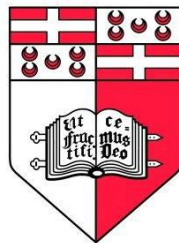# Reconfiguring Community: An Analysis of Black Lives Matter

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M.A. in English, Culture, and the Media

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Malta in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in English, Culture, and the Media

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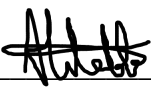
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Abstract

This dissertation questions how social media reconfigures the ways in which people form communities. Taking Black Lives Matter as an example of a hybrid contemporary social movement, this work adopts Paolo Gerbaudo's conceptualisation of social media as 'crucial emotional conduits' through which 'individual sentiments of indignation and anger' are condensed into an emotional narration. The first chapter looks at the construction of emotional narration by analysing the narrative that the movement constructs. It also explores how collective identity is reconfigured through the use of technological platforms by bringing in Stefania Milan's concept of the 'cloud' as well as W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg's 'connective action'. This drives protestors to the streets, generating new forms of physical proximity fuelled by social media platforms, while emphasising the importance of physical place.

Chapter 2 argues that, in Gerbaudo's terms, social media messages create a sense of allure around occupied squares that act as 'sources of identification for the movement', which contrasts with Castells' vision of 'society as a network without centres', thus identifying physical places as nodes of the movement. The third chapter questions who is being asked to participate in the movement and who the leaders behind it are. The extent of participation is explored alongside Geert Lovink's work on the size of networks, while the nature of 'soft' leadership choreographing the movement behind the scenes reconfigures community by identifying contemporary movements as leader-full. In conclusion, this research highlights that although social media reconfigures aspects of community formation, it also serves to reinforce the importance of what lies at the heart of community formation; physical place, leadership, and most importantly, narrative.

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My sincere gratitude extends to my closest friends and family, who had to witness my moments of panic, and endure numerous rants on the topic.

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Introduction:
Community and Social Media

This dissertation aims to explore the connection between social media and community, by seeking to analyse social media and how it is reconfiguring the ways people form community. This is attempted by looking at Black Lives Matter as an example of a contemporary social movement considered as a 'hybrid networked movement that links cyberspace and urban space in multiple forms of communication'.[1] Over the course of this work, three different facets of social media and community are explored. Firstly, the 'what' of the movement; how has social media reconfigured the material used to bring people together? The 'where' of the movement; how has social media reconfigured where people convene and form bonds? Lastly, the 'who' of the movement; who is being asked to participate in this movement and who are the people acting as the driving force behind the movement?

Black Lives Matter is only one of the latest movements in a long line of hybrid networked movements. Network theorist Manuel Castells maps out the emergence of this type of movement by looking at the wave of social movements that have emerged around the world, starting with Iran in 2009, Greece in 2010, Tunisia and Egypt in 2011, the Indignados movement in Spain in 2011 and the Occupy Wall Street in 2011; a list which is hardly exhaustive of all the hybrid movements occurring over the last few years. Numerous studies have been conducted on these social movements; studies which explore the implications the movements have for digital activism.[2] The fact that digital social movements have been widely explored through the work of theorists such as Castells and Paul Mason is understandable; after all, social movements are 'the sources of social change' and therefore of the 'constitution of society'.[3] However, these studies mainly explore the impact of social media on political activism which is not the primary concern of this dissertation. Rather, it

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[1] Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p. 180.
[2] See Paul Mason, *Why It's Still Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, (London: Verso, 2012); Karl-Dieter Opp, *Theories of Political Protest and Social Movements: A Multidisciplinary Introduction, Critique, and Synthesis*, (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2009); Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).
[3] Castells, p. 12.

looks at the rather unexplored concept of how social media is reconfiguring community as it is known by exploring community formation within these digital movements. Prior to expanding on Black Lives Matter and its role in this dissertation, a better understanding of what is entailed by the terms 'social media' and 'community' is required. It is only through exploring scholarly work on these two terms, particularly community in relation to the Internet and social media, and establishing what is generally understood by community, that an answer can be reached on how social media is reconfiguring it.

The 'New Online Layer' of Social Media and the 'Vague Simulacrum of Real Community'

Media theorist José Van Dijck defines social media as a group of Internet-based applications that 'form a new online layer through which people organise their lives'.[4] The concept of a 'new layer' is fundamental; in fact Paolo Gerbaudo, who has written extensively on social media and contemporary political activism, declares that social media should not be envisioned as the 'contemporary equivalent of what the newspaper, the poster, the leaflet or direct mail were for the labour movement'.[5] Social media networks are a means not simply 'to convey abstract opinions, but also to give a shape to the way in which people come together and act together'.[6] Van Dijck expands on this by asserting that this layer of platforms influences 'human interaction on an individual and community level, as well as on a larger societal level' while the 'worlds of online and offline are increasingly interpenetrating'. After all, it is the 'need for connectedness' that drives many users to these sites; such platforms are associated with the potential to 'nurture connections, build communities, and advance democracy', making a discussion on community in relation to social media a necessity if we want to understand community formation in the contemporary age.[7]

The emphasis on community formation on social media is even seen in the narrative employed by social media platforms, which present themselves using words such as

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[4] José van Dijck *The Culture Of Connectivity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 4.
[5] Paolo Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism* (London: Pluto Press, 2012), p. 4.
[6] Gerbaudo, p. 4.
[7] Van Dijck, p. 12.

'connection', 'community', and 'social' and 'sharing' to describe their aim. For instance, Facebook's mission is to 'make the world more open and connected', while Twitter gives 'everyone the power to create and share ideas and information'. Such descriptions need to be read with a critical eye; these 'tend to stress […] human connectednesses' and in turn 'minimise [automated connectivity]', thus producing a misleading portrayal of social media platforms.[8] For instance, Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg claims that 'technology merely enables or facilitates social activity', completely disregarding the fact that what these platforms are also doing is 'making sociality technical'. Sociality is now 'coded by technology', rendering 'people's activities formal, manageable […] and enabling platforms to engineer the sociality in people's everyday routines'.[9]

It seems then, that the word 'social' in 'social media' (which is questionable from the start because when was media ever not social?) encompasses both 'human connectedness and automated connectivity'.[10] Moreover, there needs to be an understanding of the benefits these social network sites acquire when picturing themselves as a 'community'. As media and cultural theorist Deborah Chambers emphasises, by identifying themselves as a 'community', social network sites 'articulate and enhance their ethos of social connectivity as socially valuable'; a narrative that is deconstructed throughout this work in an effort to distinguish between the community narrative of social media platforms, and what actually occurs to community in these spaces. [11]

However, social media platforms are hardly the advent of community in relation to the virtual. The rise of the Internet engendered the use of the term 'virtual communities', with the most known example probably being cyberculture theorist Howard Rheingold. In the late 90s, he explored early network systems like 'The Well' and described virtual communities as 'social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace'.[12] Rheingold describes these 'depersonalised modes' as ways for some people to 'get very personal with each other', and to 'connect with another human being', but with the 'authenticity of human relationships [remaining] in question in

[8] Van Dijck, p. 12.
[9] Van Dijck, p. 12.
[10] Van Dijck, p. 13.
[11] Deborah Chambers, *Social Media and Personal Relationships: Online Intimacies and Networked Friendship* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 143.
[12] Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community*, (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1993), p. 6.

cyberspace, because of the masking and distancing of the medium'.[13] Although Rheingold's description and analysis of virtual communities are now somewhat outdated due to the extensive changes in these network systems over nearly two decades, the idea that virtual connections are somehow less authentic, less 'real', and that it threatens close bonds persists beyond Rheingold. It is true that the fear of a 'socially diminished world' dates back at least one hundred fifty years, but the onset of the internet only served to exacerbate it.[14] The persisting fear is that if someone is connecting with another person online, it is a 'vague simulacrum of real community with people they could have seen, smelled, heard, and touched in the "good old days" '. Are virtual communities, real communities?[15]

Castells has an answer for this troubling question: 'yes and no'.[16] They are 'communities, but not physical ones', and 'they do not follow the same patterns of communication and interaction as physical communities do'.[17] The problem here rests with the fact that 'virtual' communities are seen in opposition to 'real' communities, which leads to a conundrum when trying to define the distinction between 'virtual' and 'real'. This gives rise to more questions when a virtual community leads to physical congregations as is the case with Black Lives Matter, rendering the virtual even more difficult to be distinguished from the real.

Unlike Castells, political scientist Benedict Anderson moves away from the problematic virtual-real binary when describing communities, thus providing a possible solution to this dilemma. Anderson opts for the term 'imagined community' to describe a community where 'members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[18] This certainly rings true for Twitter or Facebook communities of Black Lives Matter and other social movements; the thousands of participants will never know each and every person due to the vastness of social media networks, but people are still connected together by communicating through the virtual networks of social media platforms. With this image, it is inevitable not to think of whether social media has widened participation; in fact, the concept of virality is tackled in the third chapter by evaluating Geert Lovink's comments

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[13] Rheingold, p. 147.

[14] Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System*, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012), p. 8.

[15] Rainie and Wellman, p. 8.

[16] Manuel Castells, *The Rise Of The Network Society*, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 122.

[17] Castells, *Network Society*, p. 122.

[18] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1991), p. 15.

on the size of networks, as well as question how a collective identity and a sense of togetherness can still be constructed despite a widespread constituency.

When faced with such conflicting statements on community and how it can be envisioned, one starts to mirror Chamber's uncertainty on using the 'prevailing idiom' of 'community' to describe the activity on social media. Chambers questions its validity; in reality, 'How useful is it for understanding the social network site ties?'[19] Sociologists Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman provide a brief solution for this dilemma of 'community' by arguing that society should not be seen as built out of 'solidary, tightly bounded groups – like a stacked series of building blocks'. Instead, it is constructed of a 'tangle of networked individuals who operate in specialised, fragmented, sparsely interconnected, and permeable networks'.[20]

'Network' is the operative word here; it is the mode in which most theorists imagine the structure of social movements. For instance, Castells, in *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, defines contemporary society as a 'network society' where 'power is multidimensional and is organised around networks programmed in each domain of human activity'. When 'sorrow and hope' is shared in the 'free public space of the internet', when projects are envisioned 'from multiple sources of being', 'individuals formed networks, regardless of their personal views'.[21] Castells speaks positively about 'horizontal multimodal networks' 'creat[ing] togetherness', which is important because it is through 'togetherness that people overcome fear and discover hope'.[22] He conceives networks as 'open structures, able to expand without limits, integrating new nodes as long as they are able to communicate within the network'.[23] On the other hand, network theorist Geert Lovink is a bit more sceptical of how far networks can expand. He questions whether there is an 'ideal size' and whether 'networked conversations in which more than 500 users participate [is] doomed to fall apart', which in turn brings about questions on Black Lives Matter and whether its global reach has weakened or strengthened the movement. [24]

While the concept of 'network' is popular when considering the structure of social movements, theorists such as Gerbaudo have questioned whether this is really 'the best image

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[19] Chambers, p. 143.
[20] Rainie and Wellman, p. 21.
[21] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 7.
[22] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 10.
[23] Castells, *Network Society*, p. 501.
[24] Geert Lovink, *Networks without a Cause:A Critique of Social Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press , 2011), p. 172.

with which to capture the dynamics of the mobilisation of contemporary social movements and the role played by social media in this process'.[25] He considers Castell's utopian view of these movements as nothing more than a 'clichéd', 'techno-visionary attitude'.[26] Instead, Gerbaudo envisions social movements as a 'choreography of assembly'; a process of 'symbolic construction in public space'.[27] What the term 'choreography' implies is that the construction of public space has not been spontaneous and leaderless, with Gerbaudo targeting discourse on horizontalism from theorists like Castells and stating that social media has facilitated the rise of complex and liquid forms of leadership.

'Community', 'Network', or 'Choreography'?

The discussion on community and social media has been initiated as an attempt to clarify what is understood by the terms 'social media' and 'community'. While successful in defining 'social media', the discussion has left the term 'community' as more elusive than ever. The introduction of terms like 'networks' and 'choreography' has even thrown the very use of 'community' to describe digital social movement formation into question; there is uncertainty as to the best term to use to describe contemporary group formation. When initially faced with the multitude of these terms, what was considered was dedicating a chapter for each term to individually contest them and reach a conclusion on the most viable term to describe contemporary group formation on social media. However, a closer look at each of these terms revealed that there are more similarities than distinctions, and that there is a blurred line between the overlapping definitions of community, network, and choreography. What emerges when analysing these terms is a common preoccupation with three main aspects; the 'what', the 'where' and the 'who' of group formation, which as indicated at the start of this introduction, shapes the following three chapters of this dissertation.

Although a number of theorists are referred to throughout this work, one of the most notable ones is Gerbaudo, whose recent theory of 'choreography' has remained rather uncontested and is thus worth fully exploring. Moreover, in a dissertation on social media,

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[25] Gerbaudo, p. 19.
[26] Gerbaudo, p. 26.
[27] Gerbaudo, p. 4.

social movements and *community,* rather than *political activism,* an understanding of social media as 'crucial emotional conduits' constructing an 'emotional narration' is essential as emotion lies at the centre of community formation.[28] In fact, Gerbaudo defines this 'emotional narration' as the 'condensation of individual sentiments of indignation and anger' which can 'transform individual experiences of frustration and indignation' into a 'collective political passion'.[29] Gerbaudo's emphasis on the emotional aspect of social media distinguishes him from other theorists exploring the effect of social media on social movements. Theorists mentioned in this work like Stefania Milan, Alexandra Segerberg, and W. Lance Bennett focus more on the structure of social media networks and how this reconfigures group formation, rendering Gerbaudo's emphasis on the emotion an even more intriguing and distinctive area for exploration.

The first chapter looks at the construction of this emotional narration which aids in creating a sense of togetherness amongst a dispersed constituency. This is achieved by both analysing the narrative that the movement constructs, as well as explore how collective identity has been reconfigured through the use of technological platforms, by looking at theories such as Stefania Milan's 'cloud protesting' and Bennett and Segerberg's 'connective action'.

According to Gerbaudo, it is this emotional narration which drives people to the street, and the second chapter explores the hybridity between physical place and virtual space in the movement by looking at how social media has 'reconstructed and facilitated forms of physical proximity', as well as the importance of physical gatherings.[30] The importance of physical place is analysed by bringing in both Castells and Gerbaudo, exploring whether occupied squares act as 'sources of identification' for the movement or whether Castells' vision of society as a network without centres is a more suitable way to describe the movement.[31]

Lastly, the third chapter looks at who the emotional narration is inviting to participate and who the people constructing it are, exploring whether the horizontal networks of social media, and the movement's narrative encourage a wider demographic of people to participate. Here, the concept of virality comes in which is explored alongside Lovink's work

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[28] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 14.
[29] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 42.
[30] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 155.
[31] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 156.

on the size of networks. The second important aspect explored in the chapter is that of leadership, analysing who the people constructing this narrative are and the type of leadership setup that can be seen. This is mostly achieved by contrasting Gerbaudo's theory of 'choreographers' or 'soft leaders' with Castells' vision of horizontal, leaderless networks.

It is relevant that the movement's narrative lies at the centre of this analysis because as sociologist Francesca Polletta states, it is through studying movement narratives that there can be a better understanding of the recruitment, and the organisational structures of the movement. Along with analytic concepts such as ideology, tradition and collective identity, narrative adds to collective action frames. Polletta envisions collective action frames to be 'persuasive devices used by movement leaders to recruit participants, maintain solidarity, drum up support […] and demobilise opposition'. It is important for these frames to be successful because only then can there be a 'sense of injustice, identity and collective efficacy', which leads to a clamour for change.[32] This means that identifying and deconstructing the narrative of the movement is key to understanding how social media is mobilising people to form groups.

Black Lives Matter: A 'Hybrid Networked Movement'

All of the above will be explored by using Black Lives Matter as an example of a 'hybrid, networked movement', which owes its inception to the death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin.[33] On the 26th of February 2012, George Zimmerman shot unarmed Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida as he was walking with a bag of skittles and a can of iced tea. Zimmerman said Martin looked suspicious. On 11th April 2012, after various protests, Zimmerman is finally charged with second-degree murder, but a mere year later, he is acquitted of the murder. Community organiser Alicia Garza expresses her sorrow on Facebook with a simple status: 'Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.' Patrisse Cullors follows Garza and posts 'Declaration: Black bodies will no longer be sacrificed for the rest of the world's enlightenment. I am done. I am so done. Trayvon you are loved infinitely.

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[32] Francesca Polletta, 'Contending Stories: Narrative in Social Movements ', *Qualitative Sociology*, 21.4, (1998), 419-446 (p. 421).
[33] Castells, p. 180.

#BlackLivesMatter.' It was those three words which were adopted by thousands of protestors across the globe, leading to various street protests and the construction of the social movement.

Black Lives Matter was chosen as a case study out of the list of hybrid movements because unlike movements such as those previously mentioned in this chapter, it remains an understudied movement which would benefit from further academic research and debate. Moreover, it has been extremely influential; even in the short span of the first year, the 'impact of the movement [was] undeniable', and could be measured by 'localities forcing police to wear body cameras', 'the arrest for murder of […] police officers' that would have otherwise gone unpunished. More importantly, it could be measured by the 'shifting discourse about crime, policing, and race'.[34] Five years after its inception, it thrives on numerous social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and is still a movement that is constantly evolving and expanding. However, while Black Lives Matter will be the main case study of this work, the ultimate aim of this dissertation is to explore how social media is reconfiguring community formation; what will be explored through this movement can redefine what is meant by contemporary relationships, and how social bonds are formed.

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[34] Keeanga-Yamahhta Taylor , *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books , 2016), loc. 418.

Chapter 1:
Constructing an Emotional Narrative

Theoretical works which talk of a 'catalyst' or an event that 'sparks' a movement have been recurrent, with prominent theorists such as Castells discussing the 'sharing' of 'sorrow and hope in the free public space of the internet'. It is this 'togetherness' that helped protestors 'overcome fear' and move towards occupying urban space.[35] Castells' ambiguous discourse is reflected in the writings of other social movement theorists such as Mason, who describes protests like those in the 2008 Athens uprisings as a 'social explosion'; an 'uncontrolled and randomly provoked reaction to economic crisis'.[36] This discourse leaves the formation of movements shrouded in obscurity; it still does not clarify what material is being used to form 'social explosions', transmit this 'sorrow and hope' and how this forms 'togetherness', which is essential for an understanding of community formation.

This chapter aims to question how social media participates in the 'construction of an emotional narration' that would eventually 'sustain [the protestors] coming together in public space'. What has been 'used to create a sense of commonality among participants essential for the mobilisation of a spatially dispersed and socially diverse constituency'?[37] The chapter first discusses the elusive term of 'collective identity' which is considered crucial for the formation of any social movement. It then moves on to a discussion on what Gerbaudo calls 'empty signifiers', which are readily adopted and spread virally because of their ideological emptiness. The technological aspect of the platforms are taken into consideration as the chapter looks at theorists such as Stefania Milan, W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg to see how the formation of collective identity is being reconfigured through the 'cloud' and 'connective action' present on social media. The chapter then takes a closer look at the visual narrative being constructed by the movement and whether the vast material being used to construct it has led it to become fragmented or remained consistent. Finally, it explores social

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[35] Castells, 'Networks of Outrage and Hope', p. 253.
[36] Paul Mason, *Why It's Still Kicking Off Everywhere: The New Global Revolutions*, (London: Verso, 2012), p. 321.
[37] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 14.

media's ability to construct a counternarrative to mainstream media and the 'myth of centrality' that this elicits.

Collective Identity: The 'Inclusive Symbols' of the Movement

Collective identity has always been an elusive term, with theorists arguing about the exact definition of collective identity and whether it stems from the individual or from the collective. For the purpose of this chapter, collective identity will be defined at its most basic level, or to quote sociologist David Snow, collective identity can be seen as a 'shared sense of we-ness and collective agency'.[38] Despite its ambiguity, collective identity has been essential for understanding social movements; from the 1960s theorists have considered collective identity as central to these new nonclass-based movements in mobilising people to the streets. After all, as Alberto Melucci states, the 'unity of a social movement' is a 'result rather than a starting point'; a result which stems from the construction of collective action and collective identity.[39] Media platforms have always been critical in this construction of identities and have always provided material and symbolic support for a movement to elaborate on 'who we are', but this chapter explores how collective identity is being constructed through the use of social media as a specific platform.

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution saw the adoption of the icon of Khaled Saeed; the blogger brutally killed by the police in 2010 for releasing a video depicting the police in illegal activities. The photograph or icon of Khaled Saeed was adopted as a personal profile picture across Egypt, as a sign of rebellion towards the authoritarian regime. Similarly, the Anonymous Movement embraced the use of the Guy Fawkes mask as its symbol of protest and revolt. Despite this seemingly ineffective and trivial manner of protest (in fact, it is often discarded as slacktivism), Gerbaudo believes that this can be considered a 'manifestation of

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[38] David Snow, 'Collective identity and expressive forms', in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. by N. J. Smelser & P. B. Baltes, (London: Elsevier, 2001) pp. 196-154 (p. 197).
[39] Alberto Melucci, Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 40.

the new forms of collective identity'. Their importance, asserts Gerbaudo, is not in their political action as much as it is in 'creating that sense of "we"'.[40]

It can be said that Black Lives Matter operated along the same lines of the previously mentioned movements by adopting victims such as Michael Brown and Eric Garner as symbols of police violence towards Black people. Although various pictures of the victims were shared, both by the official Black Lives Matter pages and by individual users, these were not adopted as profile pictures by individual users to the extent that they could be identified as a common symbol. What has characterised the movement and helped construct that sense of 'we' appears to be hashtags that helped propel the movement forward. #IamMichaelBrown #IamEricGarner #WeareTrayvonMartin; these 'inclusive symbols […] catalyse the collective indignation at power-holders', in this case, the police, as well as act as a show of solidarity for the victims. This display of solidarity follows in the footsteps of other recent hashtags which feature personal pronouns; think of #jesuischarliehebdo #jesuisparis trending on Twitter during recent terrorist attacks.[41] Adopting political theorist Ernesto Laclau's theory, Gerbaudo considers these symbols as 'empty signifiers', by which he means 'a symbol which has been deprived of its particularistic content'.[42] It is this deprivation which causes a chain of equivalence and allows it to be adopted by different groups of people. These 'empty signifiers' are in direct contrast to the 'fixed points' of the movement; the occupied places of protests that will be explored in the next chapter. These occupied places of protest are 'full signifiers' filled with histories and political traditions.[43]

Although Gerbaudo asserts that these symbols go viral due to their 'ostensible simplicity, if not outright "emptiness"', the use of first person pronouns to appropriate someone else, or someone else's pain might point towards other, intriguing factors.[44] In reality, first person pronouns 'I' and 'we' have been 'linguistic instruments of protest' for at least 200 years — think of Thomas Jeferson's 'We are all Republicans' and Civil Rights Movement's 'We Shall Overcome'. However, the virality characterising content on social

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[40] Paolo Gerbaudo, 'Protest Avatars As Memetic Signifiers: Political Profile Pictures And The Construction Of Collective Identity On Social Media In The 2011 Protest Wave', *Information, Communication & Society,* 18.8, (2015), 916-929, (p. 919).
[41] Gerbaudo, 'Protest Avatars', p. 924.
[42] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 42.
[43] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, p. 156.
[44] Gerbaudo, 'Protest Avatars', p. 925.

media platforms has brought these utterances to the fore, leading Jeffrey Kluger to state that the contemporary age is characterised by people 'being a great many things'. [45]

This insistence to appropriate someone or something as a way to express solidarity raises interesting questions about social media and social rituals. Kluger asks whether there are 'humbler ways to make common cause with someone else's pain'; to 'empathise without appropriating'. This is arguable; expressing solidarity on social media is still at an early stage and does not seem to have been fully developed. The emergence of digital media, particularly social media, has reconfigured place partly by facilitating personal connections across geographical distance, as seen in the next chapter. When someone dies, there is a funeral and a mourning period. When victims like Trayvon Martin die at the other end of the world, how can solidarity and empathy with his family and friends be expressed through social media networks? Despite the emphasis on a 'networked society' what is apparent is this void; people still do not know how to express solidarity through social media because new rituals have to be formed to complement these reconfigurations to community.

Up till now, the chapter has given a glimpse into the ways that collective identity is being formed on social media. However, a look at profile pictures and hashtags as forming collective identity is strikingly similar to 'political T-shirts, stickers and flags which also satisfy the sense of belonging to a […] community'.[46] While it is true that the viral nature of social media networks render it far easier for an icon or signifier to be adopted (or abandoned), the system of imbuing an icon with significance remains the same as what was seen in physical movements; the influence of the technical aspect of these digital networks on collective identity are not explored by theorists such as Gerbaudo. Thus, the pressing question that arises is: how has social media *reconfigured* the way collective identity is constructed and how has that impacted the narrative being produced?

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[45] Jeffrey Kluger, 'Viewpoint: The Problem with the "We Are All…" Trope', *ideas.time.com,* Time Magazine (Oct 2012), < http://ideas.time.com/2012/10/22/the-problem-with-the-we-are-all-trope/> [Accessed 12 Jan 2017].
[46] Gerbaudo, 'Protest Avatars', p. 918.

Social Media Networks: 'Potential Network Agents alongside Human Actors'

Political theorists W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg state that while networks have always been part of society, contemporary society involves 'networks that become more central organisational forms that transcend groups and constitute core organisations in their own right'.[47] This means that it is crucial to look at social media platforms as organisational structures which can be seen as 'potential network agents alongside human actors', as outlined in Bruno Latour's work on Actor-Network theory; a name 'so awkward, so confusing, so meaningless that it deserves to be kept'.[48] What Latour insists is that the 'actors' in Actor-Network theory include not just humans but also inanimate objects. By stating that, he is not imbuing inanimate objects with human intentionality, but rather acknowledging that in the web of interactions, they act on other objects. How are these networks shaping the interactions on social media? Bennett and Segerberg assert that these communication mechanisms 'establish relationships, activate attentive participants, channel various resources, and establish narratives and discourses' as will be seen later on in this chapter. What arises through the use of social media is the rise of connective, rather than collective, action; participation which derives from 'self-motivation rather than external incentives' in the form of 'personally expressive content' which is shared with, and recognised by others who then repeat these sharing activities.[49]

Thus, contributing to a common cause becomes 'an act of personal expression', which allows people to be on 'opposite sides of the world', without a 'club, a party, or a shared ideological frame to make the connection'.[50] This is explored in the next chapter, which looks at the ways in which the narrative of community constructed by Black Lives Matter was adopted on a global scale and adapted to different situations. The other essential part in the equation of connective action is technology platforms that allow interpersonal networks to

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[47] W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, 'The Logic of Connective Action ', *Information, Communication, and Society*, 15.5 (2012), 739-768,< http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661>, (p. 744).

[48] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 9.

[49] W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg, *The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalisation of Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 41.

[50] Bennett and Segerberg, 'The Logic of Connective Action', p. 753.

'coordinate and scale the networks', resulting in what resembles collection, but without the 'the need for exclusive, collective action framings'. [51]

New media and digital culture Professor Stefania Milan's study on collective action reinforces certain salient points of Bennett and Segerberg's theory. Like Bennett and Segerberg, Milan believes that social media have 'become actors in their own right', as they intervene in the meaning-making process with their 'algorithmic power'.[52] This makes their process not just 'technological', but 'sociotechnical'. She also asserts that 'cloud protesting' — the term she adopts to explain collective action fashioned by social media — allows the 'customisation of narratives at the individual level'; a statement which echoes Bennett and Segerberg's assertion. However, unlike Bennett and Segerberg, who emphasise the role of social media platforms as networks which facilitate the spread of material and thus the formation of large scale connective action, Milan views social media as also crucial for building 'internalised or personalised ideas'. Since social media platforms filter most of our relationships and interactions, the 'material' being circulated through social media takes centre stage – it is not a 'sporadic and intermittent encounter' but '[colonises] the everyday'. Therefore, it is not just a physical representation of the symbolic but instead the 'process through which the symbolic takes form'.[53]

The cloud can 'indicate the virtual space where the movement's cultural and symbolic production takes place'. Although the resources that make joint action possible such as 'meanings, identities, narratives, experience-based knowledge, and solidarity networks' are 'negotiated both online and in face-to-face interactions', they are 'enlivened, exchanged and stored 'in the cloud' of social networking and storytelling platforms, microblogs and content-sharing sites. It is this cloud which gives 'visibility to personalised yet universal narratives, connecting individual stories into a broader context that gives them meaning'. Milan uses the 'We are the 99%' as an example of social media users participating in 'building the collective plot', where you had members of the Occupy Wall Street movement sharing pictures on Tumblr.[54] Pictures such as figure 1, which all followed the same format, were people writing the reasons why they are part of 99%. As hundreds and thousands of these personalised

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[51] Bennett and Segerberg, 'The Logic of Connective Action', p. 753.
[52] Stefania Milan, 'From Social Movements to Cloud Protesting: The Evolution of Collective Identity', *Information, Communication & Society,* 18.8 (2015), 887-900 < http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1043135>, p. 888.
[53] Milan, p. 890.
[54] Milan, p. 894.

narratives of struggle were posted, it served to connect them to a broader context; the income and wealth inequality in the United States stemming from the mistakes of the top 1%.
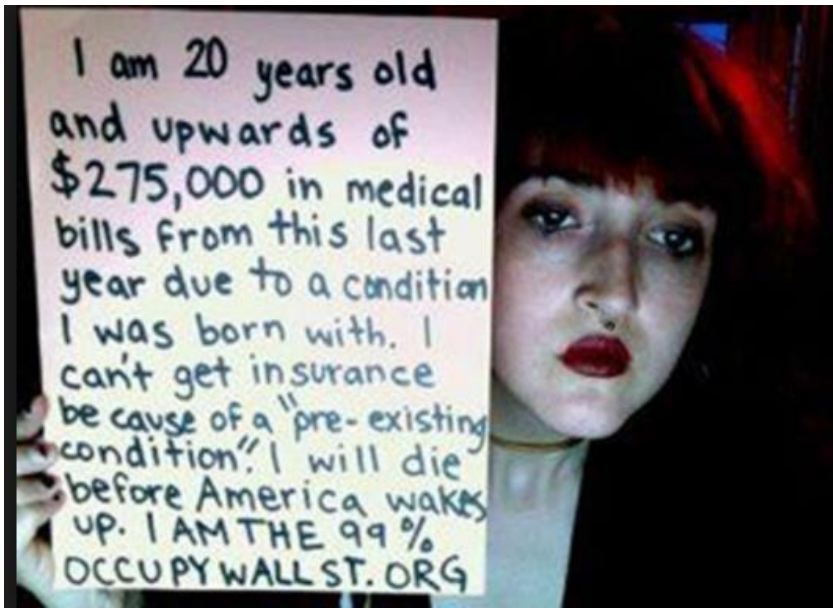
Figure 1: Tumblr Post showing an example of 'I am the 99%' used for Occupy Wall Street Movement

This is similar to what is seen being adopted by the Black Lives Matter movement as part of its narrative on the daily struggle of Black people faced with racial abuse. Fig. 2 shows Black Lives Matter identifying being Black in America as a 'national emergency' and urges Black people to 'let the world know how [they] feel, to come together, and resist'.
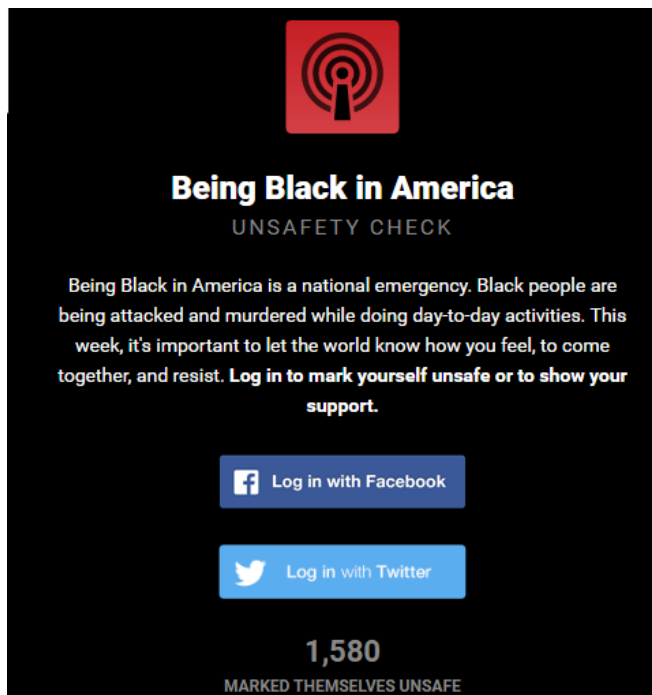
Figure 2: Social Media Post: Black Lives Matter Unsafety Check

What emerges are snippets of personal narratives of struggle. Figure 3 reveals a participant's ordeal of 'walking in the rain with my head covered in a scarf to protect [her] hair' only to have a man order her to 'go back to Iraq'.

Figure 3: Twitter post showing a personal narrative of racial discrimination

Similarly, figure 4 presents the shocking narrative of a Black person being pushed and verbally abused on the metro, with no one coming to his aide.

Figure 4: A Twitter post showing a personal narrative of racial discrimination.

These personalised narratives are connected in a broader context to give them meaning and develop a consistent, solid narrative of struggle and violence towards Blacks, which solidifies Milan's argument on the development of collective identity through personalised material.

When viewing this wide array of personalised material being created by participants, two essential questions come to mind. Firstly, with this individuals' contribution to 'symbolic production in the first person', have movement organisations 'lost their regulatory role in defining membership and narratives'? Milan asserts that yes, it is the cloud which is collectively voting for the collective narrative by 'selecting, highlighting and sharing content'.[55] This is in agreement with Bennett and Segerberg's view that collection does not require the same role played by formal organisations and that instead of mediations from hierarchical organisations, they involve 'co-production and co-distribution' based on personalised expression.[56] These statements raise even more questions as to what defines the membership of Black Lives Matter and whether the people merely tapping into the online Black Lives Matter conversation could be considered as members of the movement. These questions will all feature in the third chapter, which addresses the demographics and the role of leaders in the movement.

Secondly, the vast array of material raises questions on the resulting narrative of the movement. According to Gerbaudo, looking at narrative is crucial because social media have not simply been 'channels of information' but also 'crucial emotional conduits' to construct an 'emotional narration'.[57] However, Milan asserts that what arises is a 'fragmented' narrative, albeit 'flexible, real-time and crowd-controlled'.[58] A closer look at an empirical study by Deen Freelon et al. analysing some of the most tweeted posts during the period 2014-2015 places this assertion into question.[59]

Black Lives Matter: A Visual, 'Fragmented' Narrative?

Figure 5, one of the first images to be shared in relation to Mike Brown's death, depicts the policeman Darren Wilson, hovering over the dead body of 18-year-old Michael Brown, who was shot by Wilson a minimum of six times. The image, which was retweeted 42,000

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[55] Milan, p. 895.
[56] Bennett and Segerberg, 'Logic of Connective Action', p. 752.
[57] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, p. 14.
[58] Milan, p. 894.
[59] Deen Freelon et. Al, 'Beyond the Hashtags*', cmsimpact.org*, Center for Media and Social Impact (Feb 2016), < http://cmsimpact.org/resource/beyond-hashtags-ferguson-blacklivesmatter-online-struggle-offline-justice/> [Accessed 3 January 2017].

times draws attention to the fact that Brown's body stood on the ground for hours before being covered and taken to a medical examiner's office. Figure 6 is an image retweeted around 28,000 times of a screenshot from Eric Garner's video, showing Garner struggling and repeating 'I can't breathe' as Officer Daniel Pantaleo places him in an illegal chokehold. A few minutes later, Eric Garner was pronounced dead.

Figure 5: Image showing policeman Darren Wilson standing over the body of Michael Brown

Figure 6: Stills taken from the video of Eric Garner being put in a chokehold

One can already see a pattern of narrative emerging, but since the study deals with images from various protests and incidents over the two-year period, it was decided to also look at one specific event and see whether this pattern holds when analysing just one event.

July 5th 2016 saw the death of Alton Sterling in Baton Rouge while he was being detained by three police officers. The untimely death of Sterling who was shot several times by the police officers led to protests of outrage in Baton Rouge, as highlighted in the pictures below.

Figure 7: Protestor Ieshia Evans during Baton Rouge Protest

The iconic photograph of the protestor Ieshia Evans (see fig. 7) being detained by police officers during the protest sees the young, defenceless woman calmly extending her arms as police officers rush towards her fully armed in riot gear. Evans' calm demeanour and casual clothing stands in sharp contrast to the multitude of fully armed police officers. Figure 8 shows a protestor on the ground looking incredulously at the armed police man who is forcefully holding her arm.

Figure 8: Protestor on the ground during Baton Rouge Protest

Figure 9 also depicts a male protestor on the ground, this time with the knee of the police officer pressing down on his head and his other knee pressing down on his mouth.

Figure 9: Protestor being held forcefully to the ground during Baton Rouge protest

It would be erroneous to reach a definite conclusion based on this evidence. The amount of material being shared has been vast and the few images analysed above cannot be used to establish a pattern with certainty. It is important to question, for example, whether different social media platforms yield different kinds of images being shared for the same event, and whether analysing a sample of images across all the years of the movement

indicates a change in the narrative of the movement as it evolves. Despite these limitations, a number of interesting insights can be made.

Firstly, what strongly emerges is the presence of a visual narrative rather than a textual one; most of the material that has helped shape the movement's narrative are in the form of photographs or pictures. The reason for photographs being effective might be because according to political activist Susan Sontag, a written account has a 'complexity of thought, reference, and vocabulary' and so it is 'pitched at a larger or smaller readership', while a 'photograph has only one language and is destined potentially for all'.[60] Moreover, in an era of information overload, 'the photograph provides a quick way of apprehending something and a compact form of memorising it'.[61] However, one cannot exclude the subject that Black Lives Matter deals with; unlike movements like Occupy Wall Street which dealt with the abstract concept of wealth, police violence is concrete and visual. In fact, Black Lives Matter follows on the same path as other Black movements before it by using mass-mediated images to combat racial injustices. This is acknowledged by the movement; figure 10, which was retweeted over 46,000 times between 2014 and 2015 shows two moments of confrontation between police and Black protestors. One is from a Civil Rights Movement protest in the 1960s and the other one is from a Black Lives Matter protest in Ferguson in 2014. The uncanny resemblance between the pictures points towards the fact that not much has changed over the time separating the two incidents and that the visual narrative of protest and struggle employed by the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s has remained all too relevant in the present.

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[60] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), p. 18.
[61] Sontag, p. 20.

Figure 10: An image showing a scene from a Civil Rights Movement protest in the 1960s and a scene from a Black Lives Matter protest

Secondly, when viewing the diverse images above, the first instinct is to concur with Milan's conclusion that cloud protesting leads to a fragmented narrative. However, a closer look identifies a common thread present in all the images and tweets; violent police in positions of authority. In the images, there is a stark contrast between the police being violent towards victims who are either lifeless or struggling. This constant confrontation with state power helped maintain a consistent narrative focus and spread the message of police brutality to diverse audiences. Moreover, this opposition between lifeless bodies and irrationally violent policemen helped construct the identification of the 'other', which most theories on collective identity identify as 'indispensable to the construction of a "we" characterised by common traits and solidarity'.[62] Rather than fragmented, the narrative seems to have remained consistent throughout; a solid narrative which has helped participants of the movement construct a form of collective identity opposing the enemy; violent police.

When considering this evidence, it seems that social media has been used to 'create a sense of commonality' among participants. This is particularly crucial when considering that the mobilisation required is that of a 'spatially dispersed and socially diverse constituency', but the concept of place and demographics will be explored in the following chapters. What is intriguing is that this sense of commonality seems to have mainly been constructed through the presence of the 'other' rather than through a sharply defined group. This places Black Lives Matter in the same group as that of movements like the Spanish Democracia Real YA,

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[62] Emiliano Treré, 'Reclaiming, Proclaiming, And Maintaining Collective Identity In The #Yosoy132 Movement In Mexico: An Examination Of Digital Frontstage And Backstage Activism Through Social Media And Instant Messaging Platforms', *Information, Communication & Society*, 18.8 (2015), 901-915, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118x.2015.1043744>, (p. 40).

who identified themselves as 'ordinary people'. While 'ordinary people' is a very loose group, Gerbaudo argues that what gave it coherence was 'vibrant verbal attacks levelled at bankers and politicians'. In the case of the Egyptian uprisings, Khaled Said was the initial nodal point for people to identify with, but what strengthened participants' sense of solidarity was its identification of the much hated police force as the 'other'. Likewise, Occupy Wall Street vaguely defined themselves as the 99% but constructed its opposition as the financiers in Occupy Wall Street. Therefore, the 'coherence' of these identities stemmed less from 'some form of internal solidity', and more on the opposition 'the people against the system'.[63]

The Myth of a 'New Form of Centrality'

The discussion in the previous section establishes that despite initial observations, the narrative constructed is mostly visual and consistent. The focus on police violence identifies the police as the 'other', which is essential in eliciting a sense of collective identity among the participants. However, when considering mainstream media reports on the above mentioned incidents as well as on other victims of police violence, it can be said that this narrative was not only useful in creating a collective identity but also to act as a counternarrative to mainstream media (here used to refer to traditional forms of mass communication such as newspapers and television).

For instance, police reports describe Eric Garner as 'resist[ing] arrest' while describing him as not appearing 'to be in great distress' and his condition deemed to be as 'not serious', thus projecting the image of a freak accident and policemen merely doing their job.[64] A raw, shaky video of Garner's arrest taken by a bystander opposes this claim, as it depicts Garner on the ground audibly gasping 'I can't breathe' 11 times as an officer puts him in a chokehold.

Mainstream media reports go a step further when creating a narrative of blame revolving around the victims themselves. New York Representative, Peter King, blamed the

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[63] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, pp. 14, 149.

[64] Edgar Sandoval, 'Internal NYPD report on incident with Staten Island dad Eric Garner does not mention chokehold, states he was not in great distress', *nydailynews.com*, New York Daily News (July 2014), < http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/exclusive-internal-nypd-report-staten-island-dad-not-mention-chokehold-article-1.1875221> [Accessed 15 Dec 2016].

death on overweight Garner resisting arrest: 'If he had not had asthma and a heart condition and was so obese, almost definitely he would not have died'. [65] He also had a petty criminal record with dozens of arrests, he allegedly sold untaxed cigarettes, and he disrespected the officers by not complying with their demands. When using this logic, Garner's choices become the reasons for his death. The same can be said of Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old boy who was fatally shot by a police officer after playing with a toy gun at a playground in Cleveland. Some of the first articles on the incident focused on Tamir's Rice background, identifying his father as a domestic abuser and his mother as a drug trafficker. By focusing on Rice's troubled upbringing, and including mug shots of his father in the article, mainstream media constructed a narrative of blame revolving around his upbringing. Tamir Rice playing with a toy gun at the playground was a result of him having encountered violence. His killing was justified.

According to Stacey Patton and David Leonard, this reflects a wider pattern of victim-blaming which is 'central to white supremacy' where the victims are blamed for their choices. 'Trayvon Martin should not have been wearing a hoodie', 'Michael Brown should not have stolen cigarillos' and 'Renisha McBride should not have knocked on a stranger's door for help in the middle of the night'.[66] This is also a point raised during the interview with political activist Dr Ken Fero, who asserts that the 'narrative is always controlled by the media' and that there is a process involved to actually denigrate the person. They place 'the cause of the death in the hands of the person who has been killed' and 'focus on the person's family'.[67] Unfortunately, according to Fero, this is partly because the media obtains their information from the police who are involved in the crime, and what is circulated by mass media becomes the dominant narrative. Fero argues that this narrative of victim blaming can be considered as systematic, a system which a movement like Black Lives Matter tries to oppose as can be seen by the protestor Johnetta Elzie, who tweets (see figure 11) that they proved the 'state to be a liar' with the use of Vine; a platform which allows users to produce a maximum of 6-second videos and share them via Twitter.

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[65] Stacey Patton, 'Viewpoint: Why Eric Garner was blamed for dying', *bbc.com*, BBC News (Dec 2014), < http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30340632> [Accessed 14 Jan 2017].
[66] Patton, n.p.
[67] See Appendix A

Figure 11 Tweet from Black Lives Matter protestor Johnetta Elzie about Vine

Elzie's tweet points to the distinction between the narrative produced by Black Lives Matter individuals on social media platforms and the narrative produced by mass media about the movement. For instance, this opposition can be seen in official Black Lives Matter posts such as figure 12 below, depicting a smiling Michelle Shirley with the text: '39 years young', focusing on the potentiality of life that has been lost. The script font and the replacement of her full name Michelle with a more informal, personal 'Mickey' helps to humanise the victim and counteract the use of mug shots by mainstream media. What this does is help to humanise the victims in order to create a nodal point of identification around which people can gather — similar to the figure of Khaled Said in the Egyptian uprisings. This is crucial for the construction of a collective identity.

Figure 12 Official Black Lives Matter Tweet depicting victim Michelle Shirley

In light of the use of a personalised narrative to counteract the 'lies' spread by mass media reports, the popular Black Lives Matter activist Deray Mckesson had this to say:

> Truth-telling has always been a radical act, especially in Blackness. Protest is confrontation, Protest is destruction. There are people who choose to put their bodies on the line and say that we will physically confront the system […]. But you know this fight will also be a hearts to mind fight as well and the power of Twitter is the power of the story.[68]

While a somewhat empowering statement, it is also rather problematic. Firstly, it might be more complex than simply speaking of 'truth'. What truth? As Susan Sontag aptly states, even using images is not 'simply a transparency which has happened'. It is an image that someone chose; when you photograph you 'frame, and to frame is to exclude', rendering it essential to ask what Black Lives Matter is framing in its photographs and what it is excluding. [69] Secondly, what 'power' do Black Lives Matter participants hold when telling their 'story' on Twitter? What extent of ownership do they have on the narrative? The above discussion, as well as the following chapters, question social media platforms' neutrality, and their role in the Actor-network system. Nick Couldry also questions social media by referring to the 'myth of the mediated centre' which is the 'belief, or assumption, that there is a centre to the social world, and that, in some sense, the media speaks 'for' that centre', which is why for the past two centuries, these institutions have been 'bound up with our possibilities of knowing the social', and by extension, it has been linked to what is understood by community.[70]

This myth has been existing since before social media, but what is being offered now is a 'new form of centrality'; one that is 'mediated […] by us rather than by content-producing institutions'.[71] Couldry, however, has doubts on the extent of that mediation, and states that social media seems to be a mere substitution for mass media institutions. Cultural industries such as advertising are closely involved in social media platforms, making them a 'new business model' for media rather than an 'authentic social response to large media'.[72]

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[68] Brent McDonald, 'They Helped Make Twitter Matter in Ferguson Protests', *nytimes.com*, The New York Times (Aug 2015), < https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/us/twitter-black-lives-matter-ferguson-protests.html?_r=1> [Accessed 2 February 2017]
[69] Sontag, p. 38.
[70] Nick Couldry, 'Inaugural: A Necessary Disenchantment: Myth, Agency and Injustice In A Digital World', *The Sociological Review*, 62.4 (2014), 880-897 https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954x.12158, p. 882.
[71] Couldry, p. 884.
[72] Couldry, p. 885.

In fact, the myth of the mediated centre is slowly being replaced by the emerging 'myth of us' where the focus is on what we do 'naturally' to keep in touch. As was already briefly mentioned in the introduction, the problem is that this is not natural but rather the corporations managing social media platforms want it to be believed as natural. Our most important moments of 'coming together' are happening on 'platforms whose economic value is based on generating such an idea of natural collectivity'. Ultimately, social media target individuals, drawing them into regular interactions with other individuals they choose and then monetise that potential attention and the related consumer data. The 'places where we share material' is far from 'being our own 'place'.[73] When considering such statements, it is perhaps more apt to consider the 'power of Twitter' not to be the 'power of the story' but rather the power of making its users believe in a new form of centrality mediated by them. Thus, although social media platforms have been crucial in allowing the movement to construct its own narrative; a narrative which aided the construction of collective identity, it is crucial to view this with a critical eye. As Lovink states, it is social media's 'promise to make unmediated, direct connections' that 'drags us deeper into corporate media arrangements'; what social media platforms want their users to understand as 'connection' and 'community' is whatever is most profitable, leading to the idea that social media might be reconfiguring community formation according to monetary value. [74]

Through the use of social media platforms, the movement managed to construct a counter narrative to mass media, both by humanising the victims as well as by providing evidence (usually visual) to counteract mainstream media reports and affirm police violence. It is this story of pain and violence, this consistent emotional narrative of police as the 'other', of the victims as humans who deserved to live which partly helped the formation of a sort of collective identity.

However, what do you do once those feelings of outrage have been aroused? According to Sontag, it 'needs to be translated into action, or it withers'. Once people start believing there is nothing they can do, people start to get 'bored, cynical, apathetic'. It is not the number of images that dulls people's feelings, but rather it is 'passivity that dulls feeling'.[75] What did Black Lives Matter do once feelings of outrage were brought about by the visual

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[73] Couldry, p. 885.

[74] Geert Lovink, 'Underground Networks in the Age of Web 2.0', *networkcultures.org,* The Institute of Network Cultures (Sep 2010), < http://networkcultures.org/geert/2010/09/03/underground-networks-in-the-age-of-web-2/> [Accessed 2 February 2017].

[75] Sontag, p. 80.

narrative of police violence? The next chapter looks at how the movement acts once it arouses these feelings; namely, it explores the way the movement organises protests and demonstrations to bring people to the streets.

Chapter 2:
The Hybrid Place of the Movement

The previous chapter explores the material that constructs a sense of collective identity for the movement. The consistent narrative of police violence emerges as the most important aspect of this construction, with Gerbaudo asserting that it is the development of this narration that drives people to occupy places. However, where is the place (or rather, places) of the movement? Black Lives Matter is only one from the wave of social movements which over the last few years went 'from cyberspace to urban space, with the occupation of the symbolic public square as material support for both debates and protests'. The result: a 'hybrid public space made of digital social networks and of a newly created urban community'.[76] This raises some questions on the concept of place and its relevance in the contemporary age; questions that will be probed in this chapter as it brings in theorists like Castells and Gerbaudo to discuss the *where* of the contemporary age. This is explored by first looking at Castells, Gerbaudo and Kazys Varnelis to explore social media's 'new forms of physical proximity'. Then, the chapter looks at Castells' and Gerbaudo's emphasis on physical place, and thus the constant negotiation between the virtual and physical spaces of communication. The last two sections reinforce the importance of narrative on social platforms in creating a sense of allure revolving around occupied places, which according to Gerbaudo, allows physical place to adopt a new centrality and importance in contemporary movements.

