body of the population (Theocharis, 2016). The prevailing groups among the protesters were no more the “urban proletariat” but the “precariat”, namely the people in precarious employment, and the unemployed (Sotirakopoulos & Sotiropoulos, 2013, p. 450). A significant characteristic of the protests, therefore, was the diversity of the subject positions composing them: “the indignant pensioner (whose pension has been devalued), the indignant parent [...] the indignant shop owner (whose clientele is now diminished), the indignant taxpayer (whose reduced salary cannot accommodate the increased rate of taxation)” (Theodossopoulos, 2014, p. 370). These subject positions were rearticulated under the trope of indignation with old and new political identities from the “indignant conservative” to the “indignant communist” and the “indignant fascist” (Theodossopoulos, 2014, p. 370.).

Despite the relatively short existence of the movement of Aganaktismeni that spanned roughly over two months, resistance practices initiated in the squares were re-contextualized in the formation of solidarity networks, which, through local-level engagement, reconstituted the “people” against the established political system. The immediate aim of these networks was to offer relief to those in severe hardship, such as the people with no health and social insurance, the homeless or those deprived of economic means. These grassroots groups organized solidarity clinics with volunteering doctors, anti-middleman food markets, food banks, and offered emotional and psychological support (Demertzian, 2014). The Aganaktismeni not only produced “hidden forms of resistance” (Scott, 1990) but also contentious, radical politics on different social sites. The articulation of such political subjectivities in the form of solidarity networks not only tackle the immediate effects of the crisis but also constitute a conscious alternative politics and a critique to austerity policies (Rakopoulos, 2014). In this context, “solidarity discourse is becoming counter-hegemonic to that of debt” (Rakopoulos, 2014, p. 313).

Solidarity groups multiplied quickly after the protests. Although by 2011 relief to people in need living in Athens and the broader Attica area was provided by institutions, such as charities, NGOs and the Church, with only a handful of solidarity networks run by activists,

the picture changed dramatically after the last months of 2011¹. During the period 2012-2014 21 social pharmacies and clinics were recorded, along with 55 anti-middlemen markets and foodbanks, and 36 cooperatives. Participants in the networks were both seasoned activists and people with no previous political engagement, all finding in solidarity groups an emancipatory democratic potential that differentiated them from the work of charities and NGOs.

Our aim here is to examine the organization potential of media both in the indignant protests and the consequent formation of solidarity networks. Central in our investigation is the assumption that we are dealing with a re-articulation of collective action from one site to another enabled, sustained and defined by particular uses of available communication channels. In the process of collective identity formation social media are part of the ideological reservoir of grassroots politics, justifying their character as leaderless, horizontal organization of “the people.” They play a decisive role in enabling the displacement and de-contextualization of demands from the protest movement to grassroots solidarity groups. In this, however, social media were not alone; an important role was also played by mainstream media, as well as unmediated communication.

The Greek Media System

In order to better understand these communication practices, it is important to situate the study within the Greek media system as the institutional and technological framework within which activists operated. Prominent characteristic of this system, and relevant to our question here, is the relatively low internet penetration. When the movement of *Aganaktismeni* emerged in 2011, internet penetration was at 53% (World Bank, 2014) and social media were mostly used by a young educated minority. These relatively low numbers suggest that one should be cautious not to overstate the role of digital media in the collective action of the protests and solidarity networks. As we will illustrate in the discussion, activists needed to navigate among a range of other media to have their messages heard.

At the same time, the mainstream and mass media are embedded within a deeply ingrained culture of clientelism and political parallelism. Politicians, media and business are operating as a “triangle of power”, where private and political interests are intrinsically intertwined and where the media function as the means through which these interests are played out (Iosifidis & Boucas, 2015). Underlining these power dynamics is a weak and inconsistent

¹ The recording of solidarity groups started informally by activists later incorporated in the umbrella platform “Solidarity for All” (www.solidarity4all.gr). The data presented here has been collected by the current coordinator of the group, Costas Veniotis, one of our interviewees.

