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Protest 2.0: Online interactions and Aboriginal activists

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Introduction

Networking has always been a key feature of social movements, but as digital communications technology becomes embedded in our social understandings of the world, the modes of networking are changing. Since the mid-1990s, activists have used websites to get their message out to the world (Belausteguigoitia 2006, Landzelius 2006a, 2006b). Email listservs became a key tool for social movement communications between meetings, to plan for actions and to discuss and debate points of internal contention (Juris 2005, Graeber 2009, Kavada 2010). Recently, the internet has taken a more interactive turn, known as 'web 2.0'; this term was coined by DiNucci (1999) to indicate the profound shift from the monolithic and static, 'brochure-like' webpages with only the occasional comment function, to spaces where everyone is an author. The term is a contested one, with Tim Berners-Lee (2006) suggesting 'that was what the Web was supposed to be all along'; O'Reilly (2007: 34) concedes that web 2.0 is often 'not something new, but rather a fuller realization of the true potential of the web platform'. However, the general discussion of web 2.0 refers to technology which is multi-directional, collaborative, interactive, participatory, live and instantaneous (Goodchild 2007; Murugesan 2007; O'Reilly 2007). Rather than passive consumers of web content, web 2.0 is characterised by the collective creation of web content (O'Reilly 2007). Just as individuals rely more heavily on blogs and interactive networking sites like Facebook and YouTube, social movement networks are entering this realm as well. Unlike the web pages of the earlier years of cyber-activism which had a tendency to essentialise Indigenous groups as a political tactic (Landzelius 2006b), 'web 2.0' is a space which encourages hybridity and horizontality (Birdsall 2007). That is, digital communication technologies allows for the 'creation of new transcultural forms' (Ashcroft,

Griffiths & Tiffin 2003: 118)   in much the same way as colonisation did, by opening up spaces for interactions, but digital technology does so on a more level playing field.

This has been heralded as a digital democracy (Williams 2009). It decentres the 'expert' author, placing the emphasis instead on the conversations which can happen through comments, blogs, 'tweets', and so on (Lai & Turban 2008, Williams 2009). Web 2.0 increases the possibilities for people around the globe to exercise their 'right to communicate' (Birdsall 2008). In particular, it gives Indigenous groups the opportunity to communicate in their own language – for instance, the Cherokee Nation, which offers online tuition in Cherokee language (Cherokee Nation 2010), or the Gugu-Badhun Digital History Project, which has collected recordings of elders telling their own stories (Gugu Badhun 2010). Sometimes, this diffuse form of news infiltrates the mainstream media, as illustrated when the mainstream media used Twitter as a key source following the anti-junta protests in Myanmar in 2007 (Castells 2008) and Iran in 2009 (Drezner 2010). Of course, the democratic aspects of web 2.0 only apply to those with access to the related infrastructure – about 1.6 billion people worldwide, or 25% of the global population (Franklin 2010). As this infrastructure becomes more affordable, however, it is being increasingly taken up by many traditionally marginalised sectors of society, for instance, remote Aboriginal communities (Kral 2010). As a result, even those who lack access to many channels of expression are able to creatively utilise what is available to them, in ways that often undermine stereotypes (Abah 2009).

The role of the media, according to Moe (2010), should be to allow those at the political periphery easier access to the political core. Web 2.0 facilitates this relationship. Instead of letters to the editor, which were a historical means of expressing one's viewpoint on a public scale (Moe 2010), individuals can now write their own blogs, post their opinions

on twitter, or comment on individual news stories. Whereas letters to the editor and other forms of public expression are mediated – an editor makes a decision about what to publish, and in what form – web 2.0 offers a soapbox from which anyone may shout to the world. Castells (2008) suggests that the internet has become a public sphere, where global civil society is communicated and expressed. Part of what makes web 2.0 so powerful is how unpredictable it is (Drezner 2010), meaning that the state cannot develop responses as quickly and efficiently as they can with predictable activist repertoires. The key benefit of web 2.0 in activism is that it offers a 'many-to-many' mode of communication (Moe 2010), enabling broad conversations about issues that would otherwise not gain the attention of the mainstream media. However, the other side of this situation is that when everyone has a soapbox from which to shout, society may suffer from opinion-overload. Moe (2010) suggests that the result of this is noise, confusion, fragmentation, and ultimately political polarization. The other drawback of web 2.0 is that, in addition to lowering the costs of activist organising, it also lowers the costs of government monitoring. It allows for states to create a 'digital panopticon' (Drezner 2010), and recently this has become a global panopticon, as evidenced by the December 2010 arrest of Julian Assange, director of whistle blowing website WikiLeaks. Assange was arrested in England on Swedish charges of sexual assault (CBS News 2010); however he claims the arrest was politically motivated and 'actually an attempt to get me into a jurisdiction which will then make it easier to extradite me to the US' (*The Local* 2010).   Drezner (2010) points out that digital repression is most often the case in states which already have repressive regimes, such as Iran. In places like Australia, however, the benefits of web 2.0 to civil society are much greater, though as the WikiLeaks example illustrates, the distinctions between liberal democracy and repressive regimes are not always so clear.

The role of the internet in activism has been the focus of several recent studies. Much of the research focuses on the global justice, or anti-corporate globalisation movement. For instance, Juris (2005) examines the use of the internet by movement participants to coordinate actions and build social networks. Juris (2005) argues that digital technologies reflect and express the non-hierarchical ideals espoused by participants in this movement (see also Juris, Caruso & Mosca 2008). Likewise, Kavada (2010: 356) argues that the internet 'has the potential to contest the prevailing model of top-down communication'. Specific research on the use of digital technologies by Indigenous activists has been collated into an edited volume by Landzelius (2006). The chapters in this collection focus heavily on questions of identity construction and essentialisation (cf. Belausteguigoitia 2006, Fattah 2006, Latukefu 2006, Lee 2006). Focusing on Indigenous Australia, Singleton et al (2009) argue that interactive digital technologies like YouTube can empower Aboriginal young people as they share their culture with an outside audience.

This paper explores the role that the internet plays in the activism carried out by Aboriginal people in Townsville. This activism, a localised movement which is also part of the national Aboriginal movement, is led by older activists, who are not as comfortable with digital communications technology as their younger counterparts. Thus, they have been slow to adopt these new, interactive technologies. However, activists recognise the important potential of web 2.0 for networking opportunities, and are attempting to embed themselves in this milieu. There is an emerging focus on a new kind of activism, which I call 'protest 2.0'. Like web 2.0, it can exist alongside its predecessor, but it has also displaced its older counterpart to a certain extent. This paper argues that protest 2.0 is most effective as just one component of activism, as an enhancement to offline activism, rather than the main tactic.

Aboriginal Resistance

Aboriginal people have actively resisted European colonisation of their lands since Europeans arrived in Australia in 1788. This resistance began to coalesce into a recognisable social movement in the 1920s (McGregor 1993; Maynard 2008). Activists in the 20th century relied heavily on letter-writing campaigns, petitions, and conferences. It was common for local groups to operate largely independently but to converge under national umbrella organisations like the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). These coalitions kept in touch via phone conferences, letters, newsletters, and occasional conferences where members from many groups travelled to one place to meet in person and discuss overarching issues and strategies (Taffe 2005). Today, approximately 517,200 people, or 2.5% of the Australian population, identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Island person[i] (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). The lack of a treaty in Australia, coupled with this very small Indigenous population, has meant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples rely more on grassroots activism and non-Indigenous supporters to achieve their goals (Pascoe 2008).

Official government attitudes towards Aboriginal people varied state by state, but primarily ranged from segregation on reserves and missions, until the 1930s, to attempts to assimilate Indigenous people into white Australia until the 1970s. After the 1970s an official policy of self-determination was adopted, though in practice Aboriginal communities and individuals maintained very little autonomy (Attwood 2005). The Howard government adopted a policy of 'mutual obligation' in the early years of the 21st century, essentially trying to mainstream Indigenous Australians into a neoliberal system. Despite decades of protest, the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous Australians are still astonishing: educational outcomes, life expectancies, employment rates and good health are all much

lower for Aboriginal people, while deaths in custody and over-crowded houses are much more prevalent. These inequalities have been the focus of significant activism in recent decades by Aboriginal people and their non-Indigenous supporters (Maddison 2009). Although the focal points of Aboriginal activism, both historically and more recently, are centred on the capital cities of Australia, regional centres have always acted as hubs of resistance.   Places like Townsville, Queensland had the benefit of proximity to Aboriginal reserves, where Indigenous people were sent for bad behaviour, miscegenation, or having 'mixed blood', and administered by a non-Indigenous 'protector', usually a local police chief (Chesterman & Galligan 1997).   Activists had firsthand experience with the extreme repression of the early 20th century.

This history occupies a central location in the memories of Townsville activists, with whom I conducted field work from May 2007 until December 2009. During this period, I acted as a critically engaged activist researcher (Speed 2006), working in solidarity with my research participants.   Critically engaged activist research accepts that objectivity is impossible and instead strives to carry out meaningful, movement-relevant research (Isaacman 2003, Bevington & Dixon 2005, Speed 2006). Activist researchers play a role in shaping their research settings, but Bevington & Dixon (2005) argue that this does not necessarily affect research outcomes. Rather, as long as researchers remain committed to improving the movement, they will avoid uncritical adulation of the movement under study (Bevington & Dixon 2005). As an activist researcher in Townsville, I was a part of the shift that took place as Aboriginal activists in Townsville adopted new technology as a key tool for organising.   My work was with several activist groups in Townsville, most notably the Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group. This group was established in response to the 2004 death in custody of an Aboriginal man on nearby Palm Island, and its membership

consisted of approximately 20 women, half of whom were Indigenous and all of whom spoke English as their first language. When I began my fieldwork, the group met weekly for several hours at a time, and meetings were very well attended. This was in the lead-up to the manslaughter trial of Senior-Sergeant Chris Hurley, the police officer responsible for the death in custody. After the officer was acquitted, attendance at meetings dropped sharply; meetings were often cancelled and the group communicated mainly by email.

In Townsville, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent only 6% of the city's population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). Although the percentage is higher than the Australian average of 2.5%, Townsville's Indigenous population is still very small. As a result, Indigenous people struggle to maintain a voice in politics, both on a local and national stage. Just 50 km to the north of Townsville (see Figure 1), the Aboriginal community of Palm Island is home to approximately 3000 Indigenous people, many of whom travel to Townsville regularly to visit family, receive medical attention or go shopping (Hooper 2008). 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 (ABC News, 2004; Fickling, 2003). While this assertion is hard to verify, there is no arguing the fact that activists in this region face considerable opposition, such as a purported Ku Klux Klan cell which makes the news every few years (ABC News, 2008; McKinnon, 2007; Mac, 2003).

As I spoke with activists throughout my fieldwork, I noticed a major focus on the importance of networking. Florence Onus is an Aboriginal woman in her 50s with whom I worked closely throughout my fieldwork. Florence is a local activist as well as the Indigenous Liaison Officer for the Faculty of Law, Business and Creative Arts at James Cook

University. Florence has been involved with the establishment of Indigenous radio stations, she has long been involved in community campaigns around a number of issues, and she has recently been named the Chair of the newly formed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation. Florence considers this her most important role in the social movement as it allowed a number of people to keep up to date on the events and issues around the area. Florence relies heavily on email, but most of the activists with whom I worked were less comfortable with digital communications technologies. This is partially due to age – most activists were over the age of 50 and were reluctant to learn the new technology – but may also be attributed to cultural explanations. Aboriginal culture privileges oral and visual means of communication such as storytelling and art. Emails, though, are a primarily written form of communication, and may be less rapidly adopted. However, email has gradually become an important tool for many of these activists, particularly those who work within Aboriginal organisations, such as the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service, and can use their email addresses for the purposes of activism. Still, most activists have not integrated these digital technologies into their everyday lives. Although they utilise email, it is not, for many of my research participants, their central means of communication and collaboration.

Several of Townsville's Aboriginal activists have created Facebook profiles, though the amount and purpose of use varies considerably. For instance, while Florence has wholeheartedly embraced email as a form of information sharing and political networking, her presence on Facebook is so far limited to keeping in touch with family members. Younger users, like Janine Gertz, have embedded themselves socially as well as politically in Facebook as a medium for networking on a number of causes. These cyber-identities can be more easily devolved from state frameworks. When identity is expressed through the

'interests' tab on a profile and the groups one is a part of, these issues are public but largely independent of the state. However, they are not so easily devolved from economic frameworks, as one's Facebook profile becomes a form of market research for advertisers who can then target specific individuals (Franklin 2010).

Social Movement Networking – Then and Now

Although Florence has fully adopted the internet as a networking tool, she looks fondly on pre-technology activism. She remembers that 'We sent out letters. Back in the early days, before we had email, it was writing letters. Utilising the systems that were available' (Onus 2008). More specifically, Florence remembers a campaign she became involved in during the early 1990s. The catalyst for this action was the planned mainstreaming of Indigenous housing, which had been handled by the Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DAIA), but was proposed to be absorbed by the not Indigenous-specific Queensland Housing Commission. Florence said that activists wanted housing to remain Aboriginal-specific and called for a more general policy review, because 'there wasn't a policy review from Joh Bjelke's[ii] era, on Indigenous housing. And Aboriginal and Islander people here in Queensland were in the worst, you know, sub-standard housing' (Onus 2008). This action began as a small project in Townsville but eventually spread across the state and went on for more than two years.

At the time, very few Aboriginal activists and community members had access to email. In 1992 when this campaign started, the local Indigenous radio station had not yet been established, so there was no simple way of contacting a large portion of Indigenous families in the area. Instead, Florence used the 'Indigenous grapevine' to announce community meetings where activists could inform others of the issue, and of their plans to

address the situation. Once the campaign was established, Florence approached the DAIA and was able to utilise their 'mail-out system' so that she could contact 'all the Indigenous households in the region' (Onus 2008).

With this contact information, Florence and a small group of activists eventually went door-to-door, visiting Indigenous families living in DAIA housing to hear their thoughts on what improvements were needed in Indigenous housing. Florence says that it was time-consuming but it had to be done. Moreover, she was able to witness the conditions of housing firsthand, and she was shocked at what she saw. It was partially an issue of quality: 'Things like screens, fans, well-kept gardens. If you give people a nice place they're going to take pride in it' (Onus 2008). But what she found was that people were not given quality housing, and features like ceiling fans which make living in the tropics bearable were not considered necessary in Indigenous housing. There were also cultural issues, such as small houses, inadequate for large, Aboriginal extended families. Instead, Indigenous people were provided with housing designed for the small nuclear families common in broader Australian culture. This door-to-door action covered a very large geographical area, including Townsville, Charters Towers, the Burdekin district, around Ayr, and the Hinchinbrook district, around Ingham. By identifying the people most affected by the issue, Florence was able to put her efforts into targeted actions aimed at educating and mobilising these specific Indigenous families. As with a lot of activism at the time, 'it was a lot of work and it was a lot of really underground, going out, talking to people, going from house to house, paying for your own petrol, all that sort of stuff that you have to do' (Onus 2008).

The 'Indigenous grapevine' was successful, because it was not long before activists in other areas heard what was happening in Townsville.

> So, other regions got wind of it, and so we had a whole state petition. And I sent our letters to the network down in central Queensland, and southern, and they sent it out. So that was a whole state wide action. Onus 2008

Eventually, a state wide petition was drawn up and delivered to the DAIA, and a policy review was established to improve the standards of Indigenous housing.   Florence considered this a major win and sees the two years of work that it took as worthwhile.

Since that time, however, the internet has become an integral part of her activism. This has been aided by her workplaces, including the local university and the Indigenous radio station, 4K1G, which provided Florence with work-related email addresses. Particularly in her role with 4K1G, Florence was encouraged to use her email for activist purposes, keeping the community informed of issues and events via the internet and the radio station. She says that 'Definitely, the multimedia has really helped'; it allows her to disseminate information far more quickly and to a broader range of people. Rather than visiting Indigenous services herself to hang flyers, she can email the flyer out and it will be posted by others around the community. Another bonus is that 'you can do it with very little cost'. Speaking of herself, and activists of a similar age, Florence feels that 'I guess when you get the older activists that come from that 70s/80s era, they have to keep up to date and informed off what all the technology changes are' (Onus 2008).

Advances in technology make the opportunities for networking—locally, nationally, internationally, and between movements—much faster and simpler. But the rise of the internet in activism is far more complex than just making communications easier. As Landzelius (2006a) argues, the increasing moves made by Indigenous peoples into cyberspace complicate the relationship between identity and place, and affect the ways that identities are constructed and presented. Much of the literature on cyber-activism focuses

on global campaigns, such as the U'Wa of the Colombian Amazon who became the 'poster child' of the global environmental movement (Landzelius 2006b), or the Zapatistas, who created a global spectacle in their ongoing struggle for autonomy within the Mexican state (Belausteguigoitia 2006). These movements utilise technology for outreach purposes.

In addition to outreach, Landzelius (2006a: 9) has identified 'inreach' as 'the dissemination of in-group information … as well as the import of expert knowledge to the local level'. This is the cyber-activism more often utilised by the Aboriginal movement in Townsville. When I joined the Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group, members kept in touch by email, using the 'reply all' function which often left off newer members and which many found confusing. Someone suggested a listserv, and as I had used them before, I offered to set one up. As of April 2010, the TIHRG listserv had 32 members, 25 of whom had started at least one discussion; 10 of these active participants in the discussions are Indigenous. The vast majority (67%) of emails to the list were sent by a small group of members, made up of Florence, myself, Marilyn (an Indigenous woman) and group leader Gracelyn (Figure 2). The emails that come through the TIHRG listserv range from plans for meetings and demonstrations, to newspaper articles about Indigenous issues or politics, to notices about other social movement activities, such as an environmental rally. The purpose of the list is to keep people in touch and up to date on local issues; it serves to strengthen offline activism. Between the establishment of the listserv in August 2007 and October 2009, there were 381 discussions started; many were multi-post threads, with a total of 639 emails exchanged in this 27-month period. The volume of email discussions moved between peaks and troughs, correlating with the organisation of events or the discussion of timely issues (Figure 3). For instance, there is a small peak in October and November 2007,

when the TIHRG was planning a demonstration to mark the third anniversary of an Aboriginal death in custody on Palm Island. Another, larger peak occurred between March and June 2008, corresponding to the most active period in the Stolen Wages campaign and a large number of emails circulating about meetings, travel to Community Cabinet functions, and marches.

Kavada (2010) points out the importance of things like listservs as an archival tool. In the case of the TIHRG, our Google Group website stores all emails that have been sent, and allows members to log on and peruse these messages. This is useful for new members to familiarise themselves with what the group has been doing, as well as for long-term members to check back at what has been discussed previously. However, the primary use of the listserv was not, as Kavada (2010) found with World Social Forum activism, for arguing or debating issues. Rather, the TIHRG listserv was primarily used to share news stories of interest to group members, to advertise activist events, to share minutes from meetings and very occasionally to come to quick decisions on uncontroversial proposals. This is due, largely, to the structure of the TIHRG. Unlike World Social Forum activism, which is self-consciously horizontal and inclusive, there was an unspoken hierarchy within the TIHRG. Non-Indigenous women rarely made decisions (Petray 2010), and even amongst Indigenous members there was a tendency to defer to the opinion of Gracelyn and Florence, as two experienced activists who are also Traditional Owners in the Townsville area. As such, there were very few argues or debates at all during my fieldwork.

Activism Online and Offline
As Garcia et al. (2009) argue, the world is not split into two dimensions, one 'real' and the other 'virtual'. Rather, we have one social world which encompasses both

traditional sociality and computer-mediated communications. For instance, social networking sites like Facebook are not tools of entertainment but are used to strengthen, complement and enhance interpersonal networks (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008; Salimkhan, Manago & Greenfield 2010). Users rarely go to these sites as a form of escape, as they may do with things like role-playing games[iii] (Yee 2005). A more apt description, then, is to refer to these two dimensions as online and offline realms of the social world. In fact, Garcia et al. (2009) point out that web 2.0 actually enhances the possibilities for the 'presentation of self' (Goffman 1959). In other words, online environments provide people the opportunity to clarify who they are to their social networks (Strano 2008; Salimkhan, Manago & Greenfield 2010).

Another recent phenomenon is the rise of Facebook and other social networking sites as forms for cyber-activism. Facebook allows users to seamlessly merge their various interests, political as well as social, as they post links to articles and events or publicly express their thoughts to their entire network of 'friends'. Users can easily express their identity as an Aboriginal person, a unionist, a greenie, and a feminist with the click of a button and the update of a profile. Facebook and similar social networking sites, then, may make it easier to balance multiplex identities. The interactivity enabled by web 2.0 serves to expand the 'virtual we' of Indigenous solidarity, encompassing not just Indigenous people but their supporters, and many sympathetic individuals from around the world. In fact, many 'activist leaders' utilise Facebook heavily, for instance Aboriginal activist Gary Foley, who has more than 2,500 'friends' who see his regular posts about current events and political issues on their 'newsfeeds' every time they log in to Facebook.

People express their political beliefs on Facebook through various means, including membership in 'groups' or the support of 'causes'. One of these causes has been established by activists in North Queensland pledging their support of Palm Island.   Palm Island is an Indigenous community approximately 60 km north of Townsville, initially established as a penal reserve for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accused of being disruptive or falling pregnant to white men. This Facebook cause has garnered 1,135 members from around the world, beginning in August 2008. As with all Facebook causes, it includes an option for donations and the page explains that donations go towards the Center for Aboriginal Healing and Vision, although no donations have been made in the life of this cause. The 'About' page of this cause has reproduced the text of a 2007 letter to former Queensland Premier, Peter Beattie, protesting the privatisation of the Palm Island store. Further, three position statements were provided:

> 1. The power of the operating [sic] of the Palm island community store must stay with the Aboriginal community.
> 2. Media is highlighting all the negative in the community so the government can control what happens on the island.
> 3. Finally you have the power to stop the white man from invading Australia. (Support Palm Island 2010)

Despite more than one thousand members and the potential for interactive discussions on the Cause's page, there are only seven posts on this page, from five members. Most comments are asking for more information on the issue, noting how old the letter is and inquiring if this is still the focus of the cause. The vast majority of members, however, have simply clicked a button to join this cause, showing their support but contributing nothing else. Some have invited their own friends, thus expanding the network of uninvolved supporters of this cause. While it is possible that whoever began this cause has limited

access to the internet and is unable to update the page, the lack of engagement by members is notable.

Townsville Aboriginal activists are beginning to embrace digital technology to undertake protest 2.0. For example, a key focus of activism in Townsville in the past few years has been a death in custody on Palm Island, and the events which happened shortly afterwards. In November 2004, an Aboriginal resident of Palm Island was arrested for public drunkenness, and less than one hour later was found dead in the police station. According to the coroner, his liver had been effectively cleaved in two, with the injuries resembling those found in high-speed motorbike accidents, except that they were extremely localised. However, a week after this death the decision was announced not to prosecute the police officer responsible for the death. In an extreme expression of community disempowerment and anger, a riot erupted in which stones and mangoes were thrown at police, and the police station and courthouse eventually burnt down (Glowczcewski 2008; Hooper 2008; Waters 2008). In October 2008, Palm Island resident Lex Wotton was on trial for inciting this riot. During his trial I was asked by a fellow member of the Townsville Indigenous Human Rights Group to set up an online petition calling for the charges against Wotton to be dropped. Using a petition-hosting website, we created an e-petition. The target was vague: the Queensland Justice System. I was sceptical that the petition could have any influence on the outcome of the trial; the petition was not started until after the trial had begun, and was directed at no one in particular. Still, the petition attracted 404 signatures from around the globe – transnational 'netizens' (Hauben & Hauben 1998) from places like the US, India, Canada, and Europe calling on the Australian government to address a 'terrible injustice'. This form of activism took only moments – just long enough to fill out a

form indicating one's name and location, with the option of providing additional comments. It was circulated on email lists, forwarded around the globe through internet networks; it was also publicly available on thepetitionsite.com where anyone could read the information and sign the petition. This petition was never presented to anyone in power, and its only function was to demonstrate international condemnation of what activists regard as the racist overtones of the whole death in custody and its related events.

This petition in support of Lex Wotton illustrates the changing nature of activism in a digital age. Supporters of the cause indicate their support by clicking a button from the comfort of their home. This communicates their 'activist identity' to their network of friends, who receive updates of Facebook activity in their own newsfeeds. Unlike the housing action from the early 1990s described by Florence, this petition was not directed at a clear target; its goal was vague and unachievable. The message becomes condensed, as it must fit in the character limits provided, rather than being shared, discussed, and worked out together over the course of hours at community and activist meetings. At the same time, this form of activism opens up the issue to anyone, anywhere (with internet access), as opposed to the very targeted housing action which was only advertised to those living in DAIA housing.

Social networking sites like Facebook and electronic petition sites allow activism to become accessible to a wider variety of people. Cyber-activism is quicker and simpler than traditional methods of networking; one can sign a petition online, join a Facebook group to stop black deaths in custody, and email a form letter to a politician in the space of several minutes. This opens up politics to people who would otherwise not become involved in activism, because 'push-button activism' (Landzelius 2006b) is much easier and less time

consuming than spending hours at meetings and demonstrations. This makes it much more appealing to many people, because they do not need to invest as much time or effort to the cause. It increases the opportunities to engage with the state on a regular basis. People become 'netizens', transnational citizens of the internet who focus their activism on their own state, other states, transnational institutions, and multinational corporations (Franklin 2010). But, as Landzelius (2006b) argues, this virtual effortlessness may also decrease the effectiveness of action. Those in power realise the ease with which emails are sent and petitions are signed, and they are less likely to respond in the same way as they might to a strike or a protest march. Feminist writer Betty McLellan (2010) pushes this critique further, suggesting that virtual activism actually benefits those in power. As activists have been 'systematically excluded from the mainstream media and other arenas controlled by the power elite' they have occupied virtual spaces, but this means that 'dissidents will offer no challenge in the real world' (McLellan 2010: 234).

Push-button activism allows people to feel as if they are involved in a movement with minimal participation. This is beneficial for the strengthening of collective identity, a vital factor in the participation and retention of movement members. Movement participants can easily feel a part of the movement, by displaying their interest on their Facebook profile. But strong feelings of collective identity do not always translate into a strong movement. Facebook causes and e-petitions have a broad reach but they require little commitment from members. In other words, web 2.0 may increase the numbers of inactive members of social movements. The question for movement participants, then, is whether the reduced time costs and broad networking possibilities outweigh these negative aspects of push-button activism. Some social movement participants have come to realise

the drawbacks suggested by Landzelius (2006b) and are working to overcome those drawbacks by changing their tactics. The listserv Women for Wik, an email list which circulates information regarding a range of Indigenous Australian issues, recently received a message from a member circulating a petition. Another member responded, urging people to send an individual letter to their Member of Parliament, instead of signing the petition. This member argued that a single letter is 'worth' as much as an entire petition despite the broad range of people represented on petitions. Thus, many activist sites craft form letters or provide bullet points of issues for members to include in their own letters to power-holders, recognising that this is a more effective tactic than merely signing a petition.

Conclusions: The Effectiveness of Protest 2.0

A different use of web 2.0 could have had a very different outcome in each of the scenarios I described above. If Florence and other activists in her campaign had access to web 2.0 at the time of the housing actions, the protest campaign would no doubt have taken less time and energy. Notices about public meetings could have been emailed and conversations between regions could have been instantaneous. However, moving the educational portion of the campaign to the internet, or encouraging feedback through an online form rather than in person, would likely marginalise a number of people who do not have the knowledge and social capital associated with the use of the internet. This 'digital subaltern' is invisible in society (Kent 2008) and unable to take part in social movements which exist primarily in web 2.0.

The petition in support of Lex Wotton is one example of protest 2.0 which exists purely in a digital realm. Although web 2.0 offers more opportunities to engage with power structures, protest 2.0 needs to have a clear target in order to do so effectively. This

particular e-petition did not, and it is indicative of the possibilities for aimlessness that web 2.0 brings with it. Whereas a street protest with no clear target will at least attract the attention of passersby, these e-petitions are unlikely to be heard by anyone except the signatories unless a concerted effort is made by the social movement to direct their dialogue at power structures. Likewise, Facebook groups and causes like Support Palm Island have the potential to leave their supporters wondering what, exactly, they support. To avoid gaining a membership base that clicks their support once and then forgets about the issue, protest 2.0 needs to have a clear target, clear goals and clear instructions on how members can participate. Many forms of protest 2.0, however, are vague on all three of these aspects. The e-petition in support of Lex Wotton allowed participants to feel engaged in the process of activism but fell short when it came to outcomes; moreover, this e-petition did not provide supporters with a sense of what else they could do for the cause.

For protest 2.0 to be effective, it needs to be integrated as one component of the overarching social movement, rather than the only component. As McLellan (2010: 234) concludes about the feminist movement, virtual space is simply one arena among many in which activist voices should be heard. Schultz (2008), a researcher with the online collective DigiActive, has created a guide for Facebook activism, and the firmest recommendation from this booklet is the importance of creating a location, external to Facebook, where members can visit when they are interested in becoming further involved in the movement. Schultz (2008) also mentions the importance of linking online and offline tactics, which I argue is the most important component of effectively utilising web 2.0 for protest purposes. There are several notable examples of movements which have successfully harnessed the power of web 2.0 without falling into the rut of push-button activism. For instance, Singleton et al. (2009) write about the use of information and communication technologies

in a Western Australian Aboriginal cultural centre. These interactive media, particularly the creation of videos for YouTube, support the empowerment of Aboriginal people, particularly young people. The reason behind this, argue Singleton et al. (2009), is that certain forms of web 2.0 do not require extensive literacy skills and privilege the oral culture that Aboriginal society is founded on.

Moreover, web 2.0 has the potential to democratise and decentralise large social movements. Using email listservs and social networking sites, it is now possible to organise non-hierarchically across large geographical ranges, and to incorporate individuals and organisations from a range of ideological positions (Kavada 2010). The power of the internet is that it allows for a global network for communication, organised horizontally rather than hierarchically, which can be used both as an organising tool and as a means for dialogue between global citizens (Castells 2008). These networks no longer rely on the states within which they are located, because as Castells (2008: 86) argues, 'global civil society now has the technological means to exist independently from political institutions and from the mass media'. Egypt has dramatically illustrated the power of the internet as a tool of protest organising (Rothman 2011), but other examples of global civil society include protest website/online communities like Australia's GetUp!, MoveOn in the United States, and the global Avaaz (Ref- the monthly).

To be truly effective, I argue that web 2.0 should be used to enhance offline activism, rather than to replace it. Activists should apply the same principles to cyber-activism that they used before the availability of the internet. For instance, Florence's door-to-door activism on the issue of Indigenous housing in Queensland was focused on a specific audience, it had clear issues and goals, and an obvious target: the DAIA. The e-petition in support of Lex Wotton had none of these. Applying these concepts to cyber-activism will

allow web 2.0 to strengthen and enhance offline activism. Web 2.0 does have numerous benefits – it makes it possible for activists to communicate quickly, with a broad audience. Moreover, supporters can be quickly organised because the communication is instantaneous. If carefully managed with clear goals, audience and target, the benefits of web 2.0 to protesters are significant in terms of efficiency and ability to reach a broad audience. However, the resource needs to be deliberately and consciously utilised to ensure effective and meaningful protests.

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[i] Before colonisation, Australia was inhabited by two culturally distinct groups: Aboriginal Australians occupied the main continent while Torres Strait Islanders lived in a group of islands off the tip of Cape York. Although the groups remain distinct, the term 'Indigenous' is employed to refer to both groups.

[ii] Florence is referring to Joh Bjelke-Petersen, former leader of the National Party and Premier of Queensland from 1968 to 1987. Bjelke-Petersen is remembered for his crack-down on all forms of public protest as well as his conservative stance on issues such as Aboriginal rights.

[iii] Of course, there are numerous reasons why people play online role-playing games, and escapism is only one of these. Many players use games in the same way they might use Facebook – as a means of keeping in touch with people they know offline, or of enhancing their social networks and meeting new friends (Yee 2005). Some immersive games are even seen as tools of collective action, giving players a sense of collective agency in attempts to solve global problems (McGonigal 2003).