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Digital Natives and the Return of the Local Cause

Anat Ben-David

Prologue

In December 2010 I attended a conference titled Digital Natives with a Cause? Thinkathon. It was organised by Hivos and the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) in The Hague.¹ During the event there was much debate amongst the participants around the current definition of a digital native. This got me thinking. Is a definition necessary? If yes, does it encompass the current phenomenon of young people who are engaged with digital technologies for promoting social change? Do all digital natives care about social change? Does it exclude other types of actors who share similar practices but are not considered digital natives? Does the definition entail that there are practices unique to digital natives, which justify this distinct ontological and epistemological group? When the Thinkathon concluded, some of these questions remained unsolved, and I was still puzzled by them. A few weeks later, an idea of a possible answer came from an unexpected quarter.

I was walking in our neighbourhood in Tel-Aviv with my four-year-old daughter, when she suddenly asked me why there was so much graffiti on the streets. "Graffiti?" I asked, puzzled, since I had not noticed any graffiti in our neighbourhood before. She had noticed the graffiti as the small fences were just her height. From a taller point of view of an adult, I had only noticed the blooming hibiscus bushes that grew above them. Then she asked, "Don't you think graffiti makes our streets very ugly and dirty?" "Yes, it's very ugly," I replied, amused by her environmental concerns. Then she asked me to post a message on the internet on her behalf, calling for people to demonstrate against graffiti. At first I laughed, but she was very serious about it. Amused by

her request, I took her picture standing next to the graffiti and posted her cute request on Facebook, which received 'Likes' and comments from the usual suspects in my immediate social network .

But she was more serious than that. When we arrived home, she started preparing signs for demonstration, asking if people were already coming and if the roads will be blocked with traffic. At that point it was clear that it would be difficult for me to realise her fantasy for social change. I explained that in order to organise a mass demonstration we have to ask for a permit from the police. "Ok," she said, and together we wrote a letter to the police (which I never sent, of course). Days passed and nothing happened, but she kept on asking whether they had replied and when the demonstration was going to take place. She is still waiting for it to happen.

To me, this story serves as a frame of reference for understanding digital native practices. As uncomfortable as I may feel about the current definition of digital natives and the connotations attached to it, I follow Nishant Shah's position that it might be better to accept the "found name", rather than to replace it, while at the same time attempt to unpack the baggage of presumptions attached to the current definition and reload it with new meanings (Shah, 2010, pp. 18–25). If we must accept the term as such and the demographic dichotomies it alludes to (i.e., natives as opposed to non-natives, digital as opposed to analogue, young versus older users of digital technologies), then the story about my daughter is a story about an "everyday Digital native", who is, as Shah described, "not perhaps just a user of digital technologies, but a person who has realised the possibilities and potentials of digital technologies in his/her environments" (emphasis mine) (Shah, 2010, p. 19). The emphasis on the immediate environment , or the situated location—the granular cause, as seen through digital native eyes—is perhaps one of the lacunae often ignored in the current discourse about digital natives. Accordingly, this chapter conceptualises the term 'digital natives' in a way that attempts to reload it with new meanings about digital native practices as such that have a commitment to grounded places and situated knowledges. By tracking the parallel developments both in digital technologies as well as digital activism in relation to place, this chapter wishes to reintroduce the meaning of 'the native place' into the discourse on digital natives.