regulatory framework. The market deregulation of the 1980s and 1990s allowed for the proliferation of private media and an excessively augmented and financially unsustainable media market, with high levels of media concentration in the hands of Greek businessmen with interests in other sectors of the economy, such as shipping, telecommunications and refining. In this context, the media have been long used as means of political pressure. Newspapers operate as political instruments, broadcasting is politically partisan and displays high levels of sensationalism, while journalists are explicitly or implicitly partisan often pursuing themselves careers in politics (Papathanassopoulos, 1997, 2001). The idea of public service has never fully developed in the Greek media system, both because of the levels of corruption of the media overall and due to the fact that the national broadcaster, ERT, had always been a state channel (Kyriakidou, 2015). Within this media environment, the traditional media are met with widespread distrust, suspicion and hostility.

It is within this media system that collective action in the Aganaktismeni protests and the solidarity networks was articulated. Although the suspicion against traditional media sets the parameters of potential contestation through alternative media, the low rates of internet use means that other factors, media and channels further enabled the contention with mainstream politics and the articulation of collective identities within the context of the crisis. After a short discussion of our methodological choices, we will illustrate how activists employed a variety of media to communicate both with each other and the wider public, as well as the role played by these media in rearticulating collective action from the protest to solidarity networks.

Methodology

We have employed semi-structured interviews to explore how collective identities were articulated and rearticulated both during the Aganaktismeni protests and the following solidarity networks. We reached our interviewees through the snowballing method with the requirement that they had been active in solidarity groups at that moment but also had some previous involvement—no matter how minimal—in the Aganaktismeni protests. The first interviewees were approached through the platform of “Solidarity for All” (www.solidarity4all.gr). This was an initiative loosely associated with SYRIZA that established an online umbrella collective under the name “Solidarity for All”. The group defined its aim as an attempt to contribute to a “life without memoranda, poverty, exploitation, fascism and racism and to the creation of the conditions for a radical political change and social transformation” (“Solidarity for all,” 2013). As an initiative it has a number of objectives, including the facilitation of communication among the different solidarity groups and structures, the exchange of experiences among them as well as increasing their visibility among those searching relief from the consequences of the crisis. At the same time the collective assists the organization of national and international solidarity campaigns. The solidarity

groups focus primarily on one or more of three subject areas: first, on organizing different local anti-middleman markets (where producers sell directly to consumer at lower prices) and collective kitchens and food banks for those without means; second, social clinics and pharmacies offering basic health care services; third, cooperatives.

The interviews were initially designed to take place on one-to-one basis. As some were conducted in solidarity centers, in some instances two or more people joined the discussion. Overall, we conducted twenty interviews with activists from six different solidarity groups in Athens. Half of these groups were principally involved in anti-middleman markets, while the other half had set up social clinics and pharmacies². The interviewees varied in age from people in their late twenties to others in their sixties. The names used here are not their real ones.

In-depth semi-structured interviews allowed for the exploration of the media practices of these activists and the formation of meanings around them. The interviews started with general questions regarding the experience of the interviewees during the Aganaktismeni protests and their decision to get involved with solidarity groups and moved to more specific questions about their use of different communication channels and social media. We focus here on the use of such media and other communication practices within the context of political mobilization and collective action organization. We organize the discussion below along the lines of the different phases in the development of the movement aims; as these develop, so do their media practices and the (re)articulation of the collective. In particular, we differentiate among three different stages of the development from the movement from the protests to solidarity networks: that of political mobilization that was central to the protests, that of coordination and organization of solidarity networks during and after the protests and, finally, that of dissemination of information about the work of solidarity networks once established. For a summary of this discussion, see table 1 below.

Table 1. The Evolution from Protests to Solidarity Networks.

