

from sit-ins to #revolutions

Media and the Changing Nature of Protests



Edited by
Olivia Guntarik and Victoria Grieve-Williams

BLOOMSBURY

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1

Introduction: ‘Together We Are More’: New media for Old Tales

*Victoria Grieve-Williams and
Olivia Guntarik*

In 1989 two Australian (NSW) policemen dressed in blackface at a police barbeque to mock two Aboriginal men who had died in custody. They wandered around with nooses on their necks saying, ‘I am Lloyd Boney’ and ‘I am David Dungay.’ Lloyd Boney had been found deceased hanging by a sock in a police cell some ninety-five minutes after his arrest in 1987. His family and the Aboriginal community and their allies believed he was one of many Aboriginal men murdered by police in similar circumstances: For example, John Pat in 1983, Eddie Murray in 1981. David Gundy too – shot dead in his home in 1989 as a result of a bungled raid by the police Special Weapons Operation Squad (SWOS) who were in pursuit of another man – is recognized by the Aboriginal community as a death in police custody. The video evidence of the police blackface mockery was passed on to an ABC reporter and televised in 1993. Later that year, eighteen-year-old Daniel Yock died as a result of police violence in Brisbane, Queensland. The evidence of the protests that followed the deaths of these men is hard to find. In recent decades, instances of Aboriginal protests and talking back to white power abound due to the widespread take-up of social media by Aboriginal people to publicize the race-hate crimes committed against them.

In 2004, large-scale riots occurred in Redfern and on Palm Island due to the deaths in custody of Thomas Hickey and Mulrunji Doomadgee, respectively. These riots were unprecedented in Australian history and succeeded in showcasing Aboriginal anger and frustration globally through media attention. Police presence in Redfern had been stepped up in what was perceived as coordinated attempts to clear the inner-city suburb of Redfern of Aboriginal people and allow gentrification to occur. Fourteen-year-old Thomas Hickey was riding his bicycle and trailed by police in a pursuit vehicle when he was impaled on top of a high picket fence as a result of being thrown into the air. Mulrunji Doomadgee was singing while walking down a street on Palm Island, taken into custody and beaten so badly that he died as a result of his liver being cleaved in two. In both locations the police intensified the riot instead of acting to calm it; in Redfern they were fighting young Aboriginal men and children. Aboriginal writer Tony Birch published an essay, 'Who Gives a Fuck about White Society Anymore?' as a response to the Redfern riot; media commentary was extensive. Mulrunji Doomadgee's death has been followed by legal challenges in the courts and a documentary, *The Tall Man*, as well as global media publicity. The extensive use of new media and new powerful Aboriginal voices entering media commentary has arguably seen a paradigm shift in Aboriginal media profile over the past two decades.

The deaths mentioned above do not include those that have occurred through white vigilante violence, and these have added another dimension to our understanding of violent Aboriginal deaths. There are several examples. Adopted into a white family in Perth, eighteen-year-old Warren Braedon was murdered by a gang of white youths in 1993 'because he was black'. In 2009, Kwementyaye Ryder was kicked to death in the dry Todd River bed in Alice Springs by a group of white youth who had been driving dangerously near sleeping Aboriginal people and shouting racist insults in the early hours of the morning. In 2016, in Kalgoorlie Western Australia, fourteen-year-old Elijah Doughty was fatally wounded when struck by a vehicle that had been pursuing him on a dirt bike at high speed. The circumstances of Elijah's death and the subsequent court hearings were widely publicized and protests were held in every capital city in an attempt to get justice for Elijah. The *Black Arm Band* – a group of Aboriginal musicians formed in response to a Prime Minister saying he had no time for the 'black arm band view of Australian history', that is, the truth telling of massacres and criminal takeover – composed a poignant song for him that is on YouTube. Aboriginal take-up of contemporary media forms has lifted protest to be broader, deeper and more effective.

In 2014, Ms Dhu, a twenty-two-year-old Aboriginal woman, called police because of a violation of a domestic violence order by her partner. Police found she had unpaid parking fines and imprisoned her for four days, deliberately ignoring her complaints of feeling unwell, wrongfully assuming she was withdrawing from drugs. She died as a result of infection caused by cracked ribs she previously suffered at the hands of her partner. In 2015,

David Dungay died in prison as a result of being forcibly restrained by seriously untrained custodial officers. His inquest was shown a harrowing video of his final moments when he was saying 'I can't breathe' and spitting blood. In 2017, Tanya Day died of traumatic brain injuries after she was arrested for public drunkenness on a train in central Victoria. CCTV footage shows her arriving at a police station for questioning. She repeatedly asked not to be put in custody. At the inquest into her death in 2019, police insist she was treated with dignity and respect. Her family state otherwise.