Introduction

The term 'digital natives' consists of an adjective and a noun, whose connotations, taken both separately or together, periodise the point in time in which the term emerged. It was coined by Marc Prensky in 2001 to refer to a young generation of students who "are 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the internet (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).²

In its original context, thus, both 'digital' and 'native' refer to language – the language of these technologies is digital, and those native to it speak it fluently. However, the choice of words has broader implications. The 'digital' in digital natives also refers to the current evolutionary phase of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Had Prensky coined the term ten years earlier, digital native would have probably been called 'Cyber Natives', 'Virtual Natives', much alike other prevalent terms of that time, such as 'Cyber Activists' or 'Virtual Communities'.³ Similarly, the 'native' in digital natives connotes things other than fluency in a native language and the natural process of acquiring it. The literal definition of the noun, rather, refers to being born in a specific place.⁴

The purpose of this chapter is to conceptually unfold the broader meaning of the term 'digital natives' both by a historical contextualisation of the 'digital', as well as by a discussion of the geopolitics of the 'native'. The terminological analysis, grounded by a historical contextualisation of digital activism and the history of digital technologies in the past decade, serves to argue that in its current form, the term 'digital natives' may represent a renewed dedication to the native place in a point in time when previous distinctions between 'physical' and 'digital' places no longer hold (Rogers, 2008). As claimed by Palfrey and Gasser (2008), digital natives no longer distinguish between the online and the offline and relate to both as a hybrid space. This definition relates to older debates about the introduction of ICTs that questioned the differences between the 'virtual' and the 'real', the 'online' and the 'offline' (Rogers, 2009). The claim made by Palfrey and Gasser is ontological and epistemological; since digital natives do not differentiate between online and offline realities, the definition implies a new spatial epistemology. If this is the case, how does a digital native – spatial epistemology manifest itself in various forms of digital native activism?

Before attempting to answer this question in the following part of the chapter, I return to the terminological analysis of the existing definitions of digital natives. If the 'nativeness' of digital natives relates to their fluency in 'digital language' and their 'being at home' in digital spaces, how are their predecessors defined? Prensky, for example, contrasts digital natives with a previous generation of 'digital immigrants' – "those of us who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology" (Prensky, 2001, pp. 1-2). Palfrey and Gasser add a third category to describe the predecessors of digital natives – 'digital settlers', those who grew up in an analog world but have helped shaping the contours of the digital realm, but unlike digital natives, they "continue to rely heavily on traditional, analog forms of interaction" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 4).

The distinction between 'native', 'settler' and 'immigrant' does not only separate chronological generations; it also re-awakens the debate between the offline and online realities that preceded the emergence of the term. From a spatial point of view, it also distinguishes between the places of birth of different generations. As inferred from Palfrey and Gasser's definition, digital natives are presumed to be born into a hybrid space comprised of enmeshed digital and physical components, while digital settlers and digital immigrants are perceived as having travelled to those spaces from the offline world. The terminological premise is that natives are better acquainted with their place of birth than immigrants, or settlers, and refers to the extent to which they are "at home" with digital technologies. However, it would not be far-fetched to assume that the imagery of the native, the immigrant and the settler also borrows from colonial history, or any other history of territorial disputes for that matter. The chronology of such demographic developments entails that a space is first inhabited by natives, the 'indigenous inhabitants', who are later joined by settlers (often times not without struggle), and much later eventually joined by immigrants. In the digital context, however, the chronological order is reversed. For digital natives were not born into a digital 'terra nullius'; digital spaces were conceived, shaped and already inhabited by those referred to as 'settlers' and 'immigrants'. Ironically, it is the settlers who set the grounds for natives, and whose practices precede those of the natives.

This chronological paradox of being native to a place already created and inhabited by others may explain the tension between other connotations of 'digital natives' that arose as the term evolved. As Shah claimed (Shah, 2010, p. 15), the naming of a group as "natives" entails an act of "othering" and in the case of digital natives, the "othering" was loaded with expectations to have unique, "indigenous" characteristics that would ontologically justify their classification, while at the same time adopt and continue the practices of their predecessors, the "settlers".

As a consequence, the mystification or laments about the new generation of digital activists were performed vis-à-vis what was already performed digitally, which explains terms such as "slacktivists" (Shah, 2010, p. 17), or Bennet's explanation of digital natives' politics as "self-actualizing citizens" versus "old century dutiful citizens" (Bennett, 2008). As proclaimed by Shah, to better understand digital natives, a fresh look at what digital natives do may be more useful than the constant (and often failed) attempt to define who digital natives are (Shah, 2010, p. 20).