Aim	Mobilize	Organize	Disseminate
Primary media	Websites; social media; mass media	Social media; face-to-face communication	Social media; websites; face-to-face communication; leaflets; mass media
Primary addressees	The broader public (for mass	Other activists (co-ordination and setting up of networks)	People in need of services; the broader

² For a comprehensive map of all social groups operating in Attika see www.solidarity4all.gr/.

	participation in the protests)		public (for donations, volunteers, etc.)
Main time frame	May–August 2011	July 2011–end of 2012	End of 2011–2014 (time of research)

Political Mobilization Through Both “New” and “Old” Media

A few days after the appearance of the Spanish Indignados on May 15 2011 a call appeared on Facebook probing Greek people to protest peacefully at Syntagma Square without flags or banners (Theodossopoulos, 2014). The call (whose origin eluded most of our interviewees) soon went viral and a huge gathering took place in the square in front of the Parliament on May 25 2011. This first Facebook call was the trigger of the protests that were then sustained through a number of other contingent factors. Although social media were central in the initial stage of mobilizations, mass media also played an important role in expanding the scale of protests and sustaining them over time.

Many of our interviewees remembered the wide dissemination of the initial Facebook message—and other related ones—calling for a peaceful gathering at Syntagma. Rumour has it that it had been initiated by a young man from Athens and many people started to “like” and share it on the social network. Soon after the initial call in Athens, similar ones were made urging people to take to the squares of different cities. Participants often recalled that initial excitement of realising the possibility of mass mobilizations offered by social media. As one interviewee recalls:

What was amazing about it was the pace with which it was disseminated. It was crazy, every day it was 20...30,000 thousands more. I invited everyone I knew [via Facebook], almost 2,000 people. (Nikos, from the social and cultural space and solidarity network Ampariza)

The ultimate success of the protests however was the result of many factors, historical contingencies and dissemination by diverse communication channels.

After the Spanish Indignados emerged ten days earlier, a rumour of a banner at Puerta Del Sol with the sarcastic slogan “Silence, or we will awake the Greeks” (according to other accounts “The Greeks are still Sleeping”) had been circulating among those active in grassroots politics (Theodossopoulos, 2014). The rumour, most probably related to a football match incident (Giovanoulos & Mitropoulos, 2011), became part of the ideological reservoir of the activists at Syntagma. It brought within the frame of indignation a sense of national pride: the Greeks could not be the ones seen as unable to resist the austerity measures.

Equally significant for the digital organization of the Aganaktismeni movement was the already existing website of real-democracy.gr. The site had been initiated before the Syntagma protests in support of the Spanish Indignados. The initiators, according to an interviewee, were technologically savvy Greek activists. They started demonstrating in front of the Spanish Embassy after May 15 and had called for an assembly on May 20 2011. Once Aganaktismeni started taking a form, these activists became a central part of the movement. One of our interviewees recalls the discussion he had with them, inviting them to take part in the mass demonstration:

I suggested they join us at Syntagma, this is where the crowds would gather after the Facebook call. They came, fifty people, but they brought real-democracy.gr with them and eventually it was adopted as a central site. (Kostas, Solidarity for All)

Mass media was another, seemingly unintended, facilitator of the Syntagma protests. The coverage of the Aganaktismeni movement was extensive both in the mainstream press and television. This reporting was generally positive (Veneti, Poulakidakos, & Theologou, 2012) or even celebratory (Kyriakidou & Olivas Osuna, 2017). The density and the diversity of the protests of the squares were acclaimed by the mainstream media as “magical”, “a miracle”, “something new” (Kyriakidou & Olivas Osuna, 2017, p. 464). The protests were, therefore, reported in a way similar to media events (Dayan & Katz, 1992), namely events with a ceremonial character, and the gatherings at Syntagma became the unintended facilitators of a national sense of togetherness. At the same time, by highlighting the role of social media in the protests and reporting the hashtags and Facebook pages of the activists, the mainstream media became megaphones for the movement (Kyriakidou & Olivas Osuna, 2017). One interviewee recalls:

images of Syntagma where everywhere, we all knew we will meet there (Eleni, from the Social Medical Centre of Peristeri).

The square gatherings, reported constantly by the mainstream media, became part of a new daily routine, as described by our research participants, “what everyone was doing” during that period. As one interviewee described:

those days I was coming back from the square for a quick shower, had a few hours of sleep and was going back again (Nikos, from Ampariza).