By July 2018, news of the predicament of Aboriginal Australians suffering deaths in custody and from vigilante violence had spread effectively around the world resulting in strong international support. Outside the inquest into David Dungay's death in Sydney, Hank Newsome, president of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in Greater New York, USA, stood in solidarity with David's family and supporters, his arm around the diminutive body of David's mother Leetona Dungay. 'It's the same story, different soil', he said in reference to the death of Eric Garner in New York City in 2014. Both men had cried out that they could not breathe when restrained by officers and, their cries ignored, had died.¹

These examples demonstrate innovations in social media uses in mobilizing political support. Yet, to be too quick to celebrate social media is to ignore its ugly underbelly. Just a month earlier in June 2018, at the fringe of the city of Melbourne, more than 10,000 people had gathered in a park. On an icy winter's night in Melbourne they had come together for a silent vigil to commemorate the life of Eurydice Dixon, a twenty-two-year-old woman who was found dead at the park the previous week, raped and murdered by a stranger on her way home from a night out in the city. The vigil was a chance for the public to come together to mourn and demonstrate the community's desire to end violence against women. Reporters interviewed many women about why they attended these events and why they protested. Among the most heartbreaking responses a mother stated: 'It happened to my daughter.' For another woman it was 'To pay respect'. For another, 'To pray for change'. For others: 'We want to make a difference.' 'We want violence against women stopped.' Attendees held signs declaring: *We will beat this. Together we are more.*

This is not an unusual story. Several years earlier a candlelight vigil was held for another murder victim, Jill Meagher, only a few blocks away from this park. At the time, there was also a peace march that drew a large crowd. Bright and cheerful banners fluttered in the wind proclaiming *No Violence and Respect Women*.

On both these occasions political speeches about change were delivered in Parliament as a response to the acts against these women. Media attention was intense and, while the murders were deplorable and tragic, the activism and mourning in their wake powerful, astute observers were quick to point out the differences between coverage of Dixon's murder and

violence against other women, particularly women of colour.² For instance, Chinese woman Qi Yu was killed the same week but her murder ‘slipped by with little attention’.³ The murder of Sudanese woman Natalina Angok in Melbourne in 2019 is a similar case in point. Violence against white women, particularly if they are perceived as young and ‘undeserving’, often generates more media and public attention and outrage. This phenomenon crosses global borders. It is what Cornel West referred to as ‘the problem of the color line’, tied to the practice of a long history of colonialism and white supremacy, reincarnated through the alt-right movement, through recurring acts of xenophobia, discrimination and violence against blacks, Latinos, Asians and other racial, religious, gender and sexual minorities.⁴

The historical legacy of white supremacy bleeds into contemporary settings perpetuated by discursive constructions that pivot between a white normative figure in duress and a wider public ready to bring redemption to the figure in crisis. We saw this in the constant media references to both Dixon and Meagher in multiple media articles on violence and women. While there is no doubt that both women deserve to be remembered, it is equally important to recognize where the gaps in the nature of the coverage lie and in the racialized textures of the stories on display. There were detailed descriptions and backstories associated with both women. Dixon was portrayed as an up-and-coming comedian with a burgeoning career, a rising star whose young life had been tragically cut short. Meagher was the newly married, independent and intelligent colleague who was at the prime of her life. Media articles describe her last movements in detail, going as far as to provide the text messages she sent to friends to reflect her wit and wisdom. There is an obvious pattern here and it highlights how the media gives voice and a face to victims of crime that is not normally attributed to the same extent for non-white women. Qi Yu, in contrast, was painted as ‘quiet’ and ‘nice’; we do not learn what she did for a living nor much about who she was besides the fact her origin is Asian. For her, there was no public vigil.

And yet the facts and figures about the rates of violence against women, Aboriginal people and other minorities reveal a sad truth. These are the statistics: One woman is killed in Australia every week. One in five women has been raped. More than four hundred Aboriginal people have died in custody since 1991.⁵ Violence, in all its forms, online and off, continues.

But this is not a book about statistics or data, big or small. It is not confined to any one region of the world; it is global in its reach. Neither is it a book about protests writ large.

This book is about change – in the nature of protests, in the ways in which we organize to resist and the changing repercussive consequences of different forms of protest. Our aim is to gather a range of perspectives on whether the differing ways in which people come together to work for change make a difference.

Our intention is to reveal the movement, the flows of activity that are often initiated by extraordinary individuals, the vibrancy, proximity and even distance associated with these changes. We have focused on media, communication tools and actions, as well as their associated acts of sharing, networking and influencing practices. This anthology documents and celebrates recent works and thinking, approaching change from historical, personal and political perspectives. The book can be read as offering an opportunity to understand a multifaceted, transnational phenomenon – the coming together of people to instigate change, and the modes and practices of communication that make those solidarities real.

New beginnings ...

We begin with the premise that connections between older and newer forms of protests are not well understood in that there is an assumption of a disconnect, that historical forms of social and political organization were not as effective as more contemporary forms. We begin with a focus on the people at the margins who have the most to gain but also the most to lose in instances of social unrest. We begin with the claim that while social media protests are an inherent part of contemporary life, their relative efficacy to traditional protests (such as sit-ins, pamphleteering, speaker shoutdowns and obstructions) in the pre-internet age has yet to be fully explored, understood and contextualized.

