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## Doctoral Dissertation

Social Media, Citizenship and New Social Movements:  
The Role of Facebook Use in the Construction of  
Collective and Civic Identities by the Indignados  
Movement in Greece and France

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Phd Dissertation

**Social Media, Citizenship and New Social Movements:  
The Role of Facebook Use in the Construction of  
Collective and Civic Identities by the Indignados  
Movement in Greece and France**

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## **Abstract**

At the dawn of the 21st century we witness an upsurge in mobilization and collective action by a wide range of activists and groups engaging in social and political protest, all over the world. What these movements have in common is not only their association with the global financial crisis but also their extensive use of online social media like Facebook and Twitter for mobilization, participation and coordination. Thus, the Indignados movement which sprung in Southern Europe in 2008, constitute a new phenomenon that deserves to be studied in its own right, not only as a form of social movements per se, but also with regard to the role of digital technologies in collective action. Scholars from a wide range of disciplines have tended to focus on questions about the role of the internet in protest, without attending to the changing meaning of what it means to be a citizen within such movements and through their practices and discourses (see Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Two questions in need of empirical study and which remain unanswered in the literature are: 1. How is civic and collective identity constructed within current constellations of social movements such as the Indignados? 2. How is this construction process mediated by the use of Facebook? This dissertation responds to this need through an empirical study of the discourses and online content of Indignados activists in France and Greece. Drawing an analytical framework from the components of civic and collective identity, it brings together elements that are necessary for a two-level analysis: a) the tangible aspects such as the practices of movements and their participants and b) the ideational aspects such as the feelings of activists within the movement and in relation to the nation.

More specifically, this thesis aimed, first, at mapping different forms and processes attached with the construction of civic and collective identity through the discourses of actors. By the use of semi-structured interviews and online content, we attempted to discern and analyse the actors' belonging, practices, identification and values and principles within the political community in question (the nation-state) and the collectivity (the Indignados), exploring the multiple and complex layers of their feelings. The second objective was to explore the role of Facebook in this process, which allowed us to critically evaluate the potential of social media in the negotiation of civic and collective identity in both meaning and practice. This dissertation provides some insights regarding the figure, shape and nature of citizens in the Indignados movements, arguing for a redefinition of civic identity as a dynamic and unfixed entity based on the everyday struggles and practices of individuals. Along with this, collective

identity among the Indignados could be qualified as hybrid, multi-layered and open-ended, by pointing out the different elements which coexist within the movement such as politically diverse individuals, different political flows and discourses and new forms of belonging. The role of Facebook seems to be more complex. Several elements found online (e.g. civic talk, creation of collective frames of reference around actions) certainly contribute to the reproduction of civic and collective identities and seem to create a fertile ground for empowerment and the construction of active citizenship in the Indignados movement. However, further research is needed in order to demonstrate the long-term efficacy of such communicative practices in movement outcomes and trajectories.

**Keywords:** citizenship, civic identity, collective identity, online social media

## Resumé

A l'aube du 21<sup>ème</sup> siècle, nous assistons à une recrudescence des mobilisations sociales et à une diversification de l'action collective impulsée par un large éventail de militants et de groupes engagés dans la contestation sociale et politique partout à travers le monde. Ces mouvements ont en commun non seulement leur rapport avec la crise financière mondiale, mais aussi l'utilisation accrue des médias sociaux en ligne (comme Facebook et Twitter) dans la mobilisation, la participation et la coordination de l'action collective. Ainsi, le mouvement des Indignés qui a surgi principalement en Europe du Sud constitue un nouveau phénomène qui mérite d'être étudié comme une forme de mouvement social en soi—l'analyse devant par ailleurs proposer une attention particulière au rôle assumé par les technologies numériques au cours du processus de construction de l'action collective.

Des chercheurs provenant d'un large éventail de disciplines ont tendance à se concentrer sur les questions concernant le rôle d'Internet dans la protestation sans forcément répondre à la question de ce que signifie être un citoyen au sein de ces mouvements et sans nécessairement prêter attention aux pratiques et aux discours du citoyen (voir Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Une question, centrale dans cette thèse, demeure encore sans réponse dans la littérature. Elle pourrait s'articuler ainsi : comment l'identité civique et collective se construit dans les mouvements sociaux tels que les Indignés ? Comment cette construction se trouve-t-elle influencée par l'utilisation de Facebook ? Cette thèse porte sur l'étude des discours et des contenus en ligne de militants des Indignados en France et en Grèce. Le cadre analytique appliqué à la compréhension des composantes de l'identité civique et collective du mouvement rassemble des éléments offrant une analyse à deux niveaux : a) les aspects tangibles considérés comme les pratiques des mouvements et de leurs participants et b) les sentiments des militants au sein du mouvement.

Plus particulièrement, cette thèse vise en premier lieu à la cartographie de différentes formes et processus attachés à la construction de l'identité civique et collective à travers le discours des acteurs. A travers l'utilisation d'entretiens semi-structurés et d'analyses de contenu en ligne, nous avons tenté de discerner et d'analyser les pratiques, les formes d'identification, les valeurs et les principes que ces acteurs se constituent dans leur rapport à la collectivité (l'Indignados) et dans leur rapport à l'Etat-nation. Le deuxième objectif était d'explorer le rôle de Facebook dans ce processus, ce qui nous a permis d'évaluer de manière critique le potentiel des médias sociaux dans la négociation de l'identité civique et collective. Enfin, cette thèse fournit quelques



indications quant à la figure, la forme et la nature des citoyens dans les mouvements des Indignados en France et en Grèce en plaidant en faveur d'une redéfinition de l'identité civique comme entité dynamique et non fixée sur la base des luttes et des pratiques quotidiennes des individus. Parallèlement, l'identité collective semble être négociée à l'intérieur du mouvement Indignados évoquant une identité hybride soumise à plusieurs formes d'identification. Nous soulignons pour cela la coexistence au sein du mouvement d'une variété d'éléments (l'hétérogénéité des affiliations politiques au sein de ce mouvement par exemple) entraînant l'utilisation de nouvelles formes d'appartenance. Ainsi, le rôle de Facebook semble être plus complexe. Plusieurs éléments (par exemple, la création de cadres de référence collectifs autour de l'action) contribuent certainement à la création d'identités civiques et collectives et semblent créer un terrain fertile pour l'empowerement et la construction d'une citoyenneté active dans le mouvement des Indignados.