Interestingly, after the initial mobilizations, engagement with social media was less significant in this daily routine of protests. The physical site of the square became a constant and stable meeting place, where protesters knew they would meet each other. In this respect, the mainstream media played a contributing role within the protest communication ecology. This is illustrative of the complexity of the media environment within which the Aganaktismeni operated. Social media were particularly important in the first stage of the protest. Mainstream media channels, even if unintentionally, became part of the communication environment assisting the mobilizations.

From Indignation to Solidarity Networks: Social Media and Face-to-Face Communication

The protests of the Aganaktismeni had faded out by the end of the summer of 2011. On June 29, 2011, amidst parliamentary discussions about the implementation of new austerity measures, police violently attempted to evacuate Syntagma Square as well as other protest spaces in the capital. Demonstrations continued but only sparingly and without their initial fervor. By the end of August 2011, the Greek Indignados were hardly covered in the mainstream media.

However, the communication processes established during the protests were consequently utilized for further organization purposes. These processes, albeit initiated within the context of the political mobilizations of the squares, expanded to different spatialities and temporalities transforming collective action to solidarity networks around the city of Athens. A number of our interviewees, when talking about their participation in collective action, referred to the Aganaktismeni protests as the “phase of Syntagma [Square]”, indicating they considered them part of a longer project and, therefore, implying a continuity between the protests and the activities of the solidarity networks they were involved in. In a lot of cases, this continuity could be identified in particular moments, when the legacy of the Indignant movement was discussed even as the protests were still unfolding in the squares:

The Popular Assembly emerged after the initial Popular Assembly at Syntagma [Square], in 2011. [...]This had already been extensively discussed during the meetings at the square: constructing bases and assemblies in the neighborhoods had often been on the agenda. This is what some people took with them and tried to propagate in print, face-to-face, even via email, nothing too extreme. (George, from the movement Without Middlemen)

The same communication tools employed for the mobilization of the crowds during the protests were utilized for further political action beyond the space and time of the protests.

Face-to-face communication and discussions seemed to be also significant in this transition from the squares to solidarity networks. Similar stories were narrated by a number of our interviewees. For example, the Metropolitan Social Medical Centre in Elliniko, an area in the South of Athens, was initiated by a doctor who was a member of the social medical centre set up at Syntagma square during the Aganaktismeni protests, where doctors and nurses worked for free to help protesters with general advice and care in case of violent encounters with the police. The doctor approached some of the active members of Aganaktismeni after the summer of 2011 and suggested an initiative that would help people in need, especially those with no insurance and access to medical care. The initiative then employed Facebook and a collective mailing list to make its presence known.

Other interviewees talked about how the experience of participating in the Aganaktismeni protests inspired them to actively search for and participate in other forms of political activism. Anna, one of the oldest interviewees at the age of 63, who was initially inspired by her children to participate in the protests of the squares, described how she continued joining demonstrations after the summer of 2011, realizing at some point that these “were not enough” and that she “wanted something more”. Her children put her in touch with Solidarity for All and she was, at the point of the interview, working as an administrator at the Social Medical Centre in Athens.

Such narratives point out the continuity of collective action beyond the moment of the protests through the employment of a range of mediated and unmediated practices and networks that did not die out with the end of Aganaktismeni. The possibility of collective action, as illustrated here, rests on the interplay between attempts to construct a common identity of the “people”—as in the movement of Aganaktismeni—and re-inventions and re-articulations that “spill over” from the site of protest to other socio-political sites—such as the solidarity networks (Prentoulis & Thomassen, 2014). The dislocatory effects of the crisis loosened established ideological and political ties and allowed for the, even if temporary, decomposition and reconfiguration of a collectivity first under the trope of indignation and later under the trope of solidarity.

Solidarity Networks Within a Complex Communication Ecology

Communication and connectivity are decisive for the solidarity networks: first, they are essential in bringing the members of the groups together and allowing them to organize their day-to-day activities and, second, they are necessary for connecting them with those who will benefit from their activities and the broader public allowing them to disseminate the seeds of solidarity within society. At this stage of dissemination, social media remain important but collective action heavily depends on more individualised forms of communication such as face-

to-face conversations and leaflets. Mass media can still play an important role through disseminating and promoting the work of solidarity groups.