'New Forms of Proximity and Face-to-Face Interaction'

The introduction has already seen how the Black Lives Matter movement owes its inception to a Facebook post by Alicia Garzia. This might have been the starting point of the movement, but a Facebook status has hardly been the end point. Despite its origin on social media platforms, the movement still managed to make its way to the streets and occupy urban

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[76] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 46.

space, which is closely related with what Castells asserts in his work on social movements, where he states that the latest social movements have originated by 'a call to action from the space of flows' that aims to create a community in the 'space of places'.[77] According to Castells, with developments such as that of 'microelectronics –based digital communication, and advanced telecommunication networks' there was a transformation of the 'spatiality of social interaction by introducing simultaneity' regardless of the 'location of the actors engaged in the communication process'. The new form of spatiality is the 'space of flows: the material support of simultaneous social practices communicated at a distance'.[78]

Gerbaudo concurs with this statement, stating that social media is the 'vehicle for the creation of new forms of proximity and face-to-face interaction'. The 'new form of proximity' is brought about by social media platforms facilitating 'interpersonal connections across a distance' which allows us to communicate with others 'while not having to engage fully with them',[79] echoing network theorist Steven Shaviro who asserts that 'proximity is no longer determined by geographical location and by face-to-face meetings' but instead by 'global flows of information'. He continues to say that 'distance is abolished, and communication between any two points is instantaneous'.[80]

The protests that occurred all over the world after major Black Lives Matter events occurred in the United States seem to indicate that such theories are correct. On the 12th of April 2015, 25-year-old Freddie Gray is arrested for owning an illegal switchblade (see fig. 13). Ignoring his requests to give him his inhaler, the six policemen placed him in the police van without a restraint, which is against policy. Gray falls into a coma and dies from injuries to his spinal cord, which was 80% severed from his neck. Footage from the scene shows crowds of people walking together to protest and a depiction of escalating violence as protestors set police cars on fire and loot buildings.[81]

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[77] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 252.
[78] Castells, *Network Society*, p. xxxii.
[79] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 12.
[80] Steven Shaviro, *Connected, Or, What It Means to Live in the Network Society* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 131.
[81] 'Freddie Gray Protests turn violent in Baltimore', *youtube.com* (Apr 2015), < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQdWglXa-MI> [Accessed 1 February 2017].

Figure 13: An image of Freddie Gray being arrested

What is particularly relevant to this discussion on community and new forms of proximity, however, is the protests that Baltimore sparked across the world. Journalist Amien Essif draws attention to the fact that 'many said' that 'Baltimore' is the 'next Ferguson'. He goes on to question: 'But where, then, is the next Baltimore? Perhaps somewhere in Europe'. A mere few weeks after the Baltimore protests sees 'hundreds of Parisians' gathering to protest the acquittal of two policemen who did nothing to prevent the accidental electrocution death of two teenagers, one black and one of Arab descent. A protest in London (see fig. 14) saw crowds of people carrying signs emblazoned with the words 'Julian Cole': the 21-year-old black Briton who has been in a vegetative state ever since the 'police allegedly left him with spinal injuries'.[82] Despite the fact that the protests have each been adapted to protest local cases, they all fall under one main umbrella term: Black Lives Matter. In a video depicting protests in central Paris, Freddie Gray's and Michael Brown's name might have been replaced by Adama Traore, a black man who died in police custody in July 2016, but as the protestors walk hand in hand, they chant: Black Lives Matter.[83] At a protest in Berlin in July 2016, a reporter asks a participant: 'What prompted you to want to be here? Why do you want to take part in this?' Crying, the protestor replies: 'Because I want to show that no

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[82] Amien Assif, 'How Black Lives Matter Has Spread Into a Global Movement to End Racist Policing', *inthesetimes.com* (June 2015), < http://inthesetimes.com/article/18042/black-lives-matter-in-europe-too > [Accessed 30 December 2016].

[83] 'France: #BlackLivesMatter activists demand justice for Adama Traore in Paris', *youtube.com* (Jul 23), < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQWf2VCUA1Y> [Accessed 18 January 2017].

matter where something happens we're all affected by it. And we're all standing for one thing together'.[84] What arises from such statements is a narrative of community and togetherness in spite of the physical distance, highlighting Gerbaudo's assertion that social media is facilitating interpersonal connections across the distance, thus reducing the demographic obstacles which are usually encountered in the assembly of community.

Figure 14: Protest in London over the death of Freddie Gray

One might ask what compelled people to start a protest based on a case outside their country. It is possibly because, as is stated in the previous chapter, the emotional narration that leads to the construction of a collective identity has identified the 'other'. Once again, in these various protests across the world, the common enemy has been identified as the police, and people have come together against that one, common enemy. The same chapter also looks at Milan's cloud giving visibility to personalised yet universal narratives, and connecting individual stories into a broader context to give them meaning. Through the cloud, people could read about Freddie Gray and connect this narrative of police violence towards Black people in the States to a universal narrative of police violence that is occurring all over the world.

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[84] '#BlackLivesMatter Berlin shows solidarity', *youtube.com* (Jul 2016) < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RqbFV27TZpw> [Accessed January 5 2017]

This, however, does not take into account the fact that there were instances where people in other countries such as the UK chose to protest deaths in the United States, and disregard local cases. According to Fero, this is more a question of mass media controlling the narrative centring around police violence.[85] For instance, there is a good chance of people in the UK not knowing about British cases because 'it is hidden very well by the British media'. On the other hand, the UK media cannot control what the British view on channels like CNN and Sky, which is where they learn of the international cases.

So far, the discussion has established that social media has been instrumental in the reconfiguration of forms of proximity and connections across a distance, thus reconfiguring community formation by eliminating certain demographic barriers. What the discussion has not taken into consideration is that while there are people interacting in the 'space of flows' and there has been a reconfiguration of the idea of togetherness and community based on physical proximity, people are ultimately still gathering on the street. This would mean that proximity through physical presence is still essential for the formation of a community, as will be explored in the next few sections.

The 'Space of Place'

The previous section looks at Castells' 'space of flows', by which he understands to be the virtual space of communication offered by social media platforms. However, Castells also acknowledges the presence and importance of physical place in social movements, and it is perhaps essential to define what he understands by 'place' before furthering this discussion. According to Castells, 'place' is a 'locale whose form, function and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity'.[86] The 'space of the movement' is precisely the interaction between the 'space of flows on the Internet and wireless communication networks' and the 'space of places of the occupied sites and symbolic buildings targeted by protest actions'.[87] This hybrid of both spaces is what constitutes the

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[85] See Appendix A
[86] Castells, *Network Society*, p. 453.
[87] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 250.

'third space'; the 'space of autonomy', which is the 'new spatial form of networked movements'.

Being 'networked' is imperative for Castells because ultimately, what the space of flows present on the internet has implied is 'horizontal networks of interactive communication that, by and large are difficult to control by governments or corporations'; an assertion that has already been challenged in the previous chapter when looking at how social media platforms themselves are corporatised. Social movements are 'networked in multiple forms' as they include 'social networks online and offline' and 'pre-existing social networks', with these 'open-ended networks' maximising 'chances of participation in the movement'. [88] The interaction of horizontal networks of people thus implies a greater chance of participating in a community, and once again, an indication of overcoming demographic obstacles which previously characterised community formation.

The separation between the 'space of place' and the 'space of flows' is also seen in the work of network theorist Kazys Varnelis and interactive media theorist Anne Friedberg who use the example of a typical morning at a Starbucks coffee shop where people are immersed into their technological devices such as ; a 'woman next to you […] browsing the internet with her laptop', a 'late-career executive thumbing his Blackberry' while 'some teenagers [listen] to music on their iPhones'.[89] This familiar description extends to more than just a cafeteria; a live stream from North Carolina Black Lives Matter protests in October 2016 has several similarities. The dominant image in the footage is that of huddles of people holding up their phones and taking live videos and photographs of the event.[90] Sometimes a phone can be heard beeping in the background, protestors take up a chant in unison, but apart from that protestors interact more with their phones and messaging people outside the protest than with the people surrounding them. This seems to match Varnelis and Friedberg's claims that there is an impulse to 'share a […] communal space with other humans with whom [they] are likely not to have any direct interaction'.[91] The impulse of sharing a communal space is intriguing as it indicates that physical contact is still important to community formation, even when the virtual space of communication allows people to engage in social interactions; in

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[88] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, pp. 7, 249, 250.

[89] Kazys Varnelis and Anne Friedberg, 'Place: The Networking of Public Space ', in *Networked Publics* , ed. by Kazys Varnelis (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), p. 16.

[90] 'Live stream Black Lives Matter protesters North Carolina 9-21-16 Part 2', *youtube.com* (Sep 2016) < https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uz8eJcrvnw> [accessed 25 January 2017].

[91] Varnelis and Friedberg, p. 16.

fact, the importance of physical presence will continue to be developed over the course of this chapter and the following one.

Unlike Castells, Varnelis and Friedberg do not believe that the formation of people start in the 'space of flows' of social media platforms and end in the 'space of place', but rather that there has been a development of a 'mobile sense of place' due to digital networked media or networked publics. This new place is being online in the presence of others, with the 'bodily presence of the other café goers easing the disconnect with the local that the network creates'.[92] Therefore, Varnelis and Friedberg state that people are already gathered in the 'space of place' but through the space of flows they engage in a 'place that is networked and elsewhere'. What places Varnelis and Friedberg in line with Castells is the fact that they both consider social media platforms to be shaping a separate space where people gather. In fact, Varnelis and Friedberg do warn that 'new forms of disconnect and alienation will arise'. It is not loneliness that will be the problem of our age but rather 'being too connected' such as dwelling in the virtual which 'can be a dangerous addiction that destroys families'.[93] This statement is rather disputable; by questioning whether the 'network might replace the building as dwelling place' and whether 'virtual space will replace real space', it gives rise to problematic questions such as the distinction between the virtual and the real. This idea of a 'virtual community' is questioned by Chambers; she states that it is 'misleading since it evokes two worlds: one real and one virtual', similar to Howard Rheingold's theory of virtual communities discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. Once this binary is adopted, it 'suggests that people are withdrawing from everyday life into a virtual world'.[94]

Perhaps the answer to that troubling question lies in Gerbaudo's work, who opposes the 'disembodied view' projected by theorists such as Castells and Varnelis that allow a distinction between 'virtual space' and 'real place'. Rather than understanding social media as processes responsible for the construction of another 'virtual space bereft of physical geography', it is time to revisit the role of social media as 'emotional conduits reconstructing a sense of togetherness among a spatially dispersed constituency so as to facilitate its physical coming together in public space'.[95] By doing so, Gerbaudo directly opposes theorists such as Castells; in fact Gerbaudo criticises Castells for his techno-optimistic discourse such as his

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[92] Varnelis and Friedberg, p. 20.
[93] Varnelis and Friedberg, p. 39.
[94] Deborah Chambers, *New Social Ties*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 144.
[95] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 159.

description of people moving from the 'safety of cyberspace' toward 'occupying urban space, on a blind date with each other and with the destiny they wanted to forge, as they claimed their right to make history'.[96] This, argues Gerbaudo, 'adds little to the journalistic cliché of Facebook revolutions and Twitter revolutions' that has been prominent when referring to the wave of social movements that started in Egypt; it fails to expand on the role of social media.[97]

Instead, Gerbaudo argues that the crucial role of social media is in the construction of an 'emotional narration', already seen in the first chapter, which constructs a 'new sense of social centrality' focused around occupied squares and motivates people to take to the street. Although there are various instances in the movement where an emotional narration was constructed around occupied places, the following discussion looks at the emotional narration constructed during one of Black Lives Matter major events: the death of Mike Brown. The death of Mike Brown was a defining moment for the movement because it was one of the first events that mobilised thousands to the streets and according to Freelon's et al. study, the years of 2014 and 2015 saw Ferguson as the most popular hashtags, being tweeted over 21 million times over this two-year period.[98] How did these posts construct an emotional narration?

The 'Alluring Power' of Occupied Ferguson

In Ferguson, on the 9th of August 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager was shot dead by Darren Wilson, a white police officer. Accounts of the event were contradictory, with Mike's friend saying that Mike had his hands up and telling Wilson he was unarmed as Wilson fired multiple shots, and the policeman saying that Brown started to assault him and he fired the gun to protect himself. Mike Brown's body lay at the crime scene in the middle of the street for four hours, sparking further outrage over his untimely death. The major protests however, occurred in November 2014 when the decision was taken to not charge Wilson with murder. As riots and protests plagued Ferguson, the unrest spread to at

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[96] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 2.
[97] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 26.
[98] Freelon et. Al, p. 21.

least 13 other cities in the United States alone: Philadelphia, Seattle, New York, Cleveland, Los Angeles and Chicago just to name a few.

Although a variety of content was used to construct this emotional narration, the visual element was the most conspicuous, with thousands of images being shared across Twitter and Facebook. This emphasis on the visual was already explored in the previous chapter, which looked at Sontag's opinions on the use of photography to depict violence. In the case of Ferguson, pictures of the scene on Twitter were the first thing that started circulating and made people aware of the crime in Ferguson. Figure 15, which was one of the first tweet to circulate in relation to Mike Brown's death, depicts Mike's dead body on the ground asking people to expose this attempted cover.

Figure 15: A tweet showing Michael Brown's corpse at the crime scene

The images shared across social media platforms as Ferguson protests erupted were various, but what emerges are a few distinct categories of images. Firstly, there were a number of shared images which depicted the crowds of people being gathered to protest such as in figures 16 and 17 below, identifying those places as, in Gerbaudo's words, 'venues of magnetic gatherings'.[99]

Figure 16: An official Black Lives Matter tweet showing a protest at S. Florissant over the death of Michael Brown

Figure 17: An official Black Lives Matter tweet showing protestors standing in solidarity with Ferguson

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[99] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 13.

In the case of figure 17, it not only emphasises people gathering but is also constructing a narrative of community which is not just standing there 'in solidarity' but to 'grab hands with our people in Ferguson'. Of course, this begs the question: who is this narrative appealing to to form communities? Who are 'our people'? This is further discussed in the next chapter when looking at how a narrative appealing to Black people affects the demographics of the movement.

Once again, a number of images shared focused on police violence such as in figure 18. While figure 18 depicts the police holding the protestor to the ground, which reflects what was already discussed in the first chapter, figure 19 does not show the police interacting with the protestors. However, the sheer number of armed policemen along with the ominous description: 'So. Many. Officers' are enough of a threat to identify the police as the 'other'.

Figure 18: A tweet from protestor Deray McKesson of protestor forced to the ground during Ferguson protests
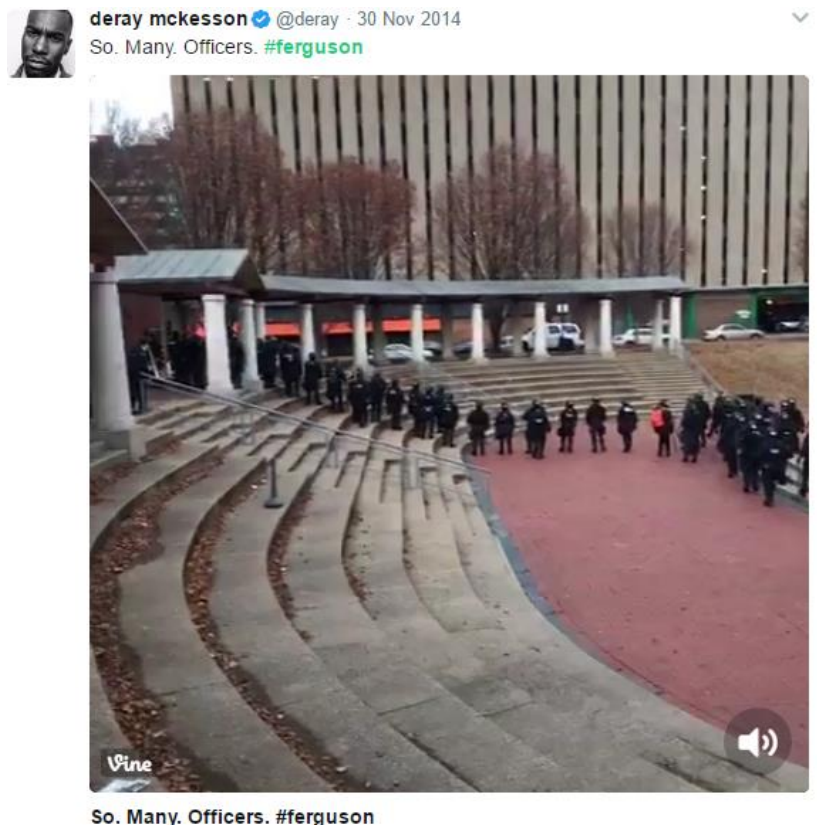
Figure 19: A tweet from protestor Deray Mckesson showing the number of policeman during the Ferguson protests

There were also images which were more optimistic and were not crucial in identifying the 'other' but rather crucial to humanise the movement as was seen in the previous chapter with images of victims counteracting the mass media narrative of victims as criminals. Figure 20 shows a young child walking with the tweet stating 'Kids.Joy.Why we protest', emphasising the human element of the movement. Gerbaudo asserts that it is these multiple messages and activist tweets which transform places like Ferguson into 'trending places, or venues of magnetic gatherings with a great power of emotional attraction'. This 'alluring power' ultimately depends to a great extent on the 'intense flow of messaging radiating out of them and in turn attracting people towards them' that is facilitated by social media. [100]

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[100] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 155.

Figure 20:Tweet from protestor Deray McKesson showing children during Ferguson protests

Figure 21: Facebook post of a Solidarity Rally for Mike Brown and all victims of police brutality

This view of social media as imperative for the construction of an emotional narration does not deny the fact that social media has also been a useful tool for protestors to coordinate and organise themselves to meet up in physical space. In answer to Sontag's question in the previous chapter; after arousing people's anger through the use of images, what was the action taken to not allow anger to dissipate into passivity? A large number of

protest events and solidarity rallies were organised all over the country such as the one seen in figure 21; protests that were filmed and spread all over social media platforms.

The use of social media for organisation hints at a wider pattern that incorporates recent social movements. Castells, who looks at the Egyptian revolution in some depth, states that one of the most important events that sparked the Egyptian revolution was the vlog of Asmaa Mafhouz, a 26-year-old business student from the University of Cairo.[101] The vlog, which was posted on her Facebook page, sent out a powerful message as she stated that 'Four Egyptians set themselves on fire' and that 'We are going to Tahrir on January 25th...If you stay home, you deserve all that's being done to you'. Her concluding line was to 'go down to the street, send SMSs, post it on the net and make people aware'. Once the vlog was uploaded to YouTube, it was 'virally diffused by thousands'. It allowed 'tens of thousands' to converge in Cairo's symbolic square in Tahrir on January 25th. It seems that for the Egyptian revolution, like the Black Lives Matter movement, media networks played 'an important role' by allowing people to 'coordinate' through social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook and convene in public spaces.[102]

However, this analysis indicates that although social media has been used for tactical purposes, what ultimately compels people to meet in physical place is the emotional narration constructed by the movement and elevating occupied places to magnetic gatherings. Thus, as Gerbaudo states, while social movements can do without the 'tactical affordances offered by social media', the role of these platforms as 'instruments of an emotional narration' lies at the heart of this formation and therefore something that cannot be done without.[103] It would be interesting to explore which emotions are most likely to compel people to form communities; is it outrage, sadness, grief? Empirical research on Black Lives Matter conducted by Munmun De Choudhury et al. indicates that posts with higher levels of sadness, instead of anger, are associated with a larger volume of people participating, but this requires further research.[104]

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[101] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope,* p. 55.
[102] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 55.
[103] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 41.
[104] Munmun De Choudhury et al., 'Social Media Participation in an Activist Movement for Racial Equality', *aaai.org,* Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence (2016), < http://www.munmund.net/pubs/BLM_ICWSM16.pdf> [Accessed 12 Feb 2017], p. 6.

Occupied Squares: The 'Nodal Points' of the Movement

What has been established in the previous section is that social media has been crucial in the construction of an emotional narration that drove people to the streets. What has not been explored is the significance of this; why is it that physical place is still essential in the 'networked publics' age and the age of the 'space of flows'? And what implications does this have for the formation of community?

After all, if one looks at the recent social movements that have proliferated over the last six years, they have been envisioned as 'take the squares movements' or 'occupy movements', involved in a struggle for the 'appropriation of public space and political organising'.[105] Think of Egyptian activists occupying Tahrir Square, Spanish activists occupying Puerto del Sol, American activists occupying Wall Street. As the journalist Paul Mason accentuates, 'these attempts at creating instant 'liberated spaces' have become the single most important theme in the global revolt'[106], while Gerbaudo emphasises that recent social movements such as the ones in Egypt and Spain '[captured] the attention both of their fellow citizens and the world at large', 'thanks less to their Facebook pages and tweets' than to their 'physical occupation' of public squares[107]. This places Black Lives Matter as not an exception, but rather part of a pattern.

It is even more curious why people are gathering in physical place because as Castells states the gathering in physical place creates vulnerability more than the togetherness on social media; history has shown that the 'barricades erected in the streets had very little defensive value' because they become 'easy targets for the artillery or the military squads'.[108] This targeting can be seen in the occupation of Ferguson during Mike Brown's protests. In a Huffington Post article, the extent of the police targeting protestors is mapped out, with the escalation being police men 'equipped with armoured vehicles, shields and gas masks' started

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[105] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, p. 11.
[106] Mason, p. 22.
[107] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 11.
[108] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 10.

'throwing tear gas at individuals who were out in the streets' in order to '[restore] peace and order to this community'.[109]

While highlighting the vulnerability of people occupying physical place, the reports of violence towards protestors also provided an interesting insight on social media platforms. As people around the world read tweets from Ferguson, they started to offer solidarity and participate in the conversation of #Ferguson. In figure 22 below, a Turkish twitter user provides advice to people in #Ferguson regarding tear gas, urging them to 'throw them in a closed container with water inside or in fire so that the gas burns before spreading'.
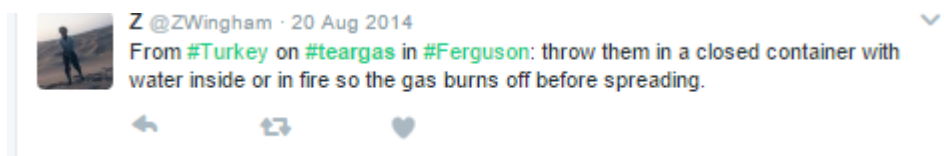
Figure 22 Turkish Twitter user gives advice to Ferguson people regarding teargas

However, the dominant response was from Palestinians who flocked to Twitter in droves to tweet advice and support to the protestors in Ferguson. One user encourages the protestors to 'run against the wind' and to not rub their eyes when teargassed (see fig.23). Another asked them to not 'keep much distance from the Police' because 'if you're close to them they can't tear gas' (see fig. 24).
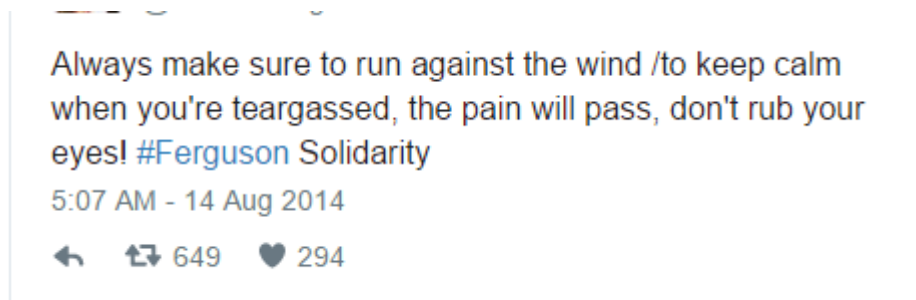
Figure 23 Tweet about teargas in Ferguson

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[109] Amanda Terkel, 'Ferguson Police Fire Tear Gas At Protesters Hours Before Curfew', *huffingtonpost.com,* The Huffington Post (August 2014), < http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/08/17/ferguson-protests_n_5686601.html> [Accessed 10 January 2017].
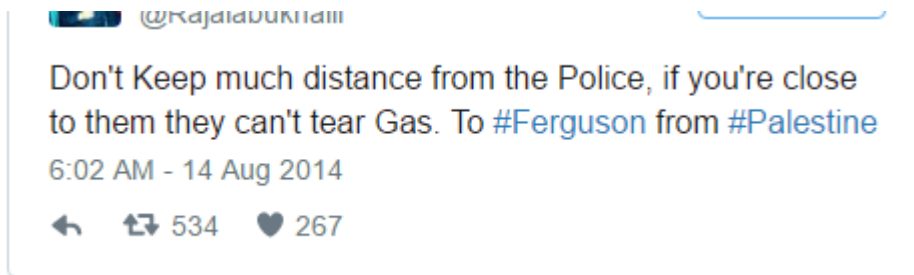
Figure 24 Tweet from Palestine to Ferguson about teargas

Some users do not engage in advice but rather tweet a message of support, such as fig. 25 below, with a Palestinian holding a sign which states that 'Palestinian people know what mean to be shot while unarmed because of your ethnicity', ending with a drawn #Ferguson #Justice. Others tweet with downright pride such as in fig. 26, where the user refers to the 'Revolution of #Ferguson' and states that he 'can't be prouder of these people who won't let their son's blood goes for nothing'. Although the content of the messages is wide-ranging, there is one common element in every single tweet: #Ferguson.
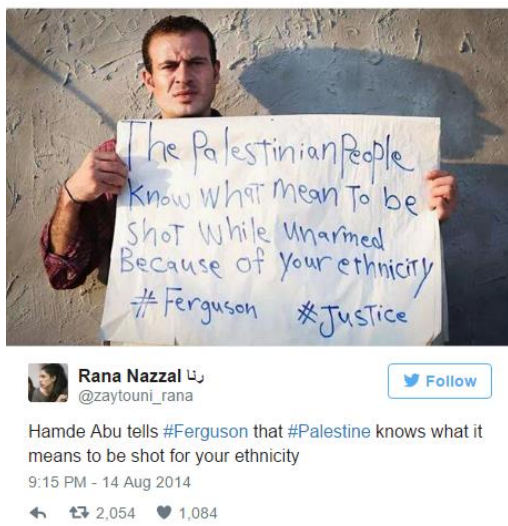
Figure 25 Message of Support from Palestine to Ferguson

Figure 26 Message of Support to Ferguson

#Ferguson, it seems, is the perfect testament of social media platforms facilitating the formation of an international community through 'interpersonal connections across a distance' as was seen earlier on in this chapter.[110] Moreover, it also provokes questions on the network's ability to connect multiple nodes together horizontally and to have hundreds of users participating in the same conversation, but the next chapter will deal more closely with the concept of the size of networks and who is being invited to participate. For the sake of this chapter and its preoccupation with place and space, #Ferguson is a fascinating specimen to look at as it is doubling place. Real Ferguson is being projected into internet space as #Ferguson, and while protestors are teargassed and generally harassed by police in Ferguson for stating their views, #Ferguson remains a 'place' where people are not targeted. When faced with such evidence, it is possible to state that #Ferguson acts as an 'occupied place'; the perfect occupied place present in the 'horizontal networks of interactive communication' that 'by and large are difficult to control by governments or corporations'. According to Castells, this is what allows our 'network society' to have 'multidimensional power'; a step away from mass media largely controlled by governments and media corporations towards a 'communication autonomy primarily constructed in the Internet networks and in the platforms of wireless communication'.[111]

What Castells fails to take into account is that the internet has become a 'corporate colonisation of the public internet' and is 'exploiting online activity', which has already been partly discussed in this work.[112] The unequal power relationships on social media platforms favouring government and corporate elites, goes directly against Castells' vision of 'horizontal networks' that are 'free from the control of those holding institutional power'.[113] This can be clearly seen by the police using Geofeedia, a controversial social media monitoring company to monitor 'overt threats'; the 'unions and activists'.[114] This tool has been used to track Black Lives Matter activists by monitoring hashtags and data from social media platforms, essentially making the internet, or the virtual, nearly as high risk a place as the physical. The view of the Internet as a corporate colonisation also goes against Paul

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[110] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 12.

[111] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, pp. 9, 12.

[112] Sanjay Sharma, 'Black Twitter? Racial Hashtags, Networks And Contagion', *New Formations*, 78.78 (2013), 46-64, <https://doi.org/10.3898/newf.78.02.2013>, p. 63.

[113] Castells, *Networks of Outrage*, p. 9.

[114] Sam Levin, 'ACLU finds social media sites gave data to company tracking black protesters', *theguardian.com*, The Guardian (Oct 2016), < https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/oct/11/aclu-geofeedia-facebook-twitter-instagram-black-lives-matter> [Accessed 10 January 2017].

Mason, who believes that the 'network has begun to erode power relationships we had come to believe were permanent features of capitalism', including the 'repressive capabilities of the state and the inevitability of monopolisation by large corporations'.[115]

However, this targeting through social media has not been highlighted to dismiss the exposure protestors face when in physical places; exposure which is perhaps transformed into more concrete physical harm than the targeting done through social media. According to Castells, the formation of a physical community is still crucial because 'occupied spaces' tend to 'create community' based on 'togetherness'. Occupied spaces are successful in defining an 'in and out' and 'us versus them'. Moreover, they succeed due to their 'symbolic power' as they invade 'sites of state power' or they 'evoke memories of popular uprisings that had expressed the will of citizens when other avenues of representation were closed'.[116] Black Lives Matter undoubtedly evokes memories of popular uprisings as it comes as the latest addition to a long list of protests about black lives in the racially divided United States, with the most vivid memories of popular uprisings that are evoked are the ones relating to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Castells' view raises some questions; does this mean that community can only be formed when people form physical groups? Is 'togetherness' only created through the gathering in physical place? Castells' claim can be disputed when considering that earlier on in this chapter, and in the previous chapter, it was seen how a sense of togetherness, and an 'us' versus 'them' was being formed through the construction of an emotional narration revolving around images used depicting police violence.

Unlike Castells, Gerbaudo believes that the importance of physical gatherings in social movements such as Black Lives Matter lies in 'constructing a new sense of social centrality focused around occupied squares'.[117] In the age of social media, the 'flexibility and elusivity of contemporary movements' organisational structures' is only held together by these places that act as 'focal points'. While 'symbolic places' imbued with a 'sacred quality' have always been essential for revolutionary movements —Bastille in 1789, the Winter Palace in October 1917, and the Sorbonne in May 1968 come to mind— these places have now taken on an even more special significance. Occupied squares are no longer just 'stages for protest performances' but also act as 'sources of identification for the social movements'; 'nodal points' that hold together movements that are deprived of a 'solid organisational structure'.

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[115] Mason, kindle loc. 1056.
[116] Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, p. 10.
[117] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 13.

Occupied places like Ferguson seen above work as 'impersonal leaders' to make up for the 'lack of visible leadership'. These occupied places only become significant through the use of social media, where as seen earlier in this chapter, multiple messages and activist tweets posted transform these squares into trending places. Gerbaudo believes that since social movements today cannot 'cling to a flag, a political party or a personality cult', the 'contemporary social movement clings to a place'.[118]

It seems, then, that the structure of the network as envisioned by theorists such as Castells and Mason does not always hold when examining social movements' activity on social media platforms. It not only starts showing cracks when considering that social media is dominated by large corporations and unequal power relationships, but also in Gerbaudo's words, when considering the 'assembly or gathering in public space'. Viewing protests as 'centres in the network' that 'anchor a diffused movement' moves away from the theory of 'decentralisation' as put forward by Mason and Castells.[119] However, is 'choreography' as envisioned by Gerbaudo an apt way to describe a social movement like Black Lives Matter? The next chapter debates whether places are the only nodes holding the movement together, or whether leaders can also be considered as nodes of the movement, thus providing an answer to whether Gerbaudo's choreography is an accurate term to use.

Interestingly, despite the role of social media in bringing people to the street, there has been the sense that once people convene in physical places, they seem 'embarrassed about how they got there in the first place'.[120] During the Egyptian uprising, the Egyptians declared that 'We are not people of comment and like', while the Indiganados Movement was characterised by cries of 'no estamos en Facebook, estamos en la calle!' which translates to 'We are not on Facebook, we are on the streets' which seems to express the 'joy generated by the rediscovery of a sense of physical communion that reversed the spatial and communicative dispersion epitomised by social media interactions'.[121] This need for physical communion has already been mentioned earlier in this chapter, and can be perhaps be demonstrated by the large number of Black Lives Matter protests, and vigils occurring on the streets, placing the movement in line with other movements observed by Gerbaudo.

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[118] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* pp. 135-136.
[119] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 97.
[120] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 97.
[121] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 97.

Figure 27 Black Lives Matter tweet about BLMLA shutting down Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills

Yet, in one of the throwback photographs circulated by the BLM movement of a street protest that shut down Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, what is prominent in the picture are the placards that are being held up by various protestors have hashtags attached to it (see fig. 27). Unlike Egyptian activists who asserted that 'We are not people of comment and like', and Spanish Inganados who shouted 'We are not on Facebook, We are on the streets', this Black Lives Matter tweet seems to put Black Lives Matter in a separate section. #Black Lives Matter, #Justice, #J4TMLA projects the idea that the protestors are acknowledging the fact that people congregate on the platforms of Facebook and Twitter and are perhaps encouraging people who are not participating to tap into an online conversation, recognising that technology 'cannot substitute public space for a virtual public sphere', but aids in '[re-weaving] a new sense of public space, refashioning the way in which people come together on the streets'.

This chapter looks at how social media has brought reconfigurations to community by changing the concept of proximity and face-to-face interaction, as well as constructing an emotional narration that aids in transforming physical places into the only nodes that hold the movement together. The final pressing question that remains, and will be explored in the next chapter is: Who? Now that it has been established that the narrative is crucial for the formation of a collective identity, and that it has been important to mobilise people to occupy

streets, we need to understand who the people constructing this narrative are, and who the narrative is asking to participate in the movement.

Chapter 3:
Diversity in Protest and Soft Forms of Leadership

This chapter turns to the final area of exploration in this dissertation, and analyses the demographics of the community. The first section brings about a discussion on the participation of socially diverse protestors, partly occurring due to the collectivist narrative of the movement. Diverse participation leads to an inevitable debate on virality, which is explored in the chapter by considering Lovink's comments on the ideal size of networks. The concept of virality and limitless participation is put into question once the discussion moves to Van Dijck to discuss the technological constraints of the social media platforms, which ultimately limit who participates in the movement. The final important aspect to consider is that of leadership, which is analysed alongside Castell's theory of networks and horizontality and Gerbaudo's theory of choreography to analyse the people constructing the movement's narrative and establish whether they can be considered as nodes of the movement.

A 'Socially Diverse Constituency'

The first chapter establishes how the emotional narration constructed through social media elicits a sense of commonality that is mainly constructed through the presence of the 'other' rather than the identification of a clearly defined group. This observation fits in with comments from the co-founder of the movement Patrisse Cullors, who while on a Fox talk show refers directly to the diversity within the Black Lives Matter movement:

> I think in our movement you see a lot of groups trying to work together. And the Black Lives Matter movement we always see the movement isn't just about black people. It's a conversation about black people but we're asking everybody to join in that conversation and we think we need everyone involved in this really brilliant vibrant and creative movement.[122]

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[122] 'Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of the Black Lives Matter movement, on GDLA', *youtube.com,* YouTube (Nov 2016), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hT4kV1wL-Pc> [Accessed 30 January 2017].

Her use of 'everybody' and 'everyone' indicates the presence of a collectivist narrative within the movement; a movement that has not been envisioned as a Black movement, for Black people, but appeals for people from all backgrounds to join in the conversation and the formation of the community. The previous chapter has already looked at how the movement has resonated on an international level, but more than that, it seems to be a movement which appeals to all races to participate. This does seem to be the case when looking at certain groups outside of Black groups, which have adopted the Black Lives Matter slogan and have participated in protests. The most prolific out of these groups is 'Asians4BlackLives', who 'support the safety, justice and resilience of black communities — so all our communities can prosper' (see figure 28).

Figure 28 Twitter profile for #Asians4BlackLives Account

Asians4BlackLives taps into the Black Lives Matter conversation on Twitter and retweets from the official BLM chapters (see fig. 29), but they also show solidarity by physically attending protests. This can be seen figure 30 which depicts members of this group marching with an #Asians4BlkLives banner during the Reclaim Martin Luther King march.

Figure 29:#Asians4BlackLives Retweets Official Black Lives Matter Tweet about Sandra Bland

Figure 30:#Asians4BlackLives Tweet showing an image of a protest

This follows somewhat the same pattern of White people for Black lives. A Facebook video shared by the Black Lives Matter Facebook page (see screenshot in figure 31) portrays a protest by White people chanting in solidarity with Black Lives: ' We are white people here to demand that all White people take a Stand'.[123]

Figure 31: Official Black Lives Matter Facebook post showing White People for Black Lives

The activity of both these groups provide an interesting insight into how different groups and different races have tapped into a conversation that is essentially on how Black lives matter, both on social media platforms as well as in physical place. The collectivist narrative employed by the movement might have served to encourage people from different backgrounds to participate in the conversation. However, it is also possible that vast,

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[123] 'White People for Black Lives', *facebook.com,* Facebook (Dec 2016), < https://www.facebook.com/blacklivesmatter1/videos/vb.1522618991381026/1604513929858198/?type=2&theater> [Accessed 5 February 2017].

horizontal networks present on social media platforms makes it easier for people to participate, with Castells identifying this 'horizontality', which undermines the need for formal leadership, as responsible for creating a sense of togetherness. This horizontality has already been partly rejected in the previous chapters, but it would imply that the participatory nature of social media networks themselves are changing community formation from one that is bound by physical proximity and existing social ties to one that knows no limits in terms of place and group demographics.

It might be, however, that is the subject itself that provoked this reaction from different groups. As a tweet from Asians4BlackLives states, 'Our liberation, interconnected' (see fig. 32) Minority groups such as Asians might be invested in Black Lives Matter because Black liberation means Asian liberation. It would be interesting to see whether this pattern holds for other movements with a different message and different topics.
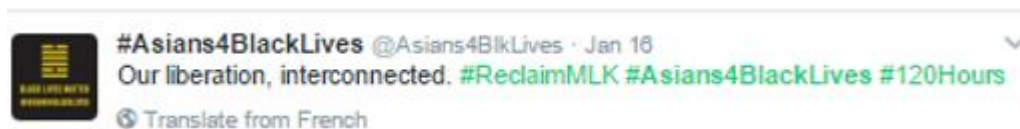
Figure 32: A tweet from #Asians4BlackLives about Interconnected Liberation

The problem that arises with so many people being invited to participate is the inevitable virality. Virality in itself is not undesirable; Robert Payne dubs current media virality as 'post-viral', by which he understands virality which has marked an 'observable shift away from […] the virus as an agent of attack upon vulnerable points within an uncontained network' to a connotation of a 'successful and desirable kind of media distribution'. This can be referred to as 'virality 2.0' which 'rebrands risky behaviour as sharing and participation' and that 'fetishises the active user-subject at the expense of other positions and pleasures'.[124] In fact, it is customary for current ad campaigns to be specifically designed to become viral; marketing agencies strive to find a formula that works in order to get instant results. Is this what occurs with social movements? Do organisers specifically strive to find a formula that would make the movement go viral? A closer look at the founders of Black Lives Matter does suggest that the virality of the movement was not completely unplanned and unexpected.

In an interview, Opal Tometi, co-founder of the movement admits that her background is in communications, and that her Master's degree is specifically in communication studies

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[124] Robert Payne, 'Virality 2.0', *Cultural Studies*, 27.4 (2013), 540-560, p. 542.

and rhetoric. When she viewed 'Black Lives Matter' in Alicia Garza's Facebook status, it 'resonated with [her] on a very deep level'; she understood the potentiality within a simple phrase which remained 'poignant and clear' while critiquing the system.[125] This led her to buy the domain name, create the Facebook page and Twitter handle, and began to use the hashtag broadly. What this indicates is that the movement was created by people who have both an academic and practical background in communications, making it easier for them to identify the best way forward for the movement to resonate with people. As the discussion progresses, the chapter will look at whether the future of community organising in general lies in the hands of people who understand social media and how it can be used to mobilise people.

While Black Lives Matter has been successful in the spread and proliferation of its message, the problem that arises with virality is that it becomes very difficult to contain the narrative of the movement. This was acknowledged by Tometi herself who states that

> Black Lives Matter has been viral and people are taking it, appropriating it, and using it however they see fit. That's part of the challenge in being able to shape the narrative when we are not necessarily around or when leaders from our network aren't the ones sharing the stories.[126]

This can be seen in the way the narrative of #BlackLivesMatter hashtag quickly changed to #AllLivesMatter and eventually to #BlueLivesMatter. #AllLivesMatter was the response to what people felt As the Black Lives Matter movement expanded, a 'number of tweets began to object to the movement', with some feeling that 'it was valuing one race above all others' and others thinking that the movement was 'unfairly condemning all police officers based on the actions of a few'.[127]

According to the Pew Research Centre, #AllLivesMatter began appearing regularly after the announcement that there would be no grand jury indictments in the Michael Brown case, with the hashtag used 14,308 times on November 25th 2014 only. However, the day

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[125] Ramshaw, par. 2.
[126] Mychal Denzel Smith, 'A Q&A With Opal Tometi, Co-Founder of #BlackLivesMatter', *thenation.com,* The Nation (June 2015), <https://www.thenation.com/article/qa-opal-tometi-co-founder-blacklivesmatter/> [Accessed 5 December 2016].
[127] Monica Anderson and Paul Hitlin, 'Social Media Conversations About Race', *pewresearch.org,* Pew Research Centre (Aug 2016), <http://www.pewinternet.org/2016/08/15/social-media-conversations-about-race/> [Accessed 20 January 2017], p. 19.

when the hashtag was used most was December 21st 2014 when two police officers were killed in New York City while in their patrol car. That day, the hashtag appeared 28, 526 times, along with #BlueLivesMatter which was used 22,834 times to support policemen. The adoption of #AllLivesMatter and #BlueLivesMatter meant a deviation from the message of the Black Lives Matter movement, especially as a 'backlash against #AllLivesMatter developed that was just as large as the hashtag itself'.[128] This solidifies the idea that virality brought about by the structure of social media platforms makes it difficult to contain the narrative of the movement. The first chapter has seen how the construction of a consistent narrative is crucial for people to form communities, therefore the idea that virality brings about a fragmented narrative puts community formation into question.

Therefore, Geert Lovink might have been right when pondering whether there is an ideal size for networks. According to Lovink, 'research has shown that a network with 50-150 active members can go on for many years'. He questions whether 'networked conversations in which more than 500 users participate' are 'doomed to fall apart' and whether 'small is beautiful is an apt response to the Facebook masses' as 'millions of replies from all to all would cause every network […] to implode'.[129] However, while it would have been easier to contain the message of Black Lives Matter had it been a smaller network, an alternative, possibly superior way of viewing the situation is that of Bennett who states that the 'vulnerabilities of these networked campaigns are often inseparable from their strengths'.[130] That is, it is better to view the participatory aspect of these sort of campaigns as a double edged sword. The 'decentralised webs of thin ties' allows networks to be more resilient and 'refigure themselves after losses and disruptions' — for instance, it allows a campaign to easily change its aim or purpose and it also permits 'the ease of joining them', thus bringing in the idea of a larger, more varied community. Yet, it can also lead to a 'lack of clarity about goals, and weak idea framing' which is what is occurring with #Alllivesmatter and #Bluelivesmatter.[131]

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[128] Anderson and Hitlin, p. 21.

[129] Geert Lovink, *The Principle of Notworking: Concepts in Critical Internet Culture* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), p. 20.

[130] W. Lance Bennett, 'Communicating global activism: Strengths and vulnerabilities of networked politics', in *Cyberprotest: New media, Citizens and Social movements*, ed. by Wim van de Donk et al (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 120.

[131] Bennett, p. 117.

The 'Common Experience of Racial Oppression'

The discussion so far has looked at the movement's collectivist narrative and how it has mobilised people from different backgrounds to participate. This inevitably links to the difficulty in containing the narrative of the movement once participation increases and the movement becomes viral. However, there are instances where the movement seems to veer away from that narrative. Figure 33 below shows the movement appealing for Black folks (only) to join the protest. The poster emphasises the 'rage, fight and strength' of 'our collective power'; the collective power of Black people. This is also seen in figure 34 where Black Lives Matter directly appeals to Black people, utilising the personal pronoun 'we' to create a collective against the 'other'. By defining Black people as a collective mass who are being 'slaughtered, abused and forgotten', it seems that the 'other' is not just the police but rather anyone who does not fall under the umbrella of 'black'.

Figure 33: Official Black Lives Matter Facebook post inviting Black people to a Ceremony
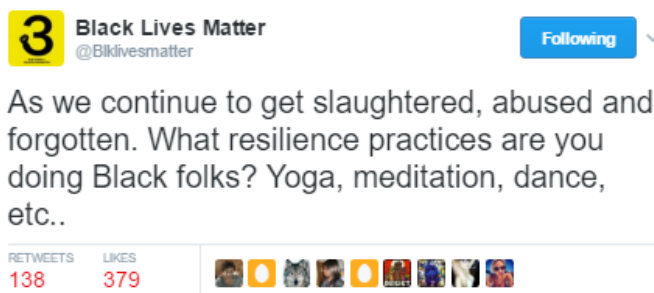

Figure 34: Official Black Lives Matter Tweet about Resilience Practices of Black folks

It is understandable that a Black movement tries to construct a narrative for Black people to share their oppression. Philosopher Tommie Shelby argues that although one does not require a black cultural identity, or even be black at all, in order to 'appreciate the value of racial equality or to condemn racism', it is often the 'common experience of specific forms of racial oppression that creates the strongest and most enduring bonds among victims of racism'. As 'interracial coalitions' are sought, this social bond cannot be underestimated or devalued, because in the past it has been a 'highly effective means for creating greater social equality'.[132] Thus, the tentative conclusion in the first chapter regarding the movement's narrative needs to be revisited. The movement has not only strove to create a collective identity by focusing on the 'other' but also by appealing to a specific group; Black people. This means that figure 10 shown in the first chapter not only acts as a reminder that the visual narrative of protest and struggle remains all too relevant in the present. By focusing its attention on the decades of struggle, Black Lives Matter grounds its collective identity in the roots of a long tradition of indignation, violence and struggle for Black lives, similar to what Gerbaudo observes in other movements such as the Mexican movement #YoSoy132.

This goes hand in hand with evidence from empirical research on 40.8 million tweets which shows that Twitter discussions during the studied period always remained 'Black-led'. Non-Black voices were never the 'overwhelming majority of the most-referenced users' although the 'proportion of non-Blacks does seem to rise somewhat during the periods that include the highest peaks'.[133] While the empirical research conducted is limited and therefore cannot produce any conclusive results, it indicates that the narrative of a Black community is favoured over the collectivist narrative the movement sometimes switches to.

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[132] Tommie Shelby, 'Foundations Of Black Solidarity: Collective Identity Or Common Oppression?', *Ethics*, 112.2 (2002), 231-266 https://doi.org/10.1086/340276, p. 234.
[133] Deen Frelon et al., p. 75.

The 'Technocultural Assemblage' of Social Media

The previous section identifies a narrative appealing to Black people within the movement, which thus limits the socially diverse constituency discussed in the first section. The idea of a limitless network of participants is further disputed when taking into consideration the technological connotations of the word 'social' attached to 'social media'. Van Dijck states that while the word 'social' connotes platforms that are 'user centered and […] facilitate communal activities', the fact that 'social media are inevitably automated systems that engineer and manipulate connections' is undeniable. It is known that Facebook, Twitter and other platforms 'track desires by coding relationships between people, things and ideas into algorithms', which '[enables] platforms to engineer the sociality in people's everyday routines'. [134] This has various implications that need to be taken in consideration. Firstly, what comes up on a person's Facebook or Twitter feed is based on a complicated algorithm that is shrouded in secrecy, making it less likely for certain sections of the population to be viewing certain posts as well as making posts from certain pages feature far less on newsfeeds because they are not algorithm-friendly. This is acknowledged by Black Lives Matter official Facebook page in figure 35, where they post that only 7% of their fans are being reached, appealing people to press like to feature higher in the newsfeed ranking.

Figure 35: Official Black Lives Matter Facebook Post on Newsfeed Visibility

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[134] Van Dijck, p. 12.

Moreover, Facebook has the editorial power to delete posts, which has led to some questionable actions in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement. A case in point is when the popular Black Lives Matter activist Shaun King posted a screenshot of a racist, abusive email directed towards him. Facebook deleted the post and banned King from Facebook for 24 hours for violating 'community standards'. Facebook apologised soon after for the shortcoming, branding the action as a mistake, but the damage had been done; it dawned on Facebook users that 'with a keystroke or computer filter', everything 'could be shut down'.[135] Thus, with the editorial power that Facebook has, it is questionable how different it is from traditional mass media; ultimately, the narrative is still being somewhat controlled. This point is crucial to a discussion such as this one because the first chapter views how humanising the victims and creating a counternarrative to mass media narrative is crucial for the formation of a community based on collective identity. As people become aware of the limitations of the platform when constructing their own narrative, they might opt to move away from these platforms as their platforms for their stories.

A second important implication lies in the fact that different social media platforms promote different social ties. Facebook is quick to bring up 'People You May Know' section at the side of your feed, prompting you to add friends based on your connections and your proximity. In this aspect, it is different from Twitter, where you have followers, not friends, and where people are not encouraged to follow people according to whether they know them but rather to follow them based on interests. This has been met with mixed feelings; some consider it to be 'augmented humanity' as technologies enhance human social action, while others are critical of this 'technological unconscious'. What is undeniable is that these different operations can promote different types of communities. On Twitter, it is easier to surround yourself with like-minded individuals with the risk, in Gerbaudo's terms, of becoming 'trapped in an "activist bubble"' of people with the same message, while Facebook allows exposure to various different views but also makes it difficult to tap into a common conversation. All of this leads to the conclusion that perhaps the question to ask is not 'what is said', but as new media theorist Ganaele Langlois states, 'what kind of technocultural assemblage is put into motion when we express ourselves online', taking note of not only what 'users are saying at the interface level', but also of the 'involvement of different types

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[135] Sam Levin, 'Facebook temporarily blocks Black Lives Matter activist after he posts racist email', *theguardian.com*, The Guardian (Sep 2016), < https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/sep/12/facebook-blocks-shaun-king-black-lives-matter> [Accessed 15 February 2017].

of software processes in sorting and ranking information; not only the content of a message online, but the informational logics that make such a content more or less visible'.[136]

'Reluctant Leaders' of the Movement

What has been established so far is that there are two main aspects controlling the demographics of the movement. Firstly, the narrative constructed by the movement, which oscillates between a collectivist one and one revolving around the Black community. Secondly, the technological implications of using these social media platforms which control who sees what on their feed. Regardless of who is being asked to participate, the salient fact remains that this movement and its message has gone viral. This leads to a pressing question. Is someone containing the message? Who is bringing these people together? The issue of leadership vis-a-vis social media is met by various reactions from different social media and network theorists.

The first instinct is to rule contemporary social movements such as Black Lives Matter as leaderless when looking at their social media activity. Black Lives Matter Facebook and Twitter accounts use collective names along the likes of Black Lives Matter Chicago, Black Lives Matter NYC and Black Lives Matter Seattle which do not point towards any specific leader. Rather than the movement being leaderless, it could be the movement constructing a narrative of being leaderless. If one looks at the history of social movements, there were instances where rather than the movement being leaderless, the movement constructed a narrative of unplanned protests and of explosions of emotion and utilised it as a strategic tactic. In fact, the 1960s Civil Rights Movement revolved around this idea of being unplanned, with students describing sit-ins as 'impulsive' and most importantly 'spontaneous', not unlike a 'fever'.[137] Despite this classification, Polletta deems that there was strategic planning behind the sit-ins.

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[136] Ganaele Langlois, 'Meaning, Semiotechnologies and Participatory Media', *Culture Machine*, 12 (2011) < http://culturemachine.net/index.php/cm/issue/view/23 > [accessed 2 February 2017].
[137] Francesca Polletta, *It Was Like A Fever: Storytelling In Protest And Politics*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 33.

The same thing happened with Rosa Parks when she refused to give up her seat for a white passenger, which was followed by a boycott from Montgomery's black citizens. This obliterates the fact that Rosa Parks was a long-time activist and that it was being planned for a long time; the 'groundwork had been laid long before Parks boarded the bus'. By describing planned protests as a 'fever', students 'captured the indefinable moment when a group of separate individuals became a collective actor'. It is precisely this 'ambiguity', this 'failure to explain a shift that seemed impossible to explain but could only be retold again and again' which could have led other students to join the protests.[138]

Although a narrative of leaderlessness could be a strategy that Black Lives Matter is employing, Castells states that it is the structure of the contemporary social movement itself that transforms it into a leaderless one. Castells asserts that they are usually 'leaderless' because of their structure; a 'network of networks' that make do without an 'identifiable center', 'formal leadership, command and control center, or a vertical organisation to distribute information or instructions'.[139] Ultimately, it is this decentred structure which leads to the participation in the movement as seen in the various examples earlier in the chapter. Castells' comments that contemporary movements reject traditional forms of leadership because of a 'deep, spontaneous distrust […] toward any form of power delegation' fit well with comments made by Shaun King, a well-known Black Lives Matter activist.[140]

In an interview with Fox, Shaun King and 1960s activist Barbara Reynolds discuss the tactics of the movement, with the discussion leading to the issue of leadership within the movement. The interviewer asks King 'Where are the leaders? They're not obvious leaders as they were in the 1960s. Is that fair?' King replies that 'It's not that there's a lack of leaders. We don't think it's leaderless, we think it's leader-full. There are hundreds of them'. According to King this decentralisation is the result of a 'painful lesson from the 60s and 70s' of 'having just one person' leading. Past movements such as the Civil Rights movement 'would crumble' when those 'leaders were caught in scandals or assassinated'.[141] This

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[138] Polletta, *It was like a Fever,* p. 31.
[139] Castells, *Networks of Outrage*, p. 249.
[140] Castells, *Networks of Outrage*, p. 252.
[141] 'Black Lives Matter: What has the Movement Achieved?', *aljazeera.com,* AlJazeera (Oct 2016), <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/upfront/2016/09/black-lives-matter-movement-achieved-160930105315794.html> [Accessed 5 February 2017].

decentralisation, then, might be less about the networks encouraged by social media and more about the 'distrust' of current activists towards formal leadership, born from past mistakes.

There are, however, two main important points that need to be highlighted at this point. Firstly, King does not talk about the movement being 'leaderless' but the movement being 'leader-full', which throws Castells' vision of horizontality into question. Secondly, although social media accounts use collective names, 'Facebook and Twitter do not post by themselves'.[142] Who are these mysterious people that are the driving force behind the movement's main social media channels?

With this in mind, it may be that a more adequate way of looking at leadership is to take into consideration Gerbaudo's view on leadership, who believes that rather than 'absolute leaderlessness', social media has created 'soft forms of leadership' that is in line with the 'interactive and participatory character of the new communication technologies'. As outlined in the previous chapter, Gerbaudo adopts the term 'choreography', which is apt because just like dance choreographers, the 'core organisers are for the most part invisible on the stage itself'. They are 'reluctant leaders', who do not want to identify as leaders but 'whose scene-setting and scripting work has been decisive in bringing […] coherence to people's spontaneous and creative participation in the protest movements'.[143] These reluctant leaders are what Gerbaudo designates as 'digital vanguards'. By digital vanguard, Gerbaudo means 'digital communication teams, often bound together by links of friendship and comradeship who take the lead in initiating and steering relevant internet conversations'.[144] These small groups have managed activist social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr, thus playing an 'important', albeit 'invisible role' in many recent social movements.[145]

The very existence of groups 'tasked with the management of key communication channels' throws doubt onto the fact that digital movements are 'leaderless' and 'non-hierarchical' as imagined by network theorists like Castells and Mason. It is only through the

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[142] Paolo Gerbaudo, 'Social Media Teams As Digital Vanguards: The Question Of Leadership In The Management Of Key Facebook And Twitter Accounts Of Occupy Wall Street, Indignados And UK Uncut', *Information, Communication & Society*, 20.2 (2016), 185-202, < 10.1080/1369118X.2016.1161817>, pp. 191-192.
[143] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, p. 13.
[144] Paolo Gerbaudo, 'The Persistence Of Collectivity In Digital Protest', *Information, Communication & Society*, 17.2 (2014), 264-268 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.868504>, p. 267.
[145] Gerbaudo, 'Persistence of Collectivity', p. 267.

action of these small largely invisible groups that digital social movements can be said to be 'participatory'. People participate and contribute to a collective space that leadership groups and digital vanguards are 'largely responsible for setting up'; a set up that is aided by 'giving movements collective names', by 'coining a series of hashtags, of icons, of internet memes', and thus 'constructing a basic operational identity'.[146] Therefore, these digital vanguards are the people constructing the emotional narration discussed in the first chapter; the same emotional narration that lead people to gather on the streets as seen in the second chapter.

The digital vanguards behind the official social media accounts — viewed as 'power accounts' because of their hundreds of thousands of fans — remain somewhat shrouded in secrecy, possibly as a consequence of the 'profound tension between digital activists' adherence to techno-libertarian principles of openness, horizontality, and leaderlessness' and the 'persistence of leadership dynamics and power differentials'. It could also be the 'legitimate fear of police infiltration'; in fact, the previous chapter has looked at how organisers have been targeted through social media. However, there are other accounts that are not the official movement's accounts but can still be deemed 'power accounts' because of their huge amount of followers.[147] Contrary to the official Black Lives Matter social media accounts, these accounts are personal and thus the driving force behind them is clear.

Three such accounts are those of activists Johnetta Elzie, DeRay Mckesson and Zellie Imani which The New York Times described as 'ordinary Americans' leading the mundane lives of a 'teacher, a school administrator and a temporary government employee'.[148] This changed when they 'found a voice on social media to comment on the news, describe their personal experiences and relate the everyday struggles of blacks in America'. As their 'social media following soared', they used platforms such as Twitter and Tumblr to 'fund and mobilise protests and make demands on police departments and government officials'. Out of all three, 30-year-old Mckesson has the most impressive following, starting off with 1000 Twitter followers but quickly soaring to 703 thousand followers once he started covering and organising Black Lives Matter protests. Protestors like Mckesson were crucial because in the case of Mckesson he posted over 2000 vines (very short videos that are played on a loop and can be directly embedded on Twitter or on a website) of various Black Lives Matter protests

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[146] Gerbaudo, 'Persistence of Collectivity', p. 267.
[147] Gerbaudo, 'Social Media Teams As Digital Vanguards', pp. 191-192.
[148] Brent McDonald, 'They Helped Make Twitter Matter in Ferguson Protests', *nytimes.com* (Aug 2015), New York Times, < https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/11/us/twitter-black-lives-matter-ferguson-protests.html?_r=1> [Accessed 15 January 2017].

that he was directly experiencing. It is possible that he obtained such a massive following because people started to rely less on mass media and the narrative mass media produces, and instead started to rely on themselves: 'We rely on ourselves and we rely on our own voices. We really rely on ourselves as authority figures, as experts in our own lives and experts in what's going on in the streets'.[149]

Earlier on in this chapter, it was questioned whether the future of community formation lies in the hands of people with a background in communications and social media. The background of these protestors places this into question; none of these protestors have a background in communications and yet they still managed to garner an impressive number of followers. Freelon, who conducted an empirical study of 41 million tweets related to Black Lives Matter asserts that it is difficult to ascertain why certain people became influencers but others did not. After all, 'you are talking about a bunch of people on Twitter making a bunch of individual decisions about who to retweet', putting you 'at the mercy of the cloud'.[150] This brings back the point mentioned in chapter one, where Milan states that movement organisations have lost their regulatory role in defining membership and narratives because it is the cloud which is collectively voting for the collective narrative by selecting specific type of content. When taking into consideration such evidence, Milan's assertion rings true.

This evidence is further testament to the point about demographics that has been mentioned earlier in the chapter; it is significant that many of the most widely-heard voices in the movement are Black, possibly because people look up to them as experts to what is going on in the movement, more than any other ethnicity ever could. More than that, the social media activity of these three activists highlight the fact that while it is true that the new digital communication technologies 'make it possible for new leaders to arise fast' which makes 'leadership more meritocratic' and 'expands possibilities of participation', the reality is that it does not 'elide that classic social movement distinction and asymmetry between organisers and participants'.[151] There is an asymmetry in power between the holders of power accounts such as Mckesson and the regular user with a couple of hundred followers because the power accounts have far more potential to control the narrative of the movement and to change its focus according to their desires. This goes against the concept of horizontalism as

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[149] Macdonald, n.p.

[150] Gene Demby, 'Combing Through 41 Million Tweets To Show How #BlackLivesMatter Exploded', *npr.org*, NPR (Mar 2016), <http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2016/03/02/468704888/combing-through-41-million-tweets-to-show-how-blacklivesmatter-exploded> [Accessed Mar 2017].

[151] Gerbaudo, 'Persistence of Collectivity', p. 267.

envisioned by Castells because horizontalism conceals the fact that 'process of mobilisation is constitutively ridden with imbalances and asymmetrical relationships between those who mobilise and those mobilised, between those leading the process and those following'.[152] In this respect, Gerbaudo's 'choreography' is a more fitting term to describe the Black Lives Matter movement.

However, while there are invisible leaders that manage the social media accounts and fit well with Gerbaudo's image of choreography, there are also people who are well-known in the movement and who tend to take centre-stage; a point that has already been briefly touched upon in this chapter. Black Lives Matter activists such as McKesson have, reluctantly or not, become one of the main faces of the movement. This can also be seen by the three Black Lives Matter founders themselves; Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tomati and Alicia Garza all accept the role as not merely activists but organisers. In an interview, Cullors states that she identifies herself as an organiser, meaning 'the person who gets the press together and who builds new leaders, the person who helps to build and launch campaigns, and is the person who decides what the targets will be and how we're going to change this world'.[153]

This directly points to the fact that Cullors, along with Tomati and Garza can be identified as people with a leadership role within the movement, who shape the narrative of the movement and strive to contain its message. This can be clearly seen in the case of Nikki Stephens. 16-year-old Nikki Stephens was the administrator of Black Lives Matter: Seattle Facebook page, where she strove to share stories of injustice from the national chapter'. During a Bernie Sanders rally in Seattle, Johnson and Willaford, identifying themselves as Black Lives Matter activists interrupted Sanders and took over the Sanders event. Stephens, shocked with the act, crafted an apology and shared it on social media:

> To the people of Seattle and #BernieSanders I am so sorry for what happened today in Seattle. I am a volunteer who just runs this page and I am only just starting to get into the movement. I was unaware of what happened and now that I've seen the video [of the event] I would like to say again that I am sorry. That is not what Black Lives Matter stands for and that is not what we're about. Do not let your faith in the movement be shaken by voices of two people. Please

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[152] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, p. 19.

[153] Judith Ohikuara, 'Meet the Women who Created #BlackLivesMatter', *cosmopolitan.com,* Cosmopolitan (Oct 2015), <http://www.cosmopolitan.com/entertainment/a47842/the-women-behind-blacklivesmatter/> ,[Accessed 1 Jan 2017].

do not question our legitimacy as a movement. Again I would like to apologise to the people of Seattle and I will be trying to reach out to Mr. Sanders.[154]

As national media spread the news that 'Black Lives Matter' had apologised, Stephens was contacted by Johnson and Willaford to 'change the name of her page' as she 'had no claim to Black Lives Matter: Seattle'. Eventually, Stephens changed her Facebook page to 'Black in Seattle'. When asked on the true ownership of the message in Seattle, Cullors stated that 'there could be some that use our name, but it does not necessarily mean it is in alignment with our message'. She insisted that 'the apology [was] off-message' as she does not think it is 'necessary to issue an apology trying to censor black folks'. She concludes by saying that while 'anyone can be a Black Lives Matter activist', the statement was not 'official'.[155]

The fact that there exists such a thing as an 'official' message indicates that a movement such as Black Lives Matter is not only making use of 'soft leadership' to 'choreograph' the movement, but is making use of formal leadership roles that directly try to control the narrative of the movement. This negates Milan's and Bennett and Segerberg's views expressed in the first chapter that movements no longer have the regulatory role in terms of narrative. It also questions the participatory aspect of the movement. While it is true that the movement mainly operates through different social media platforms which are participatory in nature, the fact that there are people deciding what is 'official' and what the movement is saying means that the amount of people participating are being limited. The previous chapter looked at Gerbaudo's view that the lack of leaders means that occupied places are the only nodes that hold the movement together. Does this hold when considering these examples? Is it possible that the leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement also act as nodes which people turn to?

While some of the leaders in the movement seem to be adopting a more substantial role than invisible, soft leaders, the movement still does not give them the same crucial importance as in past movements as was seen with the likes of Martin Luther King in the Civil Rights Movement. The movement without Patrisse Cullors, Opal Tomati and Alicia Garzia would perhaps change its message slightly, but it is doubtful that it would crumble, as the 'leaderfull' movement would have other people to fall back upon. Moreover, it is the

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[154] Ben Collins, 'Who really runs #BlackLivesMatter?', *thedailybeast.com,* The Daily Beast (Aug 2015), < http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/08/15/who-really-runs-blacklivesmatter.html
>, [Accessed 20 Dec 2016].
[155] Collins, n.p.

general public which is mostly deciding who is identified as a 'leader' within the movement. Activists such as Elzie, Mckesson and Imani led normal lives before gaining a massive followership on their Twitter accounts. They have more capacity to control the movement than other lesser known activists only because the audience has chosen whose messages are widely heard. At the end of the day, this restricts the ability of one individual to control the movement because the public can shift from one person to the other in a relatively easy manner, which means that in a few months' time the movement might have different power accounts and people spearheading the movement.

However, it is intriguing to note that the leadership of Black Lives Matter seems to have been constructed differently than that of other contemporary movements such as Occupy Wall Street and Spanish Indiganados. According to Gerbaudo's work, these are movements which never place focus on any leaders, but more detailed research and analysis is required before reaching a solid conclusion. It might be the case that Black Lives Matter operates differently because it seems to have moved from its inception as a decentralised movement to being a chapter-based official organisation, as stated on its website. It is worth pondering whether Black Lives Matter started identifying as an organisation because a more formal hierarchical structure is a more effective way of organising people and getting them to come together. Is it possible that this is the reason why Black Lives Matter is still thriving whereas movements like Occupy Wall Street faded away after a year or two? What implications does that have in terms of the structures people form when coming together?

For now, what can be concluded is that the 'who' of the movement is a convoluted discussion. The narrative put across by the movement both appeals to everyone as well as sometimes appeal only to the Black community. This emphasis on the Black community is backed up by empirical research which shows that the dominant voices in the movement remained black-led. The discussion then turns to the technological aspect of the social media platforms as the demographics are also affected by the constraints of technological platforms being managed by major corporations. The second part of the discussion reveals that leadership has not become irrelevant as Castells and Lovink state, but rather has changed its nature, identifying leaders as still crucial to community formation. Although Gerbaudo's theory of reluctant leaders choreographing the movement is closest to what is seen in Black Lives Matter, what we see seems to be a blend of leadership roles; both reluctant and

unreluctant leaders with some being the driving force behind the scenes and others identified as official faces for the movement.

Conclusion

This dissertation explores the ways in which people form community through social media, analysing the modes of construction of collective identity, the place, and the demographics of particularly the Black Lives Matter movement, as an example of a hybrid contemporary movement. The first chapter analyses how media platforms have always been critical in this construction of identity whilst also, as Milan asserts, becoming 'actors in their own right', as they intervene in the meaning-making process with their 'algorithmic power'.[156] This makes their process not just 'technological', but 'sociotechnical', leading to a reconfiguration of community formation because what is visible and not visible is controlled by obscure algorithms. The sociotechnical makes it important to discuss the place in which identity is formed and how hybridity functions as a negotiation of the physical and virtual spaces of communication also by facilitating 'interpersonal connections across a distance', which allows us to communicate with others 'while not having to engage fully with them'. [157] The discussion in Chapter 2 discusses how the movement easily traverses a country's borders and forms a community that extends beyond geographical limitations and other demographic obstacles that normally feature in the amassing of a community. The final chapter looks at the demographics of the movement and concludes that community formation is being reconfigured through the leader-full structure of the movement, which allows various leaders to manage the movement. This multiplicity, along with the fact that leaders mostly act from behind the scenes allow communities to remain stable when a loss of leaders occurs, because leaders are no longer nodal points of the movement. This is strengthened by the fact that some of the most visible faces of the movement are chosen by protestors choosing to retweet one person's tweet over another, making leadership more fluid; the person being tweeted this month might be exchanged for a different person in a few months.

At the core of these observations lies the analysis of Black Lives Matter, used in this work as an example of a contemporary hybrid movement. Since Black Lives Matter is merely an example, any observations made for Black Lives Matter could be applied to other contemporary hybrid movements and result in a general pattern. When considering

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[156] Milan, p. 888.

[157] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 12.

observations made by Castells and Gerbaudo on other contemporary movements, there are definitely a few parallels. For instance, all of these movements seem to use social media to generate a sense of allure revolving around occupied places. The construction of an emotional narration appears to be more useful in identifying the 'other', rather than the demographics of people participating, and personalised narratives are used in order to unify them into one, common, solid narrative. These parallels go beyond the scope of this dissertation, however they merit a full-scale study of Black Lives Matter in relation to the latest contemporary movements. Moreover, this dissertation shows that the extent of these common elements is questionable. There are factors that need to be kept in mind like the subject of the movement; the observations reached for a movement on police violence would probably vary from those observed for a movement on wealth inequality. Hence, while some common elements might emerge, an analysis on Black Lives Matter can never be considered as a pattern for all other contemporary movements.

This is especially important to acknowledge because the analysis of Black Lives Matter as an example of a hybrid contemporary movement proved to be a difficult one. Black Lives Matter seems to have evolved from a movement to a chapter-based organisation, with most people failing to make the distinction between the two. Moreover, many choose to participate by adopting the hashtag and the slogan for social media without any connection to the formal structure, making it difficult to distinguish between the three strands of Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter as a movement has also greatly expanded, to the extent that it has a variety of local campaigns as well as chapters in many locations which often function somewhat independently. This means a vast number of social media posts need to be analysed, all of them varying in their focus depending on the location of that chapter. Thus, the need for thorough, empirical research on this movement is both timely and lacking. Apart from the ones conducted by Pew Research Centre, Deen Freelon et al., and Munmun De Choudhury et al (all mentioned in this dissertation), empirical research on this movement is scarce. Detailed empirical research analysing the social media content for the movement could help to strengthen a theoretical discussion such as this one.

Despite the limitations of this work, a number of tentative conclusions can be reached. Throughout the work, what strongly emerges is that social media not only reconfigures aspects of community formation as seen in the introductory paragraph, but it also reinforces what lies at the heart of community formation in social movements. If anything, the presence

of social media serves to intensify the importance of what always lay at the core of social movements; narrative, leadership roles, and occupied places. Narrative, which Polletta describes as always having been essential for social movements to 'recruit participants, maintain solidarity, drum up support […] and demobilise opposition' is rendered invaluable in the context of social media, and can be considered to be the main driving force of community formation on the platforms.[158] In fact, Gerbaudo's conceptualisation of social media as 'emotional conduits' constructing an emotional narrative has been essential for this work. Gerbaudo's failure to consider the technological implications, or 'technocultural assemblage' on social media platforms omits an essential part of the discussion on social media and community formation. However, despite this shortcoming, the analysis of Black Lives Matter indicates that Gerbaudo is right when stating that narrative is truly at the core of social media and the development of social movements. Firstly, due to the 'spatially dispersed and socially diverse constituency' of the movement, brought about by social media, a consistent narrative is crucial to 'create a sense of commonality' in order to mobilise protestors, and thereby overcoming the added demographic obstacles.[159]

Although theorists like Castells and Mason claim that the 'horizontality' of social media networks give rise to leaderless networks, the consistent narrative is hardly constructed on its own. Rather, it is constructed by 'reluctant leaders' bringing 'coherence to people's spontaneous and creative participation in the protest movements'. [160] Participatory social media platforms lead to a vast amount of material being shared and going viral. In the context of this virality, leaders are rendered invaluable in their attempt to maintain a consistent narrative for the movement; an emotional narrative which drives the community together to occupy physical places.

Before the age of social media, these occupied places of movements had a 'sacred quality', but this sacred quality is now replaced with a more special significance which is only achievable through the narrative of social media messages creating a 'sense of allure' revolving around places. Occupied squares are no longer just 'stages for protest performances' but also act as 'sources of identification for the social movements'; 'nodal points' that hold together movements that are deprived of a 'solid organisational structure'.[161]

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[158] Polletta, 'Contending Stories: Narrative in Social Movements ', p. 421.
[159] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 14.
[160] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets*, p. 13.
[161] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 156.

The indispensability of physical place is, I feel, one of the more intriguing aspects of this work. Throughout the work, what consistently emerges is the emphasis on the physical, with the culmination of the movement happening on the streets. The second chapter mentions Kazys and Varnelis, who state that people have an impulse to 'share a […] communal space with other humans with whom [they] are likely not to have any direct interaction', thus seeking physical presence.[162]

The culmination of the importance of physical place is in Gerbaudo's observation in the second chapter that once meeting on the streets, people are 'embarrassed about how they got there in the first place'. Various cries from protestors along the likes of 'We are not on Facebook, we are on the streets', seems to express the joy of physical communion; physical presence is revered, sought, and celebrated.[163] It is worth exploring what exactly is about bodily presence that remains so meaningful, even in a networked age of social media. This is rendered even more essential for exploration when considering that there are indications that the movement is reverting to face-to-face interaction. In an interview, Tometi states that although there is going to be a 'lot more use of social media in the current movement', they have to be 'mindful on how [they] are surveyed'. Due to a large number of instances where activists are tracked through their online data and phone data, they are going back to the 'original methods of organising – face-to-face interactions and door knocking'.[164]

The narrative of social media platforms as, in Zuckerberg's terms, 'technology merely [enabling] or [facilitating] social activity' is showing cracks. As Van Dijck warns at the start of this dissertation, social media renders 'people's activities […] manageable' and 'engineer the sociality in people's everyday routines', [165] while Couldry asserts that despite the myth of the 'new form of centrality', the 'places where we share material' are far from 'being our own 'place'.[166] With the example above, there is an indication that protestors are realising this, and are moving away from social media platforms in search of something different; perhaps a place that *can* be called their own, and where their own narrative can be constructed unimpeded. It is intriguing to question what will happen to community once social media platforms fail us. With the adoption of new technologies, or new methods that

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[162] Kazys and Varnelis, p. 6.
[163] Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets,* p. 97.
[164] Emily Ramshaw, 'A Black Lives Matter Co-Founder on Surveillance and Social Media', *coveteur.com,* The Coveteur (Feb 2017), < http://coveteur.com/2017/02/23/opal-tometi-co-founder-black-lives-matter-social-media-power/> [Accessed 2 March 2017]
[165] Van Dijck, p. 12.
[166] Couldry, p. 885.

will overtake social media platforms as methods of communication, community as we know it will be reconfigured once again. However, if this work on social media and community has been any indication, the presence of physical place, leadership, and most importantly, narrative, will remain constant and crucial to community formation, identifying them as the foundation of community.

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Appendix A

Interview with Dr Ken Fero on 12th October 2016.

Topic: Black Lives Matter and Migrant Media in relation to media and the community formation.

Amy: There is the difference in medium, with Migrant Media using film as the 'political weapon' , and BLM mostly using social media, and there is this difference, obviously, between the means of production and distribution and in the case of social media you have the means of production and distribution. It's easier to garner support from people when you're using social media rather than film, because in the case of film you're met with a lot of obstacles of distribution etc.

Ken: BLM did use film, short films that they put on their website and people respond to them. In terms of the difference it would be a difference in process, cohesion and impact. In terms of process, for example with the Injustice film. Injustice, in the process of its making formed the United Family and Friends campaign which is the coalition board for death in custody. Black and white families but ultimately led by black families. That process was important in the production of the film but also in the political development of an organisation of families that were self-led where they took control of their struggle.

With BLM you have a similar process of the coming together of people except it's much more around social media. Of course if you got nation states, so BLM US, BLM UK, they are groups of activists who are cohesive and working towards agendas. There are areas where there is interlinking. But the major difference I would say is the transitory nature of social media and whilst you can get 7 million hits, what does it mean? It means awareness but how much does it mean political realisation of people who did not know about the issue before. In a sense you can't measure it yet, we have to see what comes out of it. It's certainly a positive step that people are being educated in terms of what's happening. I think it's far too early for people to criticise BLM for not being effective or for making the wrong decisions because it is really quite a new movement. We can critique it from our position of people who are very much community based and grassroots and who have specific targets and I think that's the difference –that our targets are very specific, certain things need to be done and

they have to be done, and there's no negotiation and debate. And in the case of the United Family and Friends it's the prosecution and conviction of police officers and of course that's one of the areas BLM works on. However, It doesn't just stick to police brutality, to migrants and refugees but to a whole range of issues that affect black lives. It is very different in its broader scope.

The next, cohesion. Cohesion for us was very important. Because when we did Injustice we were physically meeting with the families every two weeks for a couple of hours over a period of 7 to 8 years and that is the creation of an actual community. People working together form certain relationships and agreements. We were able to put out a political program which was directed depending on the issue, what issue we were discussing at the time in terms of supporting families, or organising protests. There are different targets at different times. That was very cohesive.

Now if you compare that to BLM, again they do actions, and people have criticised them for these actions, for not being directed towards the state in terms of the Heathrow action. But the bottom line is that BLM UK is making people talk about deaths in custody in the UK. The problem is that the state narrative is still controlled by the media so instead of talking about the cases, the media focuses on who are BLM, what do they want, these are all negatives. So BLM as much as it can, try to control, to challenge the narrative and control how it's represented, how it's perceived.

This is crucial because perception is very important for BLM because it is its whole ethos; they are challenging people's perceptions and demanding justice. At the moment, because of its transitory nature, you can't really say how effective it's going to be because in the long term, there are signs that it's filtering in to the community as a whole because people are using the hashtag and using the slogan, but the state is very good at managing hope, it's very good at managing political challenges and even if BLM were to grow in the UK and be a massive organisation online, it would still need a very direct political program to be effective.

If you want to take down a building, you can shout and shout for people to help you. Some will hear you, some people won't. If you have a loud hailer, that can project your voice. What you're saying though can determine if people follow you or not. BLM have social media but what's being asked of people in a direct concrete way?

Finally, in terms of impact we have to judge political organisations by what they do and again it is too early what BLM will achieve but they certainly achieved the consciousness among the general population and awareness from the general population about BLM but you can still go around the UK asking what do you know about BLM and most people will answer that it has nothing to do with the UK. And that s not a failure of BLM UK, that's a question of the state, the medium wanting to control the message because they won't mind if people are complaining about Black lives in the US. But if the focus were to shift to the UK then it would be a different matter.

A: This idea of the media controlling the message is a very important. In fact, over the last few weeks, especially in the U.S. , there has been BLM being characterised by the media as deviant. There was the shooting of the policeman during the protest so I think it's also interesting how the media kind of controls the perception of the movement because now the movement is shifting into the idea of social deviance. This is similar to what happened with groups like Anonymous who were trollers on the internet, before suddenly being transformed into 'social deviants'. In the case of Anonymous they took that and made it their identity as a group. With BLM, the movement is still in transit and it's changing so much. This can be seen particularly in the US, with so many different chapters all with slightly different approaches.

K: Even in the case of the UK there are different approaches to BLM and there are different sections and different political ideas and this relates to what I mentioned before about impact. Clearly, when the media make an effort and respond to and deviate the direction of people's thoughts, that's a compliment to the movement. They wouldn't be talking about it as a deviant group unless they felt threatened. For me that's positive. The issue then becomes one of distraction. The media and the whole problem becomes a distraction which really needs to be dealt with. This is because when families have been fighting for justice for 40 years and people come and say we want to deal with this issue as well, this is our approach, this is what we want to do, you need to address what's going to be done that's different? Or can be done? What happens when you try it for a different way for another thirty years and you end up with the same results? So I don't particularly care how people get justice in the UK as long as it happens. So if BLM can help in that, then that's great.

The danger is that it can become a distraction, it's important that the protest doesn't become the focus of the media and that the death of the person and the injustice remain the

focus. But that's an issue with not just the media but also with the group. 'Injustice' was made as a tool for the family, as a weapon, so that was something that belonged to them and that they used very effectively to get the change they wanted to at that time. We have yet to see whether BLM will work in a very practical and effective way. Consciousness is rising, informing people about this is good. It has to be continuing because you have to motivate hope to people. That is the job of the media is to say nothing changes, and nothing ever can change and so that's important that what BLM does is try to give people hope.

A: In fact, I was going to say that this was seen in your documentaries as well. The idea that the media picks on a case, for example, the death of someone, and they say 'because he was a drug addict' for example.

K: Yes, the narrative is always controlled by the media and there's a process that they do to actually denigrate the person. To put the cause of the death in the hands of the person who's been killed, and also they look at the history of the person, and they focus on the person's family. Unfortunately you can do that, but you can also say let's look at the police officer who used the gun and you may find that it was proven, in several cases, for example the police officer would have killed 4 people before, so that would make him a serial killer in a police uniform. The other argument would be that he's a trained policeman. He's trained to do that. But that's not the debate. The debate is that the victim is blamed. Unfortunately, the media get their information from the police who are involved and that becomes the dominant narrative. And after three months, or a year later, if there's an apology in the newspaper — actually he wasn't a drug dealer, actually he didn't deserve to die, and that's what they say in a parenthesis — then it's too late. We have to look at this as systematic – these cases which have been happening ever so often have been going on for 50 years. What is the systematic processing involved in the UK where officers have killed black people?

A: To jump to Brian Douglas's sister, at one point she said: 'That wanting of justice and getting it is my goal'. This comes across very strongly in the documentary – this idea of getting together, working together to get justice. So in a way, this community was being formed around this desire for justice. So then I started wondering – when this justice is achieved, what happens? What happens to the community when they get justice?

K: At the moment, the system is so oppressive and so controlling, and the narrative is dominated so much, that people are forced to beg for crumbs, when actually they need to take

the cake. If the police who committed manslaughter were going to jail, would that be enough? What more could people want? The state feels that if the police were to go to jail, the people would lose confidence in the police and that authority of the democratic government would be questioned by the people. And they don't want that to happen because that is actually a revolutionary statement. And so they make sure that the conversation doesn't go beyond: 'We want justice'. Because if it goes beyond from 'we want justice' to 'we have justice' then people start asking: Why did this happen? Why are police doing this? Why do we need police? They would open such a can of worms that they would be uncontrollable. The issue here is that once they achieve justice, they will start asking why are the police here? What are the police doing? These are all fundamental questions about how we live.

We would start having open debates about power, and that's not what they want. It's the next stage – there will be a stage where prosecution will be successful. The question of murder is a big one. Part of the fetishist disavowal is the security.

The other thing to say is that there's a perception that if one case goes through that would be enough. But that's not the case. A lot of these families have been campaigning for years and years. That desire for justice is so overwhelming, it will only go when they're dead. When the first one happens, people will ask for retribution for all the other cases. IT's hidden this issue for so long, and it's so horrific and systematic and brutal but when it does come out it's going to be quite a fundamental shock to the British system and that's the danger of them.

People think I'm extreme because I give the example of people who have committed war crimes in Nazi Germany or the Balkans, where you're going back to for example 1940s Germany and you can find people of eighty years old being taken in front of the Court of Human Rights. They can find people from 50 years ago to be guilty, and similarly they can find these police officers so that's another debate revolving around not just the nation state but also how it's dealt with from an international perspective by international bodies.

A: In fact, my next question was going to be about the international aspect. In the case of Migrant Media the documentaries were viewed in different countries mostly outside the UK because it was banned in the UK.

K: Yes, the thing to say about that is that if we made a film about France, it wouldn't be showing in France but if it was about England then it can be shown, so there are Inter European rivalries that we can explore.

A: What's interesting is that what was essentially police violence in the UK resonated in other countries. It's the same with BLM where you have people protesting about U.S. cases in the US rather than in the UK. How does it resonate? How can I view something outside my context and still relate to it?

K: If you're a young person and you want to know about death in police custody in the UK, you won't know about it because it's hidden very well by the British media. But the British media cannot control Sky and CNN and all the other stations reporting cases in the States. So young people would be aware of Eric Garner, and of other victims in the US. They wouldn't be aware of cases in the UK – if you asked them to name people who have died in the UK most people won't be able to name them. And that's not their fault – if they haven't been exposed to it, how would they know? If what it takes is for young people to metaphysically go from the London to the US and then back to London, then that's what it's going to take.

It's a positive in terms of people being politicised and people gathering on the streets and being aware. But in terms of the family they're taking every opportunity to say yes we show solidarity with the States but we need to support cases in the UK as well. And it's not about the US having more cases and occurring more frequently because clearly that is not the case. If you had to break down the percentage of the population, and this is a study worth doing, proportionately is it more in the US than in the UK?

Obviously, America has been created by violence and has been ditching out violence since the day it was created, and so that feeds into that narrative of the reality of the situation. Britain is different. The suppression of the people in Britain happened during the peasants' revolt – it happened first in the 13th century all the way to the 16th century, to the point where radicalism was then turned into trade unionism and about workers controlling some of their rights. So this radical tradition isn't in the mentality of British people. It's not that it's not there but it's not taught in schools. So that's different from the States, where people are much more aware of the radical traditions.

A: Statistically speaking, reports state that it is 100 more times likely that you'll die in the US than in the UK. My question is, how do you know that's true? It's a point you touched upon during the lecture a few hours ago when you mentioned the BBC and how they wanted you to say 20,000 killings when in reality it was 200,000 killings.

K: They do it all the time. There was a Bloody Sunday March after the Peace Accord and there were around 20 thousand people marching and the person who I was with was phoned by a relative and told her that the BBC said there were 2000 people there, and he said that was impressive. I looked at my friend and thought 'But why would they do that?' Even after they lost their argument on the Bloody March, and the RIA was successful in their agenda, they still misrepresent facts. This is not a disease, this is systematic. They look at it not as individual but as long-term, and if we don't look at it long-term if we don't have a sense of history, if we don't have a sense of hope, then we're finished.