Perhaps one way of doing so is by shifting the weights in the definition of digital natives from "being digital" to "being native", focusing on the geographies and places digital natives are native to – not as being surrounded by a media-rich environment, but as operating in a hybrid geography of physical and online spaces. In the following, I argue that digital natives have

a granular dedication to their local places and local causes, a dedication that can be seen as a form of counter-practice to previous forms of cyber-activism, shaped by transnational activist networks using ICTs for promoting global causes. To make the case for digital native practices as a renewed dedication to the local, I now turn to a historical account of previous practices of digital activism for social change led by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).⁵

By comparing two key-events of social protests and large-scale mobilisation of activists using ICTs, one marking early forms of digital activism in the late 1990s, the other marking one of the most recent forms of digital activism to date, it shows that both digital technologies and agents of social change have structurally changed from the transnational to the local, and from the institutional to the individual. I then claim that the current discourse about digital natives can be better understood by placing it in a specific point in time, and a specific place in the constantly-changing digital space.

From Seattle to Tahrir Square

The anti-globalisation protests against the WTO summit in Seattle in 1999 marked the beginning of an era of what was then termed ‘cyber-activism’ led by CSOs.⁶ During the protests, a diverse range of activists, groups, organisations and social movements coordinated actions against the WTO summit using laptops and mobile phones. Some of the actions were directed at coordinating protests on the streets; others were directed at disseminating information about the demonstrations and the anti-globalisation movement on the Web. The media took up the stories put together by the various organisations, which eventually led to the establishment of www.indymedia.org, the alternative media outlet for social activists (van Laer & van Aelst, 2009).

Twelve years (and many other digital campaigns and protests) later, the masses took on the streets of Cairo to protest against President Mubarak’s regime. They too used the internet and mobile phone technologies to coordinate the protests. People from all over the world watched the events through Al Jazeera’s satellite TV channel as the Egyptian authorities first switched off the internet in Egypt to prevent the protests, then saw Mubarak step down.⁷

Are these events comparable? Do they represent a ‘generational gap’ between public protests facilitated by ICTs in the ‘digital settlers’ era, and their current manifestation in a digital age inhabited by ‘digital natives’? If we accept for a moment the dichotomous demographic definitions of older versus younger inhabitants of the digital space, then an analytical comparison of the events may highlight the differences between older and younger generations of

digital activists, to better understand what is unique to digital native activism that was not already performed before.

At first sight, however, the differences between Seattle and Cairo do not seem significant: both are events of public protest facilitated by ICTs, both were propelled by a loose network of activists working on a joint cause, both are examples of civic initiatives that proved effective and powerful in promoting a cause against well-established institutions such as governments, inter-governmental organisations, or the mainstream media. Such similarities question the extent to which current forms of digital activism are unique practices that justify the dichotomous definitions of older versus younger users of digital technologies. Yet an examination of the differences between the events reveal that in a decade's time, technological and social factors are responsible for a gradual shift in the types of actors, the types of causes involved in the process, and the digital spaces in which they operate.

Although the internet and mobile phones played a role in both the cases, what was called 'The Internet' in 1999 was slightly different from its current form. Within a decade, digital technologies have transformed from a decentralised network of computers connected to the internet and a parallel-but-separate network of cellular communication devices, to enmeshed networks that combine both. Taking into account that in 1999 there were few, if none, wifi hotspots, the activists in Seattle had to use laptops with a LAN or modem connection to the internet to coordinate their actions (mobile phones were only used for voice communication, not for uploading data or seeking information). The Web was less social, too. While current protests in the Middle East and North Africa were mostly coordinated through social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook especially, in 1999 most of the coordination of actions was performed using email distribution lists, e-bulletin boards and NGO's websites. The actors were different, too, since the main level of coordination of actions in Seattle was performed by a core network of CSOs, with a loose network of other CSOs and individuals attached to them (Clark & Themudo, 2003, p. 116). The activists in Egypt, on the other hand, were not necessarily mobilised by civil society organisations, but by a critical mass of citizens, individuals, who communicated with their immediate social networks to mobilise and coordinate the demonstrations.