What our interviews illustrated was that digital media were both enablers of the social work of the networks and impediments in reaching a broader public. On one hand, the role of social media was often acknowledged by our research participants as instrumental in the work of the solidarity networks. The potential of new media technologies held a distinctive place in their discourse: it allowed for the globalization of resistance, increased democratization and transparency and the dissemination of information. As one interviewee put it:

The Internet is the best thing capitalism has produced (Chris, Without Middlemen movement).

On the other hand, media literacy among solidarity group members varied significantly. One recurring theme in our interviews was how the organizational needs of the groups gave them the initiative to develop their technological skills and start using social media. Some had neither email nor Facebook before joining the groups and were somehow forced into social media in order to follow developments and discussions related to the network's work. When asked about her use of email, Zoe, who worked at the Social Medical Centre at Elliniko, clarified that she only started using it once she started working for the Centre:

That's when I got my own email, as it was needed for organising work. That's when I also got into Facebook but I don't use it much, I don't have much time at work and I get annoyed with it at home. But if I see an announcement, I share it, promote it, etc. (Zoe, Social Medical Centre at Elliniko)

For a lot of our research participants social media were approached in purely instrumental ways and a means to an end:

We know how to use it in order to achieve our objectives, that's it. (Chris, Without Middlemen movement)

Intra-group communications consisted in the use of mailing lists and—more rarely—Facebook. These were integral for the articulation of the group's aims and collective identity, and ultimately, according to participants, also helped with the expansion of their movement. Greater emphasis, however, was given to face-to face communication or the relative immediacy of the telephone. The same emphasis on face-to-face interaction was placed on communicating with the general public. Facebook pages were used by social clinics and pharmacies mainly for appeals for medicine and calls for volunteers. The reach of social

networking sites, however, was perceived as limited, reaching an already finite number of networks of friends and those already involved in the solidarity structures. Interviewees acknowledged the digital divide and the low penetration of the internet in Greece, as discussed above. According to one of our interviewees, in Greece:

The word of mouth is still the best advertising (Pavlos, Solidarity Movement of Workers and Locals of Filis).

When discussing the visibility of one particular clinic in relation to those in need of its services, one volunteer reminded us that those in greater need (for example, many immigrants) had no internet access nor mobile phones:

We have patients that have no phone—or, if they do, they don't have credit—or that are homeless. With regard to our patients, social media cannot play a big role. They can play a role, however, with regard to the mobilization of society. But even that will be up to a point. I mean what? [Is it worth] having an amazing Facebook page and gather “likes”? I need people to bring me milk or to help with something else. (Anna, Social Medical Centre in Athens)

Reaching the disenfranchised in this context means sidestepping digital technologies, the networked nature of which fails to connect activist groups with those that need them the most (Wolfson, 2014, pp. 172–173).

Similarly, the lack of online access among those more in need defined the operation of anti-middleman markets. The objective of those groups was to bring producers and consumers together without mediators. Consumers pre-ordered the available products that were later delivered in a designated pop-up market. Although the communication between solidarity groups and consumers could be electronic (via email for instance) this was less so between solidarity groups and the wider public. The whole ordering process was based on printing and leafleting. As Nikos from Ampariza described, A4 prints with available products and their prices, as well as a narrative of what the network aims were, would be distributed hand-to-hand. About 7,000–8,000 leaflets were distributed before the first market. Orders would then be taken either via phone or through filled-in forms. The importance of personal contact was, therefore, key in promoting the work of solidarity networks and articulating the identity of the movement:

We want to have personal contact with people, it is not only about the distribution of food but also the coming together in a different relationship with the people. We

want to talk, explain who we are and what we do, have a dialogue. (Nikos, Ampariza)

While emphasising the importance of face-to-face interaction, participants also recognised the significance of networking through online information and cited this as one of the reasons behind the creation of “Solidarity for All”. The aim of the organization was to link the solidarity groups together in an autonomous structure, increasing their online visibility and reach. According to one interviewee (involved in the initiative), the logic behind the creation of this organization had been transported from the movement of the squares. Although the site mapped and represented all solidarity groups online, the principles of autonomy and the absence of leadership were respected. He explained the logic behind “Solidarity for All”:

It has the same logic as that behind both social media and movements. A logic which goes against the logic of the state, the logic of the political parties or the older organized movement which operated on a different logic. (Kostas, Solidarity for All)

Similarly, mainstream communication channels were not only accepted but also invited within the communication practices of the activists. The dialogue between the movement and the general public in a few but noticeable cases was assisted by mass media, as was the case during the Aganiktismeni protests. Interviewees belonging to one very well-known social clinic-pharmacy in Athens recalled how SKAI TV and Radio launched appeals for medicines on behalf of the clinic. SKAI Radio broadcasted from the building of the social clinic highlighting the work of the group and at the same time increasing its visibility for a wider audience. One volunteer explained how she got in touch with the social clinic:

I met a SKAI journalist. So one day I called him and asked him to help me to find somewhere where I could volunteer. He had made a programme on solidarity networks (Zoe, Social Medical Centre at Elliniko).

Interestingly, SKAI is owned by Alafouzos, a media mogul with business interests beyond the media (Iosifidis & Boucas, 2015). In this case, however, the interests of the activists were served by an institution implicated in the corrupt “triangle of power” discussed above. Within a complex communication ecology and the particular socio-political context in Greece, diverse communication channels intertwine in an unpredictable way, a complexity difficult to capture in scholarly accounts focusing on digital media. This was acknowledged by one of our interviewees:

Social media could play a viral role in Greece, which, perhaps due to its scale, is mostly based on personal relations: The message you get on Facebook is more meaningful because it is sent by your friend. Twitter, on the other hand, concerns a very specific group of people in Greece—journalists, PR, etc.—and does not play a role in real life, except perhaps in terms of political gossip. And this applies everywhere: how social media will influence the actual space has to do with the surrounding atmosphere and the political culture in each area. (Kostas, Solidarity for All)

Conclusion

In this article, we employed the concept of communication ecology to discuss the complexity of collective action as constituted through diverse communication practices, as well as its continuity through the extension of these practices beyond specific temporalities and spatialities. Based on interviews with activists in Athens, who participated both in the Aganaktismeni protests and solidarity networks, we have illustrated how collective action is organized, sustained and developed. The article, therefore, provides an empirical footing of the communication ecology framework in the context of collective action in austerity Greece. It highlights and illustrates the significance of this framework for illustrating the intertwining of media-centred and unmediated communication practices and their co-development in order to organize as well as transpose collective action from one social site to the other. The concept has helped us to draw attention to the fact that collective action and its constituting communication practices are culturally and socially embedded, by situating them within the particularities of the Greek context. In a country of relatively low internet penetration, activists are aware of digital divides and resourceful in their use of communication platforms. A point often missed by the analyses of the role of media in political mobilization is the fact that political action and the role of technologies in it are always contextual. As political and social mobilization increasingly expands across geographical borders, ostensibly defying local roots, this is an important point to remember.

At the same time, the article provides insights into how collective identity, constituted through action and communication practices, evolves and develops within the communication ecology. As the primary aims of the movement initiated at the squares developed from mobilization to organization and then dissemination of its operations, so did its communication practices as well as the shared understandings of what the character of collective action is. Indignation as a political expression of resentment against the establishment was transformed into solidarity, as an alternative politics to austerity. In this evolution the media were not only part of the communication practices within which collective action was constituted; they were also comprising “the field of opportunities and constraints” (Melucci, 1996, p. 70), which

participants in the movement needed to appropriate, adapt and adjust to depending on their aims and needs. As such, the media were not only constitutive of the movement's collective identity but also integral in its evolution.

This account also provides a more thorough understanding of the political impact of Aganaktismeni, often condemned as failed due to the fact that the ideological claims of the protesters were not translated into institutional politics (Marantzidis, 2015). What we have argued here is that the protests of Aganaktismeni opened up the possibility of new forms of collectivity within solidarity networks. The occupation of the squares were, therefore, an important political moment with significant legacy. Even if not directly translated into parliamentary politics, the spirit of the protests fueled social activism and solidarity movements that still function as alternative forms of social organization in the city of Athens.

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