For these reasons, we made a point to resist beginning with the biggest protests originating in the West, namely the United States. Instead, we privileged writings from the Global South and contributors who describe the challenges of communities and individuals who have overcome the lack of information, resources and policies specific to their needs. We centred our attention on those people who have to be more innovative in their drive for change and to advance their message. Within the pages of this collection, readers will only find passing references to Occupy Wall Street and the #MeToo movement. Our starting point for analysis is Aboriginal Australia, a place and a people that tend to go unnoticed in ever-growing discussions on social movements. Yet for us, this genesis represents the textual and contextual horizon of our approach: to position a critique of any theorization of social movements along the borders of difference and across cultural and political content that tends to be reduced, overlooked or stereotyped in popular media.

In this light, the significance and applications of visual media during protests cannot be underestimated. These images hold our attention for a reason; they possess the power to convey a larger story, to capture a moment in time, and carry the potential to take us back to an individual or collective

experience of resistance. They bear the traces and frictions of the encounter between people, places and technologies, between ideas and their historical worldviews, and between those activists and communities sitting at the heart of the struggle. As visual artefacts, they also retain timeless qualities of nostalgia for what has been lost, while communicating a movement's central purpose or appealing to our collective conscience.

The image on the cover of this book expresses a particular history, part of the 2015 National Day of Action to protest the Australian government's as yet unsuccessful bid (despite continuing threats) to force the people within 150 remote Aboriginal communities in Western Australia off their land. During this time, a series of gatherings and events were staged across major regional and urban centres, including Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth, organized under the banner of #SOSBlakAustralia. These protests rallied people at key sites to take over major intersections of the city. Paddy Gibson, an activist academic from the University of Technology Sydney, took this photograph during the Sydney protests as the crowds marched towards Central Station, showing how the resistance in Sydney connected to wider national action. This photograph reflects the sense of cultural pride on the day. The man holding the megaphone is Felon Mason, who had a strong leadership role in the demonstration. He used the megaphone to marshal the crowds and to direct the protest chants, which centred on the issue of community closures. Felon also guided the singing and dancing taking place at the intersections, using the megaphone to deliver short impromptu speeches along the way, while urging the people to band together to defend the autonomy of remote communities. He made a point about how the closure of the Aboriginal community in Redfern at the Block predated the push to close remote communities and this needed to be a strong focus of the campaigning in Sydney. By attacking the community in central Sydney over many years, the government had managed to remove a vital hub of black activism that had supported communities across Australia (see Chapter 2).

Paddy Gibson shared this image on his Facebook page, and the photograph was re-shared through new social networks, jostling with other images of the crowds on the day. This image of protesters who had stopped traffic as they performed an Aboriginal dance, circulated with other images of protesters holding banners that read, 'Our Land, Our Life'; the distinctive Aboriginal flag dotting the landscape is iconic to Aboriginal protest in Australia.

In selecting this photograph as our cover image, we draw attention to the importance of images in symbolizing significant protest moments and the ways in which visual media can resonate with the people and continue to be viewed, recirculated and re-presented in different forms and new contexts. This is revealing of the ways that an image can convey mood, tone and raw emotion, how the visual elements of time and place can touch us, divide and conflict us simultaneously. Ultimately, what this photograph

represents is our persistent hunger for consuming history through the image. We need the enduring power of images to reinforce our beliefs, for image and imagination are inextricably linked insofar as certain pictures of history can allow for a kind of collective imagining. The photograph of the young warriors from more than 100 years ago in Grieve-Williams' chapter on Willie Brim (Figure 7.1 on page 96) is significant because, alongside the more recent photographs in the chapter, it highlights cultural continuity while asserting temporal depth, thus providing a way to understand how the past matters in the present and for the generations to follow.

We cannot build a better future without imagining the possibilities of our shared futures. Our opening chapter offers a discussion of Aboriginal activism in Australia as a way to consider these possibilities. Grieve-Williams highlights how Aboriginal people have fought against racial segregation policies both at home and abroad, and raised awareness about stolen Aboriginal children, slavery and stolen wages, the need for citizenship, for land rights, for self-governance and most recently the need for a treaty or treaties, as well as the threatened closure of remote Aboriginal communities through #SOSBlakAustralia. Australia has a black history and we wanted to centralize the ways in which these political claims continue to challenge and resist the colonial legacy and the development of the neoliberal state.

Chapters in this collection also privilege non-Western traditions and peoples, incorporating decolonizing alternatives that sit outside of Eurocentric positivist models. To this end, we are inspired by Patricia Hill Collins' work on the concept of intersectionality, which insists on bringing multiple power relations and identity politics into view. Collins' theoretical insights allow us to scrutinize how systems of domination mutually cohere along the lines of race, class, gender and nation. Here, we see our common challenges as being greater than our differences; here, we see the greatest challenge being how we express and engage with those common challenges across our differences. Collins offers a valuable perspective that prompts us to question the relations of power that shape our social conditions and the ties that bind us to different forms of oppression. Her acute awareness of the need to create safe spaces of diversity in fostering group autonomy and effective coalitions resonates with our own worldviews on the need to identify points of connection across raced and gendered cultural, political and national boundaries. We applied these considerations to ground our socio-historical approach to viewing political struggles and their multiple dimensions and intersections. This informed our thinking in gathering this collection, which personifies both contemporary and traditional cultural forms of expression, the expression of activism in regions and amongst peoples that are too often silenced and erased in media and scholarly discourses. The diversity of range of activism includes writings on India (Guha), Thailand (Guntarik and Trott), Iran (Momeni), Jamaica