One other difference relevant to the case I wish to make for digital natives is that both the actors as well as the causes in the two instances represent a shift from the transnational to the local. While Tahrir square has become both the physical site and symbolic location of the Egyptians' liberation from their local regime, Seattle had transformed into a battle site only because it hosted the WTO summit and attracted a network of transnational activists to protest against it. Put differently, while the protests in Cairo were about

Egypt, the protests in Seattle were not about Washington; they were about anti-globalisation.

The scholarly literature on social transformation facilitated by ICTs that spurred in the aftermath of the 'Battle of Seattle' highlighted the importance of the structural fit between ICTs and social movements. This 'perfect match' has been given many names, one of them was "the dot cause", coined by Clark and Tehmudo (2003: 110):

The term 'dot cause' can apply to any citizen group who promotes social causes and chiefly mobilises support through its website. Such group fit Keck and Sikkink's (1998:2) definition of 'transnational advocacy networks' as including 'those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services'. In social movements, dot causes can be important mobilising structures, attracting new support, coordinating collective action and producing and disseminating new framings.

In many ways, the new technology, perceived as decentralised, global, and flattening time and space, only facilitated the already-existing structures of transnational networks of civil society organisations. Thus, the "settlement" of civil society organisations in cyberspace and their transnational networking on the Web was perceived as a 'natural move'. However, digital technologies did not transform civil society organisations' modus operando: their networked structure has remained the same (albeit greatly facilitated by the new technologies), their causes have not changed, and their actions are still directed at the same institutions (government, inter-governmental institutions, and the mass media) (Garrett, 2006).

To contextualise the current discourse on digital natives, I suggest a rhetorical 'thought experiment', by applying the terminology used today to refer to Digital Natives versus Immigrants or Settlers on the various stakeholders that used ICTs for social change in the late 1990s. In such a case, transnational networks of CSOs were the 'natives' since their networked, transnational structure was not alien to the transnational and networked structure of the new technologies. Other institutional stakeholders, such as governments, inter-governmental organisations, or mass media corporations, had difficulties adjusting their fixed structures and business models to emerging ICTs in the same way the current discourse about 'digital natives' refers to the generation of 'digital immigrants' or 'digital settlers'.

Over time, however, the paradigms hailed for the structural fit between CSOs, transnational advocacy and ICTs have started to collapse. Transnational collaboration was effective, but in certain cases it hit a wall, especially when local issues and causes were addressed by the international community. As Garrett

points out: “Protests occur regularly around the world, but activity generally doesn’t continue at a single location for extended periods, and a particular location is unlikely to see more than a few protests a year” (2006:210). Rogers and Marres (2008), for example, report how NGO-Web involvement in the controversy around the Narmada Dam in Gujarat, India resulted in the abstraction and generalisation of the issue to the extent that it no longer addressed the situated problem. In a different study on the involvement of transnational network advocacy in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, we found that local Israeli NGOs involved in objecting Israel’s construction of the structure between Israel and the Palestinian territories were left out of the debate (Rogers & Ben-David, 2008). Local issues, then, remained less well-treated by the transnational community, using the global structure of ICTs.

At the same time, the World Wide Web has become less and less wide. Very much following the logic of “daily me” Web cultures described by Cass Sunstein in *Republic.com 2.0* (Sunstein, 2007), Ethan Zuckerman speaks of an “imagined cosmopolitanism” effect of digital technologies, reflecting on the need to tune into local reports from all over the world in order to widen the potential of the Web as a global technology (Zuckerