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'This isn't a black issue'
Homophily and diversity in Aboriginal activism

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Abstract

The principle of homophily states that people who share certain characteristics will interact more often and more closely with one another than with those who are dissimilar (McPherson *et al.*, 2001). In general, homophily is found to have a strong influence on the organisation of social networks. The categories which lead most directly to strong homophily are race and ethnicity. Many activist movements have been found to tend towards homophily, which can have profound limiting effects on their impacts and successes. The nature of Australian history and the demographics of present-day Australia have required Aboriginal people to rely heavily on diverse networks, although the relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous supporters has been full of tensions.

This paper will examine the extent of homophily and networking within Aboriginal activism in Townsville, North Queensland. It will focus specifically on the daily demonstrations that were held outside the trial of Senior-Sergeant Chris Hurley. At this trial, I witnessed was a concerted effort to avoid homophily, as activists framed the issue as 'not a black issue'. This paper will explore some of the ramifications of this framing tactic, based on media reportage and ethnographic description. Personal invitations were extended by activists to non-Aboriginal academics, feminists, religious organisations, and even the police. This very deliberate attempt to diversify the demonstrations outside the courthouse happened at the expense of homophilic ties. While this has positive effects such as a broadening of support bases, it may mean compromising the articulated goals of the movement and reducing levels of collective identity.

Keywords: Indigenous movements, social movements, social networks, homophily, collective identity

Introduction

On 19 November 2004 an Aboriginal man residing on Palm Island was arrested for swearing at a Police Liaison Officer. He was heavily intoxicated, and he struggled as he was moved from the back of the paddy wagon into the watch house. During the struggle the arresting officer and the man fell through the doorway. How they fell, and what happened immediately afterwards, is still the issue of much debate. Regardless, the man—referred to after death by his language name, Mulrunji—suffered a ruptured liver during or immediately after the fall and died shortly afterwards (Glowczewski, 2008; Hooper, 2008; Waters, 2008). Two and a half years later the arresting officer, Senior-Sergeant Chris Hurley, was put on trial for manslaughter. This was a landmark case, as Hurley was the first Australian police officer ever to be charged over a death in custody (Waters, 2008, p. 207).

Many activists feel that the only reason Hurley was charged was because of the broad-scale organizing they undertook following the original Department of Public Prosecutions decision against pressing charges. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork on Aboriginal activism in Townsville from 2007 until 2009, beginning at the culmination of this activism[1]. I discovered that, rather than remaining homophilic, Aboriginal activists utilized extensive networks. As I have come to see throughout my fieldwork, there is often a significant amount of dis-unity that characterizes Aboriginal activism, as one expects with any large and diverse group of people. Additionally, many Aboriginal activists are acutely aware that they are a minority and thus, that they need to gain broader support to have any success.

The combination of in-fighting and the need for non-Indigenous supporters has led Aboriginal activists to focus their attention outwards. In many social networks, including activist movements, people who share certain characteristics tend to associate with one another rather than with people who are different. Townsville Aboriginal activists, however, deliberately diversify their support base. For instance, during rallies outside of Hurley's trial,

activists repeatedly reminded the media and the crowd that 'this isn't a black issue, it's a human rights issue'. This has many positive effects, but it also means that homophilic ties are occasionally neglected. It is important for movements to have both diverse and homophilic ties, so some strategy must be worked out in order to address both ties at once.

In this paper, I examine an ethnographic example of Aboriginal activism in Townsville to explore the issues of homophily and diversity within the local movement. To begin, I provide a brief overview of the history of race relations within Australia; for the entirety of colonization, Aboriginal people have struggled between seeking broader support and aiming for autonomy. I also introduce Townsville, the regional Queensland city where I conducted my field work. Next, I discuss the theoretical implications of homophily and diversity in social movements. From there I delve into the ethnographic evidence. I introduce readers to the Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group and describe a week of demonstrations surrounding the trial of Senior-Sergeant Hurley. I discuss the ways in which activists engage with the media and the implications this has for the movement. Finally, I discuss the effects of diversifying the movement, and the challenges of framing this as 'not a black issue'.

Background and context

Since Australia's colonization by the British in 1788, Aboriginal people have engaged in a series of ongoing resistance efforts. Colonisation started in the south, and North Queensland remained a sometimes violent frontier into the late 19th century. The history of Australia has parallels with other similar settler nations like Canada, the United States, and New Zealand. One striking difference is the lack of a treaty with the native populations. Although in many cases treaties were not honoured, they at least provide contemporary Indigenous peoples with legal avenues to address inequalities. Today, approximately 517,200

people, or 2.5% of the Australian population, identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island person[2] (ABS, 2006). The lack of a treaty in Australia, coupled with a very small Indigenous population, has meant that Indigenous people rely heavily on grassroots activism and the support of non-Indigenous supporters to achieve their goals (Pascoe, 2008).

The first major government policy phase was to 'protect' Aboriginal peoples, based on scientific notions that Aboriginal people were a 'dying race'. The aim was to segregate Aboriginal people onto European-run reserves and missions to remove them from the negative influences of European life and to reduce the risks of miscegenation (McGregor, 1997). Several decades later, policies shifted towards assimilation, especially with regards to 'half-caste' children. Missions and reserves became training centres where inmates were forbidden to speak native languages, and light-skinned children were removed from their parents and raised in group homes or fostered out to white families (Chesterman and Galligan, 1997). The removal of children was officially stopped in the early 1970s, when governments agreed to Aboriginal self-determination. The late 1980s saw the start of the official reconciliation process which has taken many forms, from the practical to the symbolic (Pascoe, 2008).

As soon as white settlers started inhabiting their lands, Aboriginal people engaged in localized resistance. Frontier violence was a common form of community resistance, as was petty theft (Reynolds, 1989). In the early 20th century, Aboriginal resistance became organised, with the establishment of several groups aimed at improving the position of Aboriginal people (Maynard, 2008; McGregor, 1993). These groups fought for land rights, civil equality, and an end to protectionism. They utilised strategies similar to those used by white activists of the era—petitions, letters to the editor, and pamphlets (McGregor, 1993). Interestingly, these earliest Aboriginal activists recognised the need for Aboriginal control of the movement; non-Indigenous supporters were invited to join as 'associate members', but

full membership was limited to people of Indigenous descent (Maynard, 2008; McGregor, 1993).

Towards the middle of the century, Aboriginal activism took a more confrontational stance. In 1966, the Aboriginal workers at the Wave Hill cattle station went on strike and established an autonomous community at a traditional sacred site (Attwood, 2000). In the late 1960s and 1970s, urban Aboriginal activists started an Australian Black Panthers group, which set up Aboriginal legal and medical services (Foley, 2001). In 1972, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy was established outside of Parliament, highlighting the fact that Aboriginal people were treated as foreigners in their own land (Foley, 2001). At the same time, the peak Aboriginal rights organisation, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), was conflicted over the role of non-Indigenous members. In the 1950s and 1960s, the group had welcomed any interested members with equal voting rights, and anyone could join the executive council. By the early 1970s, however, the growing push for self-determination and Black Power led to a split in the membership. A motion that executive positions be limited to Indigenous members was very narrowly denied. In response, a contingent of the Indigenous members left FCAATSI to form their own group, the National Tribal Council (Taffe, 2005).

When the Australian government adopted an official stance of self-determination and then reconciliation, Aboriginal activism began to focus on legislative changes. Land rights and native title struggles became the focus of the media and scholarly work. Activism took an issues-based focus, rather than a general fight for rights. In North Queensland, Aboriginal health, education, and housing have been the focus of activist activity. The historic tensions between Aboriginal groups and outsiders have continued throughout the 220 years of resistance. From one perspective, Aboriginal people are such a minority voice that they will never succeed without broader support, particularly given their politically disadvantaged,

treaty-less status. However, when the ultimate goal of Aboriginal activism is autonomy, it is incongruous for the process to rely so heavily on the support of outsiders; the means seem to be discordant with the ends.

Townsville Aboriginal activists, though, cannot escape the reality that Indigenous people only represent 6% of the city's population (ABS, 2006). Just 50 km to the north of Townsville, the Aboriginal community of Palm Island[3] is home to approximately 3000 Indigenous people (ABS, 2006), many of whom travel to Townsville regularly to visit family, receive medical attention or go shopping. The links between the two communities are strong, and many activists in Townsville have family members living on Palm Island. More important than population distribution, however, is the environment in which activists work; many have said that Townsville is the most racist city in Australia (cf. ABC News, 2004; Fickling, 2003). While this assertion is hard to quantify, there is no doubt that activists in this region face considerable opposition, such as a Ku Klux Klan cell which surfaces every few years (cf. ABC News, 2008; McKinnon, 2007; Mac, 2003). Because they view their environment as very hostile, Aboriginal activists are consciously aware of the need to gain broader, non-Indigenous support for their movement.

Networking, homophily and heterogeneity

Recent social movement scholars are interested in the ways in which social movements are 'embedded in dense relational settings', and thus they seek to explore the 'web of multiple ties that ultimately make up a social movement' (Diani, 2004, p. 339). Network ties are formed through some combination of the amount of time spent together, the emotional intensity of the relationship, the amount of mutual confiding, and the amount of reciprocity between two individuals (Granovetter, 1973, p. 1361). Network scholars differentiate between two types of ties; bonding ties, or strong ties, are found between people who are interconnected, while bridging ties, or weak ties, act as connections to individuals

from other groups and communities (Putnam, 1995; Granovetter, 1973). In general, networks display a core-periphery pattern, with a central group of similar people who are closely connected to one another, and then increasingly loosely-affiliated people who become less similar as they progress outward from the core (McPherson *et al.*, 2001, p. 427).

Activist movements rely heavily on the networks in which they operate. For these movements, strong networks—those with a balance of bonding and bridging ties—act as a form of social capital (Putnam, 1995). Newman *et al.* (2008, p. 131) explain that the creation of networks leads to the effective mobilisation of social capital; in other words, formalized links between individuals and organisations lead to reciprocity and trust. People have been shown to join organisations based on pre-existing lines of interaction (Snow *et al.*, 1980), but this is more important for certain types of groups. Activism which is associated with low risk or low personal costs (time, energy or resource investment) is less dependent on strong networks. On the other hand, interpersonal links were a vital factor in recruitment drives for the high risk and high cost Freedom Summer campaign (McAdam and Paulsen, 1993).

The concept of homophily states that people who share similarities are more likely to interact with one another than with very dissimilar people (McPherson *et al.*, 2001). Face to face interaction is based heavily on similarity, because shared characteristics makes interactions more comfortable, efficient, and rewarding (Carley, 1991, p. 334). Granovetter (1973, p. 1362) found that the strength of a tie is positively correlated with similarities between individuals. The characteristics which have been found to lead to the highest levels of homophily (that is, higher than expected given population distributions) and the strongest divides in personal environments are race and ethnicity (McPherson *et al.*, 2001).

Because activist movements rely heavily on established networks, they are likely to remain relatively homogenous (McPherson *et al.*, 2001). This is more pronounced in political and activist movements than other networks because 'people who are more structurally

similar to one another are more likely to have issue-related interpersonal communication and to attend to each other's issue positions, which, in turn, leads them to have more influence over one another' (McPherson *et al.*, 2001, p. 428). In a study of sustainable development activism in Canada, Newman and Dale (2005; see also Newman *et al.*, 2008) found activist groups became more homogenous over time. This is corroborated by Sandell (1999) who argues that both the joining and quitting of movement organisations is strongly influenced by other members of the movement with whom one shares similarities. Broadly speaking, collective behaviour is spread via diffusion through pre-existing interpersonal networks. Again, this is illustrated most strongly in racial or ethnic minorities, whose activities are more segregated than the activities of majority groups (McPherson *et al.*, 2001).

Strong homophilic tendencies have both positive and negative impacts on social movements. Movements which are homophilic are characterized by mainly strong, bonding network connections. Because they are homogenous, they are able to focus on specific issues which are often popular amongst those who are already sympathetic. Thus, there is no need to lessen the intensity of movement goals in order to appeal to a diverse audience (Diani, 2004). This leads to a strong collective identity and local cohesion. However, this cohesion can be a downfall, as it has been shown to lead to cliques and fragmentation. Cohesive networks have the effect of curtailing autonomy and inhibiting individuals' abilities to create bridging ties (Gargiulo and Benassi, 2000). Homophily also limits information that people receive, the attitudes they form, and the experiences they have because interactions are mainly with similar individuals (Newman and Dale, 2005). Further, homogenous networks are less adaptable when confronted with new members or contexts (Gargiulo and Benassi, 2000).

On the other hand, heterogeneous movements are based on networks which feature a large number of weak or bridging ties. These weak ties are important for the spread of information across broad networks (Granovetter, 1973). This is because a greater cross-

section of people can be reached through weak ties via shared network links. As Granovetter (1973) argues, loose affiliations between diverse groups will be more effective than tight-knit networks at spreading information across a broad portion of the population. A potential drawback of highly heterogeneous movements is that their messages must be more vague and encompassing than those which are directed at homophilic groups (Diani, 2004, pp. 346-7). In many cases, these heterogeneous movements cannot make claims as radical as other movements; for instance in Australia, the facet of the Aboriginal movement which has received the most non-Indigenous support has been the fairly non-confrontational Reconciliation movement (cf. Allum, 2000, on the 'Reconciliation Walk' attended by 500,000 Australians), whereas the Land Rights movement, which seeks Aboriginal autonomy from the state, was viewed as 'too radical' (cf. *West Australian*, 1988; *Courier-Mail*, 1988 on the unpopularity of Land Rights protests). This balance is difficult to negotiate on a movement level, and is likely to be even trickier at a local level.

The Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group

After Mulrunji's death in 2004, the coronial autopsy reported that his liver had been nearly cleaved in two; the injuries were similar to a motorbike crash or a skiing accident, but the major difference was that the rest of Mulrunji's body was virtually unharmed (Hooper, 2008; Waters, 2008). The coroner ruled that the death was an accident, that no charges would be laid, and that the investigation was closed. The people of Palm Island perceived this as an indication of their continued oppression, making them angry enough to riot. More than 300 Palm Island residents pelted the police barracks with stones and other projectiles and eventually burnt the police station to the ground. In response, special anti-terrorist police were flown to Palm Island where they arrested more than 20 rioters, the legality of which were questionable (Glowczewski, 2008; Waters, 2008).

Given the close connections between Townsville and Palm Island, tensions were high in both places at this time. In response, several community members decided to do something proactive. The Justice Group, as Florence Onus[4] recalled in an interview, was a means to channel the anger surrounding the situation into something positive:

> It was all like a volcano erupting, you could feel it, in the community, the tension. I thought, 'Well I've gotta do something to diffuse that'. And so that's what we did. I got together with a community group, we formed a committee, and said, 'We need to hit this on the head; we need to diffuse it so the people know we're taking some sort of action, we're not just sitting by not doing anything'.

As a result of the activism from this group and others, the original coronial decision was overturned, and Senior-Sergeant Hurley was eventually charged with manslaughter. Over the course of nearly three years, this group evolved into the Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group (TIHRG). The group was made up of Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and was fairly informal in its organisation.

I joined the TIHRG one month before the start of Hurley's manslaughter trial. I quickly became a contributing member of the group, which was in the process of organising daily rallies outside the courthouse. I attended weekly meetings in the month preceding the trial. Although I expected that my whiteness would pose a barrier in my field work, it was mitigated by my citizenship. My American-ness helped break the ice, inviting conversations with strangers on everything from the US Civil Rights movement to Paris Hilton. Throughout my fieldwork, I was introduced by my 'key informants' as 'our American researcher' to other activists, bureaucrats and politicians. I suspect that I was viewed as a sort of international bridging tie; on several occasions elders and activists noted how pleased they were to have an American in their group, 'telling the world about their struggle'.

In the several meetings held before the trial, I was able to discern a lot about the TIHRG's decision-making and organisational style. Outwardly, the TIHRG had a formal

committee structure, with a chairperson and a treasurer. In practice, however, the membership was fluid depending on who was present at weekly meetings, typically attended by about a dozen members. Indigenous women came freely, while non-Indigenous women joined by invitation. The non-Indigenous members included prominent local feminists, lawyers, and academics. Decision-making mirrored membership structures in its fluidity. Unlike the formal committees which it resembled, there were very few motions moved or votes called. The TIHRG did not resemble consciously non-hierarchical groups either, as these groups actively construct democratic structures, such as for consensus-based decision-making (Harding, 2009). For the TIHRG, decision-making structures, while casual, were informed by cultural protocol. Elders were given unofficial leadership positions, especially if they had experience in activism. Likewise, Traditional Owners[5] were afforded a greater decision-making capacity than outsiders. Amongst the non-Indigenous members of the group, there was an unspoken rule that we supported decisions made by the Indigenous women; this unofficial rule was broken once during my fieldwork and resulted in the non-Indigenous woman in question leaving the group.

The trial

The crowd that gathered for the start of the criminal trial of Senior-Sergeant Chris Hurley in Townsville on June 7, 2007 was smaller than most people expected—50, rather than 500. Most were from Townsville and Palm Island. Every day of the trial, a few minutes before the court opened, Gracelyn Smallwood, the Chairperson of the TIHRG, called everyone together on the lawn. We quietly gathered in a circle and held hands. The circle was usually evenly split between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Inside the circle was traditional dancing, followed by a smoking ceremony. Gracelyn said a few words each morning about the importance of gathering together in solidarity, 'whether there are two of us or two hundred'. She also regularly reminded us that 'this is not about black or white, it's a

human rights issue', and continually called for peace and non-violence. Then members of the crowd were offered the chance to say something. Family members of Mulrunji were given the first opportunity to speak, followed by elders, activists and then the general public. Most mornings, prayers were said to the Christian god, as well as to the ancestors.

This demonstration structure was followed on each morning of the seven day trial. However, some days were marked by unique appearances. One morning we were joined by a South African woman, dressed in a traditional orange skirt and headdress. On another day we were joined by two senior academics from the local university. Other guests included feminists, psychologists, lawyers and other non-Indigenous locals. All of these people were personally invited by activists. Others came who were not specifically invited but they were nonetheless welcomed. Particular freedoms were granted to members of the media, who were allowed to break the circle for photo opportunities, to hold microphones close to speakers, or to record broadcasts nearby.

Inside the courthouse was a frenzy of reporters, police officers, lawyers, and Indigenous people from Townsville and Palm Island. Many of these people knew each other so conversation during recesses was lively. One local journalist, writing at the close of the trial, described the atmosphere as 'festive', punctuated by 'light-hearted chats' between Aboriginal people and police officers, and with 'no evidence at all of any animosity or confrontation' (Weatherup, 2007a).

Media attention and public opinion

Many social movement participants believe that their actions have been successful if they are reported by the mass media (Maddison and Scalmer, 2006, p. 214). Media attention indicates that the concerns of a social movement are transferred from the margins of society into mainstream public debate. Unfortunately, movement participants have little control over

how the media will portray their actions and frame their issues. One means of media success is to learn how the media operates. Knowing that television and radio broadcasts typically rely on short 'sound bytes', activists attempt to condense their message into a five second 'grab'. This is illustrated by Gracelyn's repeated chorus that 'this isn't a black issue; this is a human rights issue'. This framing was not something that the group had decided to focus on, but rather an individual decision made by Gracelyn based on nearly four decades of activist experience. She has realised that a 'human rights' frame moves this issue from a minority interest to a universal, humanitarian issue. Further, she recognised the potential for that statement to be broadcast around Australia. In the mornings before the trial she could be heard repeating this phrase in conversation, as if 'rehearsing' for the main performance which was to come during the demonstration. Once her 'sound byte' was perfected, Gracelyn continued to personalize the issue for non-Indigenous people. She was able to expanded on this sentence in interviews, suggesting that

> Any mother, black or white, could get a phone call that her son,
> who was happily drunk—not violent, just singing and having
> fun—was arrested and found dead in the gaol cell one hour later.

This was a concerted effort to broaden the audience of potential supporters. Choudry (2007) notes that it is useful for Indigenous peoples to utilize certain coalitions to 'construct and frame issues so they resonate among diverse groups in different locations' (p. 105).

After seven days, the jury took less than three hours to reach a verdict: they found that Senior-Sergeant Chris Hurley was not guilty of manslaughter. This was a major blow to the family and friends of Mulrunji, and to the Indigenous community in general. Still, activists chose to frame the entire case in a positive light despite the negative legal outcome. 'This has been a win', Gracelyn announced to the media, 'because the whole world is watching this country'. The 'win' was not related to the case itself, but rather to the attention it garnered for Indigenous issues generally. The attention of the media ensures that the movement is

publicised and accessible to potential supporters, and that the issue remains the focus of public interest. In this regard, the daily rallies outside of Hurley's trial were a success. The local newspaper, the *Townsville Bulletin*, included pictures of demonstrations throughout the trial (cf. *Townsville Bulletin,* 2007a, 2007b), culminating in five pages devoted to the trial after it had finished (cf. Johnson and AAP, 2007; Weatherup, 2007a, 2007b). Likewise, the event was covered around Australia (cf. *Perth Now,* 2007; *The Australian,* 2007).

However, the truth behind Gracelyn's assertion, that this was a 'win' because 'the whole world is watching' is questionable. The Palm Island death in custody and the subsequent riots did attract media attention from countries such as New Zealand (cf. New Zealand Herald, 2004) and the United Kingdom (cf. BBC News, 2006), as well as from the global news network Associated Press (cf. AP Worldstream, 2004). The announcement of the trial was also newsworthy, and its announcement was reported in The United Kingdom's *Guardian* (Briton, 2007) and on the BBC website (2007). The case was also of interest in France, mostly due to the involvement of French anthropologist Barbara Glowczewski throughout many stages of activism, and her subsequent book on the topic (Glowczewski, 2008). These articles cover not only the death in custody and the trial, but the activism which has been involved in every step of the process. The articles which include an in-depth discussion of activism, though, do not mention the role of non-Indigenous supporters (cf. Johnson and AAP, 2007). Rather, these articles rely heavily on interviews with Aboriginal activists. Further, the images which accompanied the stories show traditionally dressed Aboriginal dancers conducting the ceremonies which opened the daily demonstrations (cf. *Townsville Bulletin,* 2007a, 2007b). The image which is portrayed by the media, then, is not necessarily of a diverse movement which is supported by a broad cross-section of the population. Rather, the faces which appear in photographs and the voices which are heard in articles and broadcasts are almost entirely Indigenous. Thus, the success is partial; the issue

has been broadcast around the world, but it has been framed as a black issue despite activist attempts to universalise it.

Even when social movements successfully manage their portrayal within the media, they have no control over the ways in which they will be interpreted by the general public. While many Australians are sympathetic to Indigenous issues, Townsville is not known for its tolerant attitude. Although many people argue that the 'racist' label is unfair (cf. AAP, 2007), the heightened publicity around Aboriginal issues often draws a negative backlash. For instance, in the lead-up to a highly publicised march in response to the death in custody, racist graffiti was scrawled around Townsville, 'including threats to kill black people' (Mercer, 2004). Similarly, one of the daily rallies outside the courthouse was dampened when someone brought reports of a sign scrawled with 'Die Blacks Die' hanging in one of Townsville's outer suburbs that morning. Thus, while activists have developed strategies to successfully manage their portrayal in the media, they are still faced with considerable opposition from some sectors of the community. In response to this, activists attempt to frame issues in a non-threatening way.

Diversification and framing

In order to appeal to a wide audience, the daily actions outside the courthouse were purposely kept low-risk. Because of the extensive liaisons with police officers before the trial began, concerns about the legality of the rallies and the potential for arrests were very low. In an attempt to further reduce the perceived risk, the TIHRG framed the daily demonstrations as peaceful prayer vigils. Gracelyn and Cindy, two of the key activists in the TIHRG, suggested that we invite leaders from every local church to hold a prayer vigil. Likewise, everyone in the group agreed that it was important to keep the demonstrations peaceful; given the recent riots on Palm Island, many people were wary of a similar event happening in Townsville.

Even the name of the group was a conscious framing attempt. Although it had started as the 'Justice Group', Gracelyn explained that 'justice' is linked with the police and the government. 'They are our enemies', she said, 'and we do not work with them. We are opposed to the government'. Thus, the group name was changed to the more universalist Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group.

The ways in which an issue is framed will attract certain non-Indigenous advocates (Funk-Unrau, 2005), so this deliberate framing shows an astute sense of coalition-building on the part of Townsville Aboriginal activists, who were aiming for a diverse and non-violent demonstration. The Aboriginal movement has always relied on networking with other groups, and these range from peaceful coalitions to involvement with more radical activists (Maddison, 2009). Support from different sorts of activists are valued in differing contexts, but in this case Aboriginal activists sought support from mainstream, non-violent and 'respectable' community members. Given the recent history of violence surrounding this issue, activists hoped that the inclusion of diverse supporters would abate some of the ongoing tensions between the Aboriginal community and the police.

In addition to the calculated framing attempts, personal invitations were extended to as many people as possible in order to ensure news-worthy numbers at the rallies. Rather than relying only on the media to draw a crowd, it was important to follow up with phone calls or emails, because people are more likely to follow through with an action which has been recommended by an interpersonal link (Granovetter, 1973). The make-up of the TIHRG was broad and ensured that a variety of networks would receive information from group members. Group members were contacted via email and reminded to bring as many people as they could to the daily rallies. Further, activists intentionally invited high-profile non-Indigenous community members. On the afternoon before the final day of the trial, Gracelyn asked everyone present to bring as many friends and family as they could on the following morning.

She wanted a very large circle with many speakers, prayers, and dances. These invitations, however, were not accompanied by an ongoing role in the movement. While activists were very clear with the loose coalition of supporters that their mere presence was of extreme importance at the daily rallies, without clearly articulated tasks or roles for non-Indigenous supporters, the relationship is unlikely to remain strong for any length of time, as Funk-Unrau (2005) found in coalitions between Canadian Indigenous and settler peoples. However, people who formed weak ties with the Aboriginal movement during the trial have been more likely to become involved later on, suggesting that the formation of weak ties during this trial was a successful means of creating a broad and diverse support network, even if those individuals are not heavily involved in activist organizations.

As important as it is to nurture bridging ties, it may be risky to do so at the expense of homophilic ties. While invitations were extended to non-Indigenous academics, co-workers, friends and acquaintances, it was only one week before the trial actually began that activists thought to speak with the Palm Island Council or the Palm Island Men's Group. These groups, along with other Aboriginal groups and individuals, were expected to know the details of the trial or to hear about it on the local Indigenous radio station. However, one cannot assume that just because someone has a certain identity that they are an activist. Even if people have taken part in activism previously, or regularly, the activist identity is not always readily taken on (Bobel, 2007). And since those who do not identify as activists are unlikely to act on an invitation which is only extended via mass-media (Granovetter, 1973), it is necessary to personally invite as many people as possible.

Framing this death in custody as 'not a black issue' further ignores an important fact: it *is* a black issue. The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, finished in 1991, and several subsequent reports have found that Aboriginal people are far more likely to die in custody than non-Aboriginal people. In the state of Queensland, Aboriginal people

were 16.8 times more likely to die in custody than non-Indigenous people based on statistics from between 1990 and 1995 (Indigenous Deaths in Custody, 1996, p. 23). This number is largely due to an overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the criminal justice system—Indigenous Australians made up 23.2% of all Australian prisoners in 2005, which is especially noteworthy considering that only 2.5% of the Australian population identifies as Indigenous (Johnston, 2008, p. 10). While it is conceivable that a non-Indigenous person could die in police custody, this is clearly an issue which disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Johnston (2008) feels that this high incarceration rate is due to the fact that 'too many Aboriginal people have not received the support and services needed to generate opportunity and to begin to recover from the impact of colonisation' (p. 11).

It is important to recall the recommendations which came out of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. In order to address the high rate of incarceration amongst the Indigenous population, 339 recommendations were made (Johnston, 2008). Many of these were related to diversionary practices—for instance, the creation of sobering-up shelters or the issuing of summons to appear before court, rather than arrests (Royal Commission, 1991). However, very few of these recommendations have been fully implemented in the years since the Royal Commission (Clements, 2006; Kelly, 2001). On Palm Island in November 2004, Mulrunji was arrested for being drunk in public. Activists were left wondering: if changes had been made to police procedures in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, would Mulrunji have been in police custody at all? However, diversifying the movement means that ultimate goals must be watered down in order to appeal to a more moderate audience. Thus, activists could not afford to point out the structural racism inherent in the justice system, nor their lack of political agency, which has led to such a high number of Indigenous deaths in custody. Instead, the issue was framed as a

question of justice, ignoring the social context which makes this issue specific to the Indigenous community.

Conclusions

Ignoring bridging ties may result in a homogenous, inward-focused movement, and too much homophily can lead to cliques and fragmentation (Gargiulo and Benassi, 2000; Granovetter, 1973). On the other hand, disregard for homophilic ties can leave many people feeling ignored and disenchanted with activists. Further, without strong bonding ties it is unlikely that a movement will have the sense of shared identity that encourages collective action (Saunders, 2007). This has the potential for turning some away from the movement, which may explain the lower numbers of people than were expected at the trial. This dilemma is not unique to the Aboriginal movement; the tension between unity and difference, or autonomy and collectivity has been identified as a key dynamic in social movements (Maddison and Scalmer, 2006). In response, movements like the anti-corporate globalization movement have embraced a 'diversity of tactics' approach to actions. For instance, Juris (2005; 2007) discusses the formation of several tactical 'blocs' within a single anti-summit protest; despite the difference in protest styles, a sense of unity was attempted through council meetings and dialogue within and between 'affinity groups'. The means of negotiating these tensions displayed by the anti-corporate globalization movement may be useful within other social movements, and further ways of negotiating the tensions are yet to be uncovered in movements around the world.

When movement networks contain a relative balance of bonding and bridging ties, their longevity and success is more likely. Homophilic ties offer local support and dedication, while heterogeneity allows for links to external resources and adaptability (Newman and Dale, 2005). This combination makes movements more resilient and reduces the likelihood of

activist exhaustion (Newman *et al.*, 2008). However, choices must be made when planning

protest events. As Gargiulo and Benassi (2000, p. 193) point out, social actors have limited

time and resources and so they are faced with a trade-off between cohesiveness and diversity.

The choice, then, is between safe, cohesive and homophilic networks or flexible, adaptive,

diverse networks. Aboriginal activism in Townsville, though vibrant and adaptive to local

conditions, still struggles to achieve a balance between diversity and homophily. Activists

have identified the local challenges and strive to counteract the difficulties in the area, but it is

important that movement participants recognize that both sets of ties are vital to movement

longevity and success, and both must be nurtured. Strategies which enable both ties to be

addressed at once are being developed, however, and are particularly aided by social

networking sites such as Facebook, which allow users to send seemingly personalised

invitations to dozens of people at a time. Further research into this area, particularly as

technology changes the face of social movement networking, will undoubtedly elucidate the

processes which inform the formation of social movement organizations and the

demographics of movement constituents and supporters.

Notes

[1] For this ethnographic study I acted as a 'critically engaged activist researcher'—standing in solidarity with research participants while remaining critical and reflexive (Petray, 2009).

[2] In Australia there are two culturally and geographically distinct indigenous groups: Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders. My fieldwork was specifically geared towards Aboriginal activism in Townsville, but I made no attempts to exclude Torres Strait Islanders; when I speak about a mixed group I indicate this with the term 'Indigenous'.

[3] Palm Island is a former Aboriginal reserve, established in 1918 as a penal settlement for 'troublesome' Indigenous people and single mothers, eventually becoming home to people from more than 50 culturally distinct Indigenous groups. In 1985 the Queensland government established all former reserves and missions as

Aboriginal communities which are now governed by elected councils, similar to mainstream local government areas in the state (Waters, 2008).

[4] Most names and identifying details have been omitted from this paper. However, names which were highly publicized have been included. Further, several research participants have explicitly requested to be identified in my research, so I have chosen to print their names.

[5] Traditional Owners are Indigenous people who have descended from the groups who traditionally lived in an area. Given the nature of colonialism, there are a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living around the country in areas where they have no cultural links, particularly in urban and regional centres like Townsville. In Townsville, the Traditional Owner groups are the Bindal and the Wulgurukaba. Community members who identify with these groups are often given higher decision-making powers and are deferred to in arguments.

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