(Figueroa), Mexico (Rodríguez, Mendoza), Aboriginal Australia (Grieve-Williams), Malaysia (Guntarik) and black America (Summerville). While this range is designed to encourage comparison, we are not interested in entering a debate on the extent and hierarchies of oppression in these various locations. The diversity we bring speaks directly to the multiple roots of the wellspring of activism, demonstrating the ways in which our combined social histories and inequalities are relational.

The book is divided into four thematic parts. The first part of this anthology clusters around the theme of history: the five chapters in *Part 1* set out to untangle the tensions between public and private communication practices, offering glimpses into how the past shapes our contemporary epoch. The anthology begins with putting history in perspective to demonstrate how activism around class, gender, sexuality, race and social justice issues has been affected by and rooted in time. History can show us that social media and digital tools can permit freedom of information, democracy and more open, public discourse. Yet history also reveals how social media has imposed strong, exceedingly draconian state-level constraints on protest efforts.

Viewed through the lens of time, what might these kinds of social media uses tell us about what direct democracy looks like in an age of shareable media messages? Put another way, social media may give us a sense of being more connected, yet whether social media provides more access to knowledge is debatable. Bishop directly responds to this issue by posing a fundamental question about the impact of our seemingly global connectedness: despite how ‘connected’ we are, what is a truly democratic social, civic and public sphere? Moreover, what is the role of traditional forms of media, such as print (newspapers, magazines, journals), and their relationship to existing digital culture? Stevenson distinguishes between traditional ‘print’ forms of communication and new media as seen through the development of the women’s rights movement and contemporary feminism. She engages with the women’s movement as a set of political activities that show long-standing methods and goals feminists applied in the *longue durée*. Adopting a comparable examination of print culture, Rodríguez presents the tireless journalistic efforts of activist Jovita Idár to fight for civil rights in Texas and for Mexicans/Mexican-Americans. Idár was raised on the frontier of US takeover of Mexican lands, when women had little, if no political, traction, and long before women won the right to vote. Rodríguez discusses how this form of campaign activism provides a model for understanding existing newly created spaces of contemporary racial terror. Similarly, Romagna demonstrates how the evolution of activism can be critically analysed through analysis of historical modes of political participation, tracing the threads of ‘underground’ collectives and through ongoing practices of hacktivism. He thus illustrates how hacktivists, in their demands for freedom of information and free speech, have become more aggressive and effective over time.

The art and artefacts of activism

In compiling this collection, we offer new angles through which to look at the diverse social and media features of protest cultures. The approaches utilized to scrutinize this landscape in this volume give a taste of the myriad variations employed across the globe. We seek to assert that such diverse considerations, while situated along the heuristic of social and cultural difference, are vital at a time that has experienced enormous shifts in relationships to the state, gender roles, racial and ethnic identities and transformations in people's media and digital literacy levels. In the current world context of immense population growth and urbanization, dwindling resources and increasing challenges for environmental and social sustainability, this critique is evermore significant. It is in this thematic vein that we have curated the mix of contributors in *Part II* who emphasize the varying tactical and creative uses of communication tools and technologies to promote democracy to ultimately expose anti-democratic practices. Figueroa discusses how the Maroon people of Jamaica's Cockpit Country have addressed issues of under-representation and how their resilience was tested as a consequence of the bauxite mining industry and rapid urbanization. She reveals the role media, communications techniques and particularly film played in awareness building, lobbying and the work of garnering national and international support to protect land rights. Following a similar, yet unique, cultural trajectory, Grieve-Williams' contribution on Willie Brim, elder and leader of the Buluwai people in north Queensland, Australia, conveys how reggae music forms emerged as a catalyst to mobilize change, spreading an Aboriginal cultural and political message to the world through a popular form. She reveals how the reach of such messages and narratives can spread through people's love of music and the lyrics of songs and the stories of the Dreamtime that are shared on YouTube.

Activism is viable only when people are convinced that public protest is acceptable and likely to produce a result, making explorations on the language of activism necessary as a way to understand how protesters are inspired. For instance, popular culture has been a significant site of struggle for resistance against dominant cultural ideologies, providing a language for engaging with the culture of the masses. Kelly's chapter provides an overview of the ways popular culture has been employed in activism in inventive ways, thus connecting cultural texts with hacktivism in his focus on science-fiction films, cyberpunk novels, the archives of early hacker 'zines, and many other aesthetic and literary forms that have inspired contemporary organizations such as Anonymous. Guntarik and Trott have similarly discussed the significance of popular culture on activism through protest songs, popular literature and social networking sites. In their chapter, they blend literary form and imagination to engage with participatory politics and to understand

how social media analysis can be investigated through performance, creative practice and metaphor, as well as from a critical geographic distance.

