ANONYMOUS BULGARIA: "I LIKE TO LUMPEN LUMPEN"

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Abstract:
The current paper explores the involvement of Anonymous Bulgaria in the protests against the Bulgarian government in June, 2013. The paper approaches Anonymous through the prism of anarcho-communist theories of open, horizontal, collaborative networks and asks whether the collective is really open and inclusive and whether such an organization can provide a viable alternative to more institutionalized forms of resistance. In order to assess the political potential of Anonymous Bulgaria, I address three sub-questions: 1. Who are Anonymous Bulgaria and what is their internal structure? 2. What kind of social critique did Anonymous Bulgaria engage in during the period I observed? 3. What kind of alternative social order do Anonymous envisage?

The paper claims that there is no such thing as Anonymous Bulgaria but instead there are multiple loosely connected factions that use the same name for different purposes. While some factions of the group leaked information about corrupt politicians, others targeted NGO representatives and public intellectuals. The general opposition of Anonymous to any form of institution ("Fuck the system") led to a state of all-pervading suspicion which was so general that it lost political effectiveness. Based on a politics of unmasking and on an ideology of fluidity and leaderlessness, the operations of Anonymous Bulgaria could not go beyond 'hacking politics' and offer a positive vision of what the protests had to achieve.

Key words: Anonymous, multitude, horizontality, openness, anarcho-communism

1. INTRODUCTION: MAFIA OWNS THE GOVERNMENT

The #DANSwithme protests in Bulgaria started on the 14th of June with the appointment of the controversial media owner Delyan Peevski as the head of the national security agency (DANS). The decision of the three-week old government provoked huge public outrage and thousands of people took to the streets to protest against corruption and the oligarchic mechanisms of power. A popular sign during the protests read: 'The mafia owns the government, whether it owns the people as well depends on us' (fig. 1).

Fig. 1. 'The Mafia Owns the Government'. Source: ANONYMOUS BULGARIA, 2013.

People continued protesting even after the resignation of Peevski with requests for new elections but also for a general change in the electoral system. There were mass demonstrations every single

day and a siege of the parliament in July. In October students occupied Sofia University - the biggest and oldest higher education institution in Bulgaria, protesting against corruption and façade democracy. The protests have been losing track but still continue in different forms in 2014.

In the current paper I would like to explore the involvement of Anonymous Bulgaria in the first wave of the anti-government protests in June, 2013. My main research question is: what is the political potential of Anonymous Bulgaria? In order to answer this question I have divided it into three sub-questions: 1. Who are Anonymous Bulgaria and what is their internal structure? 2. What kind of social critique did Anonymous Bulgaria engage in during the period I observed? 3. What kind of alternative social order do Anonymous envisage? All these are empirical questions that can be answered through observation and data collection. But they address a deeper theoretical problem: the idea that open, horizontal, participatory networks that are not based on membership can provide an alternative to the current form of liberal representative democracy (Hardt and Negri, 2005). In this respect, the current paper confronts anarcho-communist theory with empirical observations and analyzes the creative tensions between them. Exploring the actions of Anonymous in the times of anti-government protests in Bulgaria is particularly suitable for this goal as this was a period of vivid social critique and debate in which social actors themselves were constantly asking questions about who they are, what they want and what kind of alternative political orders are possible.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW: ANOTHER WORLD IS POSSIBLE?

In the current section I would like to explore the genealogy of the Anonymous collective. The history of Anonymous starting from the image boards on *4Chan* and passing through the stage of massive protests against the Church of Scientology before assuming its current more political form of attacks on government web sites and infrastructure has been already well documented and analyzed (Coleman, 2011; Coleman, 2012; Kelly, 2012). What I would like to do instead is to trace the theoretical underpinnings of the collective and the discourse of openness, horizontality and inclusivity that makes the existence of such a group possible.

To begin with, what are Anonymous? Kelly quotes the definition provided by the group itself: "On its website, Anonymous describes itself as 'an internet gathering' rather than a 'group'. Moreover, Anonymous states that it has 'a very loose and decentralized command structure that operates on ideas rather than directives'" (Kelly, 2012: 1678). In addition, anyone who wants to join Anonymous must know that: "You cannot join Anonymous. Nobody can join Anonymous. Anonymous is not an organization. It is not a club, a party or even a movement. There is no charter, no manifest, no membership fees. Anonymous has no leaders, no gurus, no ideologists. In fact, it does not even have a fixed ideology" (Pastebin, 2013). In practice, Anonymous consists of hackers and geeks, people with a number of digital literacies united by a common online culture of shared references, jokes and attentiveness towards injustice both online and offline (Coleman, 2011). As the group states in their 2010 press release: "Anonymous is not a group of hackers. We are average Interent Citizens ourselves and our motivation is a collective sense of being fed up with all the minor and major injustices we witness every day" (ANON OPS, 2010). According to Kelly, the key characteristics of the group are: 1) the unrelenting moral stance on issues and rights; 2) a physical presence that accompanies online hacking activity; 3) a distinctive brand (Kelly, 2012: 1680).

The problem with every attempt to define Anonymous is that definitions are totalizing by nature. And with an amorphous gathering such as Anonymous every attempt to provide a definite description borders on inaccuracy. Maybe the best way to define Anonymous is to resist to provide an ultimate definition and to use working definitions open to change as the group itself. The radical openness, fluidity and inclusiveness combined with a general will to be against are what makes

Anonymous Anonymous. The problem is: is the group *really* so open and inclusive? Or are there hidden contradictions, divisions and mechanisms of exclusion? And what is so bad about hierarchies, institutions and stability?

Jordan and Taylor (2004) trace the origins of hacktivism, defined as online direct action, to three different but interlocking contexts: the hacking community, the increasing prominence of immaterial labor and immaterial commodities in contemporary society, and the new social movements. Hacktivism draws in "powerful alternative visions of society, arming these visions with informational tools and injecting itself as a radical virus into twenty-first century societies" (Jordan and Taylor, 2004, 165). Hacktivism is inspired by the "hacker ethics" that appeared in the 1980s and emphasized the value of sharing, access to computers and freedom of information, decentralization and mistrust of authority (Levy, 1984). These ideas found a convincing expression in the free software movement which proclaimed that free software is a prerequisite for a free society. Richard Stallman was one of the first "hackers" to emphasize the directly political nature of technology. He fought for free software, claiming that "free" is a matter of liberty and not a matter of price: it is "free" as in "free speech" and not as in "free beer" (Stallman, 2002). A program is free software if the program's users have the four essential freedoms: to run free the program, to study how the program works and change it, the freedom to redistribute copies and the freedom to distribute modified copies to others (What is Free Software, 2013).

And while Stallman insists on the politics of technology, political theorists such as Hardt and Negri use technology as a metaphor that allows them to propose a new vision of politics: they propose a society "whose source code is revealed so that we all can work collaboratively to solve its bugs and create new, better social programs" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, 340). The faith in participation, collaboration and openness is common both to the techno-geeks and the anarcho-communist political theorists. From the standpoint of sociology of critique, Luc Boltanski traces the suspicion towards any institutions and forms of hierarchy to the relational philosophy of Delezue and to the social movements of the 1960s when young people rebelled against Fordist wage regimes, Taylorist methods of labor organization and a paternalistic welfare state. The so-called new social movements developed since the 1960s on issues such as gender relations, environmental protection, peace and international solidarity and had a strong middleclass basis in contrast to earlier working-class or nationalist collective action (Della Porta and Diani, 2006: vii). Boltanski claims that the emphasis on freedoms and the right of individuals to determine their identity forms part of a critique which might be labelled "artistic" and which was successfully incorporated by the spirit of capitalism to give birth to a culture of projects, networking and constant mobility. However, the social critique aimed at redistribution and social justice was neglected and suppressed (Boltanski, 2005).

Writing in the 1990s and 2000s Hardt and Negri provide a good example of the artistic critique of capitalism, focusing on the emancipator power of mobility, freedom and individual difference. They offer a useful synthesis of the story both of the rise of a new biopolitical form of production and the resistance against it, of Empire and the multitude. Their bestselling book "Empire" is a timely response to Fukuyama's notion of the end of history. Capitalism has transcended all national borders and prevailed around the world creating an integrated global market, a new world order in which economic production and political constitution tend increasingly to coincide. Empire is not a particular nation state or a supranational entity. Empire is a machine, a mechanism for producing goods but also subjectivities, ideas, affects and social relations. The authors talk about the succession of different economic paradigms: from primary production (agriculture and extraction of raw materials) to secondary production (industry and manufacture of durable goods) to tertiary production (services and manipulating information). It is precisely this passage from the secondary to the tertiary economy which they call postmodernization or even better: informatization (ibid, 280). And since the production of services does not result in a tangible, material good, the notion of

immaterial labor is introduced – "labor that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge and communication" (ibid, 290). The key point in the argument is that we all "participate in a productive world made up of communication and social networks, interactive services, and common languages...Producing increasingly means constructing cooperation and communicative commonalities" (ibid, 302).

So, on the one hand, there is the global proletariat, a multitude of individuals no longer constrained by national boundaries, individuals constantly on the move who are becoming entangled in denser and denser networks of cooperation, and on the other hand, there is Empire that extracts as a parasite the value produced by these individuals. The main argument of Hardt and Negri is that there is no way back. The traditional left with its insistence to protect the local and the welfare state is fighting for a lost cause. What is needed to win against Empire is more globalization, more mobility, more deterritorialization. Hardt and Negri remind us of the original impulse of internationalism and the notion that the proletariat "has no country", that "the country of the proletariat is the entire world" (ibid, 49). So not only has capitalism become all-pervasive, but also the notion of "proletariat" has expanded and acquired new dimensions to encompass all those exploited by and subject to capitalist domination. Yet this should not indicate that the proletariat is homogeneous or undifferentiated: "It is indeed cut in various directions by differences and stratifications" (ibid, 53). Or to quote sub-comandante Marcos from the Zapatista movement: "Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristobal,… a Jew in Germany, a Gypsy in Poland, a Mohawk in Quebec, a pacifist in Bosnia, a single woman on the Metro at 10pm, a peasant without land, a gang member in the slums, an unemployed worker, an unhappy student and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains" (Marcos, 1997).

All the different causes and struggles across the world coincide in their attack against the capitalist system: "These struggles do not link horizontally, but each one leaps vertically, directly to the virtual center of Empire" (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 58). Everyone is part of the multitude. In the same way everyone can be Anonymous:

> "How do I recognize other Anonymous?
> We come from all places of society: We are students, workers, clerks, unemployed; We are young or old, we wear smart clothes or rugs, we are hedonists, ascetics, joy riders or activists. We come from all races, countries and ethnicities. We are many.
>
> We are your neighbours, your co-workers, your hairdressers, your bus drivers and your network administrators. We are the guy on the street with the suitcase and the girl in the bar you are trying to chat up. We are anonymous. Many of us like to wear Guy Fawkes masks on demonstrations. Some of us even show them in their profile pictures in social networks. That helps to recognize each other".
>
> (Pastebin, 2013)

There is a strong cross-fertilization between political theory, social movements' practice and hacktivism. It is not by coincidence that the foreword of the anti-globalization movement book "Another World is Possible. Popular Alternatives to Globalization at the World Social Forum" (2004) is written by Hardt and Negri. This connection is not surprising and in fact reflects a particular vision of the role of political theory which is not so much an accurate description of the world but more a program, a manifesto for action. As Paul Patton claims in his article on Foucault and Deleuze, both of whom are widely quoted in "Empire": "They reject the idea that there is a single 'totalising' relation between theory and practice in favour of a more local and fragmentary conception. Theory is neither the expression nor the translation of practice, but is itself a local and regional practice that operates

as a series of relays from one practice to another, while practices are relays from one theoretical point to the next" (Patton, 2010: 86).

If we accept that theory and practice constantly inform and transform each other, the way to criticize and possibly improve a theory is through observing to what it leads in practice. This is precisely the goal of my paper. If Anonymous as a collective are the expression of an anarcho-communist theory/vision of the world, observing what they do and how they do it is essential to assessing this particular theory. My empirical analysis of the involvement of Anonymous in the anti-government protests has firstly the aim to assess anarcho-political theory on its own grounds, i.e. to explore whether Anonymous are in fact are open, inclusive and anti-capitalist, and second, to explore what is the political potential of such an organization in general compared to more institutionalized forms of political participation.

3. METHODOLOGY: "THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS"

In order to analyze the involvement of Anonymous Bulgaria in the anti-government protests from June 2013, I performed content analysis of the two most popular *Facebook* pages of Anonymous Bulgaria from the beginning of the protests on the 14th of June until the 30th of June. In addition, I did a series of semi-structured in-depth interviews and frequented chat rooms of the group. I refer to the "Silence of the Lambs" in the title of this section not because the process of research resembled a horror film but because of an especially surreal conversation I had in one of the IRC chat rooms. The interview included myself under the pseudonym "pipi" and 7 respondents, who played a joke on me and changed their nicks to variations of the name "silentlamb": silentlamb, stilenlamb, siletlamb, silenlamb, Silentlamb, stilenlabm. During the conversation one of them explicitly addressed the other telling him/her: "*[17:08] <stilenlamb> Silentlamb, never give an interview!"* In addition, one of the 7 people I was talking to turned out to be a bot. It is one of the rules of Anonymous never to give interviews which made my task especially difficult. What is more, as some of the activities of the collective could be considered as cyber crime, I had to deal with constant suspicions that I was a police agent or a paid journalist.

In an attempt to establish initial contact, I posted on the largest forum of Anonymous Bulgaria a message about my project and promised to enter the two chats of Anonymous always with the same pseudonym "pipi" so that people knew that I was observing their conversation. The message on the forum provoked endless jokes and a wave of suspicion, one of the ironic responses I got being: "Hello, I am from the Cyber Crime Unit of the police and I work on getting a promotion by writing on Anonymous. Could you please answer some of my questions.....haahahahahah... :d :d :d :d :d" (Anonbg, 2013). My subsequent chat conversations made me painfully aware of the question of trust, with one of my respondents constantly checking random facts I told him in Google, repeating "I think you are lying to me" and refusing to answer some questions with the argument "you are going too far".

Due to the complex status of the actions of Anonymous, always on the border between legality and illegality, I was especially concerned about ethics issues. I decided to follow Stefania's Milan approach to adopt the hacker principles of "do not harm" and "leave no damage" as points of reference (Milan, 2012, 182). All interviewees used pseudonyms and encrypted connection. I didn't ask them about their real names so that I wouldn't be able to reveal them if asked by the police. I was also especially careful in terms of data storage and protected the interview data by keeping the files on a separate laptop without access to the Internet (Eynon et al., 2008, 28). With regard to the material from the public *Facebook* pages, I treat it as publicly available content and quote the authors of particular comments without asking for specific consent. In general, I adopted an

approach to research ethics which is attentive to different contexts and their particular requirements instead of postulating in advance an overarching rule (Markham and Buchanan, 2012).

4. ANONYMOUS IN TIMES OF PROTEST

4.1. United as one, divided by zero

On the basis of the data collected, in the following paragraphs I will address the three sub-questions formulated in the beginning of this paper. First of all, who are Anonymous Bulgaria and what is their internal structure? There is active work involved in the process of group formation that includes the process of self-definition and differentiation from enemies (Latour, 2005, 34). It has to be clear that there is no single organization Anonymous Bulgaria. Instead, there are multiple loosely connected factions, each of which has its own *Facebook* page connected to a web site/forum, and two of them have their own IRC chats. In fact, the question "Who are Anonymous Bulgaria?" is relevant not only for me but for social actors as well. Some of the people in the two chats I frequented were even less informed than I was, which made me question the border between observation and participation, externality and internality with regard to Anonymous. Many users join the channels where future operations are discussed out of curiosity and actively try to understand what the group does. As one user told me when I asked him about Anonymous: "I don't know either. I'm just hanging around trying to make sense". In addition, many people approach Anonymous for help with quite extravagant problems. Among the most typical examples are teenagers who want to have the *Facebook* profiles of their girlfriends hacked:

> *[01:54:27] Pafnuty Chebyshev: We tried to work responding to complaints by ordinary people*
> *[01:54:44] Unfortunately people in Bulgaria are still in the stone age*
> *[01:54:49] the only ones who approached us were the 12-13 year-olds with their stupid requests.*

Often people are attracted by the media image of Anonymous and want to join them without having the necessary skills:

> *[02:25:22] Pafnuty Chebyshev: soon after the first attacks the first fans and try-hard-s appeared*
> *[02:25:50] pipi: what does being a fan consist in? and trying-hard?*
> *[02:26:28] Pafnuty Chebyshev: It consists in trying to participate in something the risks of which you cannot understand*
> *[02:26:35] and in the lack of any programming skills*

One of the factions of Anonymous has lost many members precisely because of the flow of new people in, the so called 'newfags':

> *[17:39] <Ch0v3ch3t0> Many people left us because of the newfags*
> *[17:40] suddenly someone comes who doesn't know what Anon is*
> *[17:40] and starts giving orders*
> *[17:40] and you get fed up with all this and leave*
> *[17:40] and others just lost any hope that something can change*

But if 'newfags' don't know what Anon is, do more experienced users know? The answers they gave to my question were vague at best:

> *[17:04] <silentlamb> you can't say 'you're not anon!'*
> *[17:05] 'Anonymous' and the 'Idea' are just metaphors meaning different things for different people*
> *[17:05] <pipi> but if one word means everything, it actually doesn't mean anything*
> *[17:05] <silentlamb> hmm*
> *[17:05] <stilenlamb> Anonymous is just a word*

[17:06] <silentlamb> they say that we are called 'Anonymous' because of the nicks in 4chan

This chat excerpt clearly shows the difficulty to define Anonymous, to state what it means to be part of the group. My question for definition is displaced and addressed as a question of genealogy or even etymology, tracing the origins of the group name.

However, the absence of clarity is not due to some confusion. The inability to strictly define Anonymous is inscribed in the very ideology of the collective. It is an essential part of who they are. The instruction on how to recognize other Anonymous, quoted in the theoretical review section is repeated almost literally by one of my respondents in the chat room:

[17:21] <stilenlamb> Among us there are journalists, writers, students, engineers, cleaners, butchers
[17:21] We are not just hackers. We are your neighbour, your classmate...
[17:21] Anyone can be Anon...

Yet, there are limits to the openness of the group. Anyone who claims to be a leader of the movement cannot be Anonymous, neither can be traditional politicians or political parties, often accused in my interviews of infiltrating the "authentic" pages of the group. On the *wikianonbg.com* web site there is even a wall of shame with the names of people who have tried to "hijack" the cause. Or to put it simply, everyone can be Anonymous but some are more Anonymous than others.

[17:48] <Ch0v3ch3t0> Everyone who knows the idea knows that no one from Anon
[17:48] would use the idea to support a political party

The attitude towards politics is one of the main criteria for differentiation between the different factions of the group. Pafnuty Chebishef has left Anonymous because according to him people have betrayed the idea and have started to get involved in political causes, to plan to participate in elections, etc. According to *pafkata86,* one of the factions of Anonymous Bulgaria fights against government parties, while the other attacks private organizations such as monopolists in electricity supply, water supply, etc. In a nutshell, some members of Anonymous are against the politicization of the cause in general, while those who claim that Anonymous should have a say in politics differ in their very definition of politics and the causes they support.

Another source for internal differentiation within Anonymous Bulgaria is technical expertise. At the time I was conducting the interviews the programmers' core of one of the factions had left, leaving the young ones to cope alone. Know-how is extremely important for Anonymous and is transmitted through personal contact online and with the help of tutorials. Technology is a main uniting force for the group and the reason many people join in. Thus, Pafnuty Chebyshev started his involvement with Anonymous by finding the unfinished forum *anonbg.info*. After a short contact with the system administrator he became the global moderator of the community. The forum was left by a previous Anonymous group which had disbanded more than a year ago because of differences in political ideology. Once Pafnuty resurrected the forum, 2 more people joined and a new community was formed. Their main activity in the beginning was the exchange of technical knowledge "in the name of the greater good".

But forums and web pages are used not just for recruitment and consolidation. My observations during the protests showed that *Facebook* pages can be stolen from within by group members with different vision for the future. What is more, one of the web pages I was observing (*wikianonbg.com*) was taken down while I was doing my research. Another subversive practice is to copy and paste messages from one chat room to the other in order to make fun of particular users. Channels for communication can have a deeply political use and allow strategic displacement of discussions and hijacking of symbolic capital.

To sum up, the very question 'Who are Anonymous Bulgaria?' is a political question which is still to be decided. The faction that manages to create the most durable association between people, online platforms, software and hardware will probably impose its vision (Callon and Latour, 1981). For the time being, there is no unity but mainly division, no group, but group formation. Anonymous Bulgaria are in a state of productive uncertainty in which they have to choose their future.

4.2. I like to lumpen lumpen

The second sub-question I am going to address is: in what ways did Anonymous engage in social critique in the period 14th-30th of June? In answering this question I will count on the content analysis of the posts and comments on the two most popular *Facebook* pages of Anonymous Bulgaria. There is clear difference in the main focus of the two pages.

Anonymous Bulgaria (3,431 likes) was engaged with causes such as data privacy (with various posts about Edward Snowden and surveillance in the US) and international solidarity. One could read on their *Facebook* page posts in English such as the following:

> #OccupyBulgaria #OccupyGezi #ChangeBrazil - WE ARE ONE
>
> It's not over. #Revolution @AnonOpsMob: Army of people getting ready to retake #Taksim Square again http://t.co/uJhRZtdBQ9
> #Anonymous #OccupyGezi
> Rise up!

And also the motivational:

> United as one divided by zero!
> #AnonymousBulgaria
> #AnonymousTurkey
> #AnonymousBrazil
>
> *The team of REVOLUTION announces that Turkish users show a serious interest in the protests in Bulgaria. They actively share and comment on our pictures, one can clearly see SOLIDARITY!*
>
> (Anonymous Bulgaria, 2013)

On the contrary, the more popular group *ANONYMOUS BULGARIA* (12, 822 likes) focused on current political events in Bulgaria. The content analysis revealed that the most prominent themes were: the anti-government protest; the proposed changes in the educational programme leaving out important poems by the 19th century national poet and revolutionary Hristo Botev; the exploitation of gold mines by foreign companies; the forbidden relations between political enemies, media owners and mafia bosses; the fierce opposition to the so called 'Harta 2013' [Chart 2013] that contained ideas for political reform suggested by Bulgarian intellectuals.

In the period observed there were also two operations of Anonymous. The first of them was reported on the *Facebook* page of *Anonymous Bulgaria*. It consisted in defacing the website of the Youth Organization of the ruling Socialist Party. The reason for the anger of Anonymous was a statement made by a socialist politician, who claimed that the current protests are caused by 'the Internet lumpenproletariat'. The phrase became an instant hit. People started going to the protests with signs "I am an Internet lumpen", contributing to the *Facebook* hashtag #internetlumpeni, and even jokingly performing in front of the National Assembly a song with the lyrics: "I like to lumpen lumpen": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcrjNkote5s>. The second operation was published

on both *Facebook* pages, but the massive campaign around it was associated exclusively with the *ANONYMOUS BULGARIA* page. The hacktivist group defaced the website of Harta 2013, claiming that NGOs and intellectuals are trying to become leaders of an essentially horizontal citizen protest and to "trick" common people. Both operations and the content of both *Facebook* pages are indicative of the deep mistrust in politics in any institutionalized form.

Probably the best summary of social critique during the protest is afforded by the following image (fig. 2):

Fig. 2. Photo from the protests. Source: ANONYMOUS BULGARIA, 2013.

The black sign in the foreground reads: "Corruption entered in parliament again and chose its own government", the black sign in the background reads "Against the invasion of Turkish masses" and the white sign reads: "Change of the system, New Constitution". The picture is published on the *ANONYMOUS BULGARIA* page with the question: "Do you think that the flag of the European, pardon Jewish, Union should be there?"" with comments such as "In Bulgaria - only what is Bulgarian" and "Burn it!" (ANONYMOUS BULGARIA, 2013).

I analyze this image and its context in light of Boltanski's theory of social critique. The accusations of corruption and the unmasking of corrupt politicians seem a good example of what Boltanski calls 'tests of reality'. The critique is directed against the spokespersons of the institutions but not against the institutions themselves. The "Change of the System: New Constitution" slogan however points to a more radical critique which insists on a total social change. One of the key problems in the June 2013 protests in Bulgaria was that social critique was directed against everyone and everything which led to an impasse: an all-pervading sense of apathy and negativism. The logical counterpart of such insecurity was the return to romanticized forms of bonding and stability. Conspiracy theories went hand in hand with nationalism. Critique as performed by Anonymous was at the same time anti-institutional ("Fuck the system!") and conservative ("Bulgaria for the Bulgarians!").

4.3. Decision making on the ground: searching for alternatives

The third sub-question that I tried to answer by analyzing the available data relates to the alternatives to the current social order proposed by Anonymous Bulgaria. If the position of the collective has to be summed up in two words, they have to be: direct democracy. The actions against both party-affiliated politicians and civil society intellectuals showed a clear suspicion of political

representation as such. The alternative offered is participation by everyone facilitated by technology:

> *ANONYMOUS BULGARIA direct democracy is a form of political organization of the society, in which the main decisions are accepted and implemented directly by citizens - notice that we talk precisely about citizens, you are included there, as well as your neighbour and your grandmother from her godforsaken small village. Direct Democracy is the unmediated way to take decisions in a society. This means from us for us, without leaders, representatives, instructors, etc. Of course it can't happen immediately. All public assemblies can be connected and each one can have a representative. This means that the assembly can be in your village/neighbourhood/city and everyone can participate. Bulgarian citizens can participate virtually over the Internet* (ANONYMOUS BULGARIA, 2013).

The principles that Anonymous envisage for reforms are the very principles that structure their group. Complete openness, inclusiveness and direct participation seem to replace the need for any institutionalized form of politics. However, disintermediation is never that innocent, and presupposes the creation of new intermediaries (Graham, 2008). There are several problems with replacing political mechanisms of representation with technological mediation. First of all, a major issue is access to technology. Not everyone can participate and technology creates new inequalities (Graham and Haarstad, 2011). For some, this is an advantage:

> *Elza In the social networks one cannot find the darker-skinned electors of the current parties [the comment refers to the gypsies]* (ANONYMOUS BULGARIA, 2013).

But if technology can be used to exclude people, this leads to an internal contradiction in the very ideology of openness and inclusiveness.

In addition, *ANONYMOUS BULGARIA* defended the idea of public assemblies in which people sit on the ground, because "nothing can happen under the table". But how often would people find time to sit on the ground and collaborate? How much time are they prepared to sacrifice? To illustrate, Anonymous encouraged discussions on their *Facebook* page for possible changes in the political system. In response several users posted long lists with ideas for political change. The user Georgi Karadachki in a comment from the 16th of June proposed to publish all dossiers of former state security agents, to forbid them participation "in the political, economic and social life in the country", to introduce electronic voting, to challenge the monopoly of the National Health Insurance Fund, etc. (ANONYMOUS BULGARIA, 2013). Some of these ideas seem a bit extreme – preventing people from any participation in social life because of past mistakes, or making all policemen pass a lie detection test – but the problem is not so much in the content of the suggestions as in their rather piecemeal character.

In addition, ANONYMOUS BULGARIA recognized the need to discuss initial suggestions and develop a more coherent system. That is why they published a special note (Anonymous Note, 2013), which was supposed to be constantly expanded and changed through citizen proposals. But there was a serious lack of interest and user participation. Only 10 people commented on the note. And it is doubtful whether the opinions of 10 people were enough to propose substantial changes that could be perceived as legitimate.

To sum up, the increase in participation and openness in the alternatives to current forms of democracy proposed by Anonymous should be balanced against the dangers of technological exclusion, piecemeal solutions and under-participation.

5. Discussion and conclusion: the will to be against

Hardt and Negri have proposed a vision of international inclusive collaborative networks of resistance. Networks unified by recognizing and constructing what we have in common: "It is not really a matter of fixing a point of unity or, worse yet, identity, but simply finding what is common in our differences and expanding that commonality while our differences proliferate" (Hardt and Negri, 2003, 17). It is this same vision of collaborative international resistance that has informed the ideology of the Anonymous collective. My empirical observations, however, point to the fact that Anonymous Bulgaria, as they operate on the ground, have concerns which are much more local, related to issues of the nation and nationhood. Indeed one of the factions of the group (Anonymous Bulgaria) demonstrates international solidarity and interest in information and human rights in general. But the faction which is much more popular (ANONYMOUS BULGARIA) is the one that addresses very narrow locally-specific political issues such as the school program, a project by local intellectuals or the biographies of particular politicians. In addition, fighting against capitalism is not among the priorities of the Bulgarian Anonymous. On the contrary, they fight against Mafia and corruption, against the shape that institutions have taken in Bulgaria here and now. Thus, while transnational organization and diffusion of the brand Anonymous is undoubtedly important, the importance of the nation state as a locus of resistance not only has not diminished, but on the contrary – it has increased.

When it comes to the internal organization of the group, it is inevitable to notice that instead of complete inclusiveness and convergence of different types of struggles against a common goal, what is observed is fragmentation and dissent on the basis of both political differences and differences in the levels of technical skill. Vertical struggles do not "magically" coincide and hit "the virtual center" of Empire. On the contrary, as Laclau convincingly argues, there is a painful process of political articulation and horizontal coordination of struggles that is inescapably political and is related to processes of exclusion, of defining "us" and "them" (Laclau, 2004, 28). And this process takes place even in a movement that explicitly states that "everyone is Anonymous" – it takes place against its very own ideology.

What is more, the atmosphere of all pervasive suspicion and "fuck the system" attitude does not allow Anonymous to formulate a targeted critique and instead leads to a dispersed, conspiracy-theory-driven series of actions with little political traction. The mistrust of any form of institutions and constituted power is a defining feature not only of Anonymous as an actually operating hacktivist formation but also of the theory that has inspired them. To illustrate, Paul Patton identifies as a serious reason for dissent between Foucault and Deleuze the latter's state phobia. According to Foucault not all states are the same and not all institutions are bad: "Foucault objects to the essentialism of the state phobic conception that it licenses the 'interchangeability of analyses and the loss of specificity'" (Patton, 2010: 93).

The will to be against does not spontaneously lead to social change. A positive vision of what we are fighting for must be provided. The multitude is powerful but this power can be used for bad. As Slavoj Zizek reminds us: "in Spinoza, the concept of multitude qua crowd is fundamentally ambiguous: multitude is resistance to the imposing One, but, at the same time, it designates what we call 'mob', a wild, irrational explosion of violence" (Zizek, 2007). It seems that Hardt and Negri neglect this "bad" side of the multitude. What if the multitude desires something utterly destructive? Is nationalist violence also part of the "productive force of the multitude"?

And again, following Zizek, what will happen if the multitude takes over? (Zizek, 2006). Is it really possible to go without constituted power? Or representative democracy will be replaced with new forms of charismatic informal leadership (Gerbaudo, 2012)? The alternatives to the current political

system proposed by Anonymous are all procedural. They offer ways of avoiding the traditional system of representation. But as Della Porta and Diani argue, the practical functioning of these alternative organizational structures is much less than perfect: "Unstructured assemblies tend to be dominated by small minorities that often strategically exploit the weaknesses of direct democracy with open manipulation; 'speech' resources are far from equally distributed; the most committed, or better organized, control the floor; solidarity links tend to exclude newcomers. Consensual models developed to contrast the 'tyranny' of organized minorities have their own problems, mainly bound up with extremely long (and sometimes 'blocked') decision processes" (Della Porta and Diani, 2006, 244).

To sum up, the "artistic critique" of capitalism provided on a theoretical level by Hardt and Negri and embedded in the organizational structure of the hacktivist collective Anonymous cannot so far provide a viable alternative of the current political system. The state phobia and the mistrust of institutions lead to too quick dismissal of the role of state and questions of redistributive social justice. The will to be against is not enough. Anonymous are raising a crucial question about politics as it is. But they are not the answer.

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