Landscape as text

Evgeny Morozov's 2012 book *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* is a wake-up call to those 'cyber-utopians' who have fallen sway to the charge that digital technologies are a panacea for social change. This kind of technology worship is dangerous because it can blind us to the ways that social media can both empower and reduce people. The relationship of activist cultural texts and intense, ever-increasing social change is telling of our contemporary media landscape. Hence, we are interested to present this landscape from both the positions of 'users' and 'consumers' of that media, as well as their 'producers', 'creators' and audiences. We seek to convey different features and facets of this changing landscape, which is both limiting and retaining unique opportunities for activists alike. Modes through which events and issues are televised and represented around the world effect new cultural forms in local contexts. And yet, we are experiencing a world of extreme media convergence. The media landscape is evolving rapidly with older forms of media being reconfigured in newer forms, highlighting the messiness and sometimes inscrutable nature of our networked and ephemeral media environment. The dark side of this social world is evident in closed forums that are based on invitation-only online networks such as 8Chan, where extremist groups are given license to present divisive views of their social reality with others of like-mind. These representational issues tussle with competing images of third world development and contemporary discourses of Euro-Americanization. How to make sense of this media ecosystem? How do these 'texts' speak to the moment? In what ways do they foretell the future? In posing these questions we sought to bring together new ways of seeing this protest milieu through a media lens.

We know that popular tools of communication have changed the protest landscape over time. This has often meant that at times people's range of basic, complex and mixed uses of these tools have both hindered and enhanced the progress of communities, social movements and political agendas. At other times, these tools have contributed significantly to connecting the social and political struggles of the people whose lives they touch while at the same time providing the ideal megaphones through which to vocalize minority groups' pro-, anti-religious, racist and violent views. We have to wonder what this particular moment of social media-inspired activism reveals about our age. While social media characterizes this late modern world, what is less definitive is the potential that social media carries to drive change relative to its capacity to deliver speed, scale and reach.

Covering more recent events over the past decade from 2009 to 2019, contributors in *Part III* throw light on the very question of social media's possibilities, peculiarities and future insights, and through a focus on specific geographic regions. Specifically, through rape cases in India, Guha discusses how feminist activists advocate for non-violence against women, by bypassing media gatekeepers and engaging directly with key political influencers through forms of citizen journalism and advocacy. Other authors in this section remind us that social media can be used to both bolster and undermine democracy; it can give weight to right-wing, racist and anti-religious ideals in rural regions (Taylor) or be used to promote misogynistic and sexist events on the ground in urban centres (Trott), while simultaneously deployed by autocratic governments to censor and silence oppositional voices across multi-centres of geopolitical uprisings in the Middle East (Momeni).

These contributors each engage with social media as sites of narration, influence and collective struggle and through a place-relations focus. Indeed, social media research as a form of archival enquiry – no matter where their locations of analysis – can expose the connections and contradictions between different ways of thinking and relations of power. We can mine this archive of social media to interrogate how political processes create barriers to action inasmuch as we can excavate the archive to call out the intractable dysfunction of the state. And still, no matter how much burrowing we do to assign value and meaning to this archive, we know that it still retains the power to foreclose knowledge and to provide access to other people's authentic experiences and realities.

While the dynamic of screen- and street-level activism makes it harder to examine questions of impact and affect, it is evident that social media can be exploited for both social good and harm. This is why we must caution ascribing social media with a divine status for it is easy to get swept up by the moment and all too quickly embrace social media as transformative and emancipatory, or to see these interactions on social media as a solution to our economic, political and social ills. Research is establishing this as an overly ambitious claim to make, one that is based on wishful thinking rather than evidence of ongoing organized social action.

Powerful reach but not (yet) revolutionary

As editors, we have discerned that while social media is a political tool, it does not in and of itself cause revolutionary change. It takes more to produce the deep social political and economic change that the actors in this volume seek, but what is this? We seek to nuance this imperative, hence why this book is intent in exploring the role of the 'social' in instigating change.

This focus on the social dimensions of protest culture invites new questions about the impact and affect of sociality across cultural, racial, gendered and political differences. How are people using their voices, social networks and influence to shape decision-making processes at the personal and political levels, and through their provisional practices?

Contributors in *Part IV* look to the tangible fabric of place, while underscoring the intangible values of memory. The equally ethereal notion of democracy and agency cannot be discussed without also drawing attention to groups who continue to be excluded or written out of history such as women, minority racial and ethnic groups, gender non-conforming, queer, trans and gender diverse people. Strong's examination of music archives highlights issues of gender under-representation and diversity in the context of how historical accounts of music reflect a gender bias. In so doing, she contests hegemonic masculine forms and dominance by questioning rights to access knowledge, opportunities and resources for emerging female musicians. Such a critique is critical of the democratization of technology and knowledge so far as certain groups are excluded from participating in such democratizing processes. These exclusions adopt a distinctive form among those incarcerated who are deprived of access to communication technologies as Benavides, Meiners, Padilla, Quinn and Yasuoka illustrate in their discussion of the Illinois Deaths in Custody Project. This chapter further probes the contradiction that online activism is promising but also inherently limited. The authors show that while democratizing information-sharing technologies are banned within prisons, they can also be used to bring humanity to an otherwise under-represented and overlooked group of people denied access to the internet in the prison system.

In contemporary everyday life, the social takes place across the duality of offline and online spaces. People share stories in these spaces and engage with other people's stories, compelling many to take action while others remain glued to their screen and connect in different ways or perhaps remain merely consumers. This is part of the risk and the peril of protest cultures referred to as 'clicktivism' or 'slacktivism', a form of feeble involvement in protests considered dangerous and ineffective, enacted from the perceived safety of the screen. Indeed, whether action takes place on the street or via the screen is open to contention as to the extent to which the individual 'participates' in that protest. All these insights leave us with enduring questions about what it means to think and act together, to be involved politically, and the extent to which various forms of protest lead to social and political change.

The changing face of protest

The book's central focus on the concept of social change allows us to come full circle and return to our original topic and the distinctive ways

people engage with social change, whether institutional, behavioural, environmental, relational, practical or conceptual. Continuing with the theme of memory and materiality, the remaining contributions in this collection cast light on these finer aspects of social change. Summerville describes forms of African American representation through the *unchanging* dominant narrative of American equality, freedom and justice and how this narrative has worked to obscure black bodies. This narrative has functioned in tandem with changing uses of mobile and handheld devices (e.g. cameras, video recorders, mobile phones) in forms that enable African Americans to portray different versions of themselves and promote wider civil activism.

Change is also explored through the role social and digital media play in facilitating new constitutions of activism; how people have employed innovations in technology to tackle global problems. Mendoza's chapter is a provocative examination of the online activities of mothers in Mexico searching for their missing children who have 'disappeared' under government policies that allow impunity for the perpetrators of these crimes. Through a critique of definitions of sovereignty, she acknowledges the crucial role new technologies play in supporting mothers of the missing to form collectives, while posing an important question about protest *repertoire*, its legacies and lessons. If protest demonstrations do not lead to revolutionary change, how do our struggles contribute to the movement and why fight at all? This question connects directly to our purpose in curating this collection, which is to showcase the complexity of responses to such a query, and which various authors have responded to in different ways. Indeed, the volume closes with Guntarik's personal reflections on the nature of progress and through the enduring question of how people are inspired to develop a sense of political consciousness in the first place and commit to fighting for a cause. Inspired by Walter Benjamin's theory of progress, she argues that at the heart of any analysis of social change is the need to account for the realities of peoples' lives, their political experience and history, and the materialities of their social capital, resources and literacies. As Marx ([1859] 1978: 4) cautioned: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.'⁶ This claim interrogates the very nature of change through the social and personal: who are we, how we change, what it takes to engage with difference and, ultimately, how our encounters with difference alter us and shape our experience.

This book embodies a socio-historical approach to exploring questions of change and protest agendas, suggesting ways in which new social forms have challenged or played a complicit role in prevailing systems of authority. Herein, we do not wish to draw definitive conclusions nor do we seek to present universal truths. Rather, our objective is to explore the complexities and cultural nuances of diverse peoples' interactions with social and media forms over space and time. This required us to find a new conceptual language that departs from existing dominant frameworks that privilege the

now and the about-to-be over the past. Insofar as a more comprehensive understanding of mass mobilizations is necessary, we have not yet found an adequate model to fully articulate how protests have truly made a difference.

The inspiration for this book was to present a range of contradictions, in terms of how people are equally more connected to and disconnected from one another through social media than ever before. The connections allow us to see new opportunities and the enduring potential of protest cultures through traditional and digital epochs, while the disconnections highlight the necessity and urgency of being humanly connected, illustrating what it means to unite as a community and for a common goal under extraordinary circumstances. Social media-driven protests can serve as an expression of the times, reflecting the tensions in democratic and undemocratic moments and conditions and individual and collective reactions to personal loss, interpersonal and political violations, and attacks on our freedoms. While these events are shared publicly in old and new media, and across social media, what is less evident is the irrevocable and often irreducible gap between experience and its enunciation – between the personal and political. How to capture change without reducing its very meaning? Change itself cannot be static.

In developing this anthology, we sought to address the movement between the individual and the collective and vice versa, in processes of becoming political, active and participatory subjects and what that takes. The collective demonstration of action, listening, speaking out, standing apart and together, sharing a particular experience across the distances, in physical proximity, across digital and real time-spaces, can be either dangerous or empowering, functioning as both mechanisms of oppression and resistance. How we think *collectively* about these issues is critical despite how diverse our experiences may be, despite our various geographic and social locations. This would not entail envisioning our alliances as isolated, individual or homogenous lived realities. This would entail seeing our alliances as part of something bigger, and would allow us to work towards what Patricia Hill Collins might regard as *continuous change*, affording a way to move beyond group-specific politics. Continuous change demands that we persist in undoing the social relations of domination in forms that dismantle overlapping cycles of violence.

This collection is not a celebration of change but a vehicle for guiding our thinking towards truths that persist within the flux of our encounters with everyday forms of resistance. To this end, the book is unapologetically polemical, expressing how collective and individual experiences alter and are in turn altered by the speed, scale and impact of our changing media technologies. We believe in the energy, truthfulness and tenacity that collectives can engender. We live for the localized spaces of resistance that can sharpen our political will. These moments help us to imagine other possibilities that allow for the erosion of ideologies that construct us as dangerous and impoverished. This momentum matters and drives meaning in

the message. Movements necessitate strong leaders and the communication of key messages through the power of voice, a form of technology in its own right, in supporting movement leaders to evoke an emotional connection with and response from their followers. As a musician and leader of his community, Willie Brim (Chapter 7) used his voice to share his worldview, to create bonds with people around the world and to bear truths, reflecting the power of political uses of voice through music. Through the work of activist Jovita Idár (Chapter 6), we also see the ways in which voice, body and position are interconnected – used to convey cultural resistance through the performance of the political message in everyday subversive words and actions, to express stories of daily hope and struggle, or to simply force authorities to back off. The body as we know has been exploited as screen, stage, site and canvas for social and political uses, highlighting just how vulnerable we are to images that perpetuate structures of power, privilege and inauthenticity. Dead bodies remind us of the ultimate sacrifice we make for resistance. Dead bodies signal that all bodies are in crisis.

Our stance here echoes what Patricia Hill Collins calls ‘interlocking systems’ of oppression that keep bodies in their place. To resist oppression, we must call these images to account in order to curb the recycling of old repressions: ‘Racist and sexist ideologies, if they are disbelieved, lose their impact. Thus, an important feature of the hegemonic domain of power lies in the need to continually refashion images in order to solicit support’ (Collins 2000: 283).⁷ The shared recognition of this oppression is crucial and urgent, for even as oppositional voices are submerged, silenced or out-voiced in everyday struggles for justice, the influence of media in carrying the message forward gains traction as ‘transmitters of culture’ for the next generation. We leave you with a final message for what this collection represents: If media can make us more risk-prone and violent, it can also counteract the forces that would enslave and brutalize us.

Notes

- 1 ‘Black Lives Matter Leader Shows Support for David Dungay’s Family’, (2018), *NITV News*, 16 July. Available online: <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2018/07/16/black-lives-matter-australia-david-dungay> (accessed 15 March 2019).
- 2 Lin, J. (2018), ‘Eurydice Dixon Absolutely Deserves to Be Remembered. But So Does Qi Yu’, *Mamamia*, 21 June 2018. Available online: <https://www.mamamia.com.au/qi-yu-murder/> (accessed 26 March 2019).
- 3 Kun, J. (2018), ‘In Response to the Death of Eurydice Dixon’, *Wire*, July 2018. Available online: <https://www.wire.org.au/in-response-to-the-death-of-euridyce-dixon/> (accessed 26 March 2019). Gbla, K. (2018), ‘Let’s Make Space for the Stories of All Women’, *Our Watch*, 20 June 2018. Available online:

<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media/Latest-news/Let-s-make-space-for-the-stories-of-all-women?feed=LatestNewsFeed> (accessed 26 March 2019).

- 4 West, C. (2017), *Race Matters, 25th Anniversary*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- 5 *The Guardian Australia* has an online database tracking Aboriginal deaths in custody; see 'Deaths Inside: Indigenous Australian Deaths in Custody' <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/ng-interactive/2018/aug/28/deaths-inside-indigenous-australian-deaths-in-custody> (accessed 20 March 2019).
- 6 Marx, K. ([1859] 1978), 'Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy', in R. C. Tucker (ed), *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 3–6, New York: W. W. Norton.
- 7 Collins, P.H. (2000), *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, New York and London: Routledge.

PART I

History in
Perspective

2

‘We Have Survived the White Man’s World’: A Critical Review of Aboriginal Australian Activism in Media and Social Media

Victoria Grieve-Williams

Social activism is great for making a big splash and a big wave that follows that splash, but it isn’t always the right people that ride that wave, there isn’t always direction or strategy for the way that wave is going toward an outcome.

-Luke Pearson, founder IndigenousX

This chapter is concerned with the political activism of Australia’s Aboriginal people who are perhaps the most disregarded of all the Indigenous peoples of the world. They have come to be known as Aboriginal, Indigenous, First Peoples and First Nations. Their own names for themselves are more complex – koori, murri, nungah, nyoongar, yammatjee, yolngu, anangu, for example – since they were not a people organized nationally in the way of colonial states. Originally moving in circumscribed patterns within a wholly settled continent, organized into bands of kin-related groups, their country was annexed by the British and invaded through the south-east in 1788. The spread of colonization was

relatively slow over the whole of the continent through the introduction of sheep and cattle, mining, timber-getting, fishing and pearling, and the spreading stations, villages and towns.

The original brutal colonial aggression was relatively recent; the last recorded massacre of Aboriginal people was in Central Australia in 1928; the last known deaths of colonists as a result of Aboriginal resistance was in the 1930s in the Kimberley region in the north-west of the continent. Populations of Aboriginal people were decimated by massacres in an undeclared colonial war, starvation and disease. This, the last British colony, was brutally and thoroughly taken under the doctrine of *terra nullius*, an empty land, through unrestrained settler colonial vigilante violence. We know it was not an empty continent of course, but this doctrine gave the colonists the rationale for setting about making it empty of the original inhabitants through unrestrained violent aggression fuelled by racist doctrine. The people they encountered with each wave of colonization across the continent were inscribed as non-human with no right to exist. A major research project is only now uncovering the extent of massacres and recording them online (NITV News 2018; Ryan n.d.). There is no doubt that this was a process of systematic and premeditated genocide.

Settler colonials and civil servants alike applied the lessons learnt in the colonization of other Indigenous peoples with force; the ‘bushwhack’, attacking camps of men, women and children before dawn, poisonings, rape, violent restraint and movement of populations off country, were commonplace. The remnant populations were enslaved on sheep and cattle stations, incarcerated on reserves and effectively segregated through material application of racist doctrine. Aboriginal people have eked out a bare life in tightly administered colonial regimes that have varied in practice, though not in intent, between states and territories over a vast continent, over time. However, Aboriginal resilience and resistance are evident in not only armed responses but in the increasing take-up of the written word. Aboriginal people were learning to read from the early years of colonization, and they adopted written texts in various ways, including letter and petition writing, to challenge their oppressors and to protect country and kin (Van Toorn 2006).

Now less than 3 per cent of the population, Aboriginal people are recognized as holding the cultural heart of the nation and punch above their weight in the arts, sport and education. However, many people are left in a state of existential torpor and communities suffer high rates of incarceration, child removal and youth suicide. Individuals suffer racism, de facto segregation and racist violence including lynching, in contemporary Australian society. Aboriginal people still labour under the racist trope of the most primitive people on Earth, resistant to modernity.

While there is growing evidence of the depth and breadth of Aboriginal resistance to colonialism over the whole of the country over time, it was not until the 1970s that this activism exploded onto the media stage both nationally and internationally. A younger generation was influenced by international fights for rights, inspired and led by their elders into a new brand of activism. This became essentially a celebration of survival of the doctrine of *terra nullius* and a refusal to go away, nor to be grateful for the crumbs from the whiteman's table.

The historical legacy of Aboriginal activism and media

The early 1970s remains widely understood as the high point of Aboriginal activism for human rights and social justice in Australia. This period was marked by brilliant political strategy, both at home and transnationally, that



FIGURE 2.1 Gary Foley during the 1971 South African Springbok rugby team tour protests. Aboriginal activists used the platform to bring attention to the mistreatment of Aboriginal people in Australia. Photo credit Koori History Website.

was developed by Aboriginal people using the principle of connectedness and relatedness as realized in the philosophical foundations to Aboriginal culture. Ravi de Costa has documented the development of extensive national and international networks that were vigorous and thoroughgoing without the benefit of contemporary internet technology at that time (de Costa 2006).

In 1972, people from across the continent arrived in the national capital, Canberra, to support the Tent Embassy outside of Australia's Parliament House. It is testament to Aboriginal capacity to build networks and communications that this became an extremely effective transnational political event. The foundations are to be found in the activities of Aboriginal political organizations and individuals during the earlier part of the century until they reached an explosive force by the late 1960s. The catalyst for the Tent Embassy occurred when the Prime Minister announced there would be no Land Rights but rather a plan to lease back stolen lands to Aboriginal peoples. The very next day a group of urban-based activists from Sydney – including Michael Ghillar Anderson, Billy Craigie, Tony Koorie and Bertie Williams – arrived in the national capital Canberra, by car, with only a beach umbrella and some signs.

Aboriginal people from across the country converged on the site of the Tent Embassy to join the protest, signalling the burgeoning of a pan-Aboriginal movement that broached traditional language and geographic divisions as well as colonial state and territory boundaries. The 'old fellas' the lawmen of the remote communities of the centre, the west and the top-end arrived on the back of cattle trucks with nothing but a blanket for a swag. Aboriginal community leaders and members, women and children also arrived by bus and by car.

Aboriginal Australia was hurting and hurting deeply. The Tent Embassy was symbolic of Aboriginal people as outsiders, without the rights of citizens, despite the overwhelming YES vote for 'citizenship' at the 1967 Referendum. The original doctrine of *terra nullius* enshrined in the constitution of the Australian government, formed in 1901, has left unfinished business with Aboriginal people in the absence of a treaty or any form of agreement for the takeover of their lands. Nor had there been any reparations. I have argued elsewhere that we exist in a state of exception to the Australian democratic state, fitting exactly the theoretical *homo sacer* as described by Agamben (Grieves 2017; 2018). Aboriginal Australia in all of its poverty came to the notice of national and international media. In many locations in Aboriginal Australia people were (and are) reduced to starvation, the bottom line of dispossession and genocide, as they had been over the history of colonization and racism. Tent Embassy activists created an opportunity to protest the genocidal disregard and segregationist neglect, and the accompanying racist configurations of power and privilege, by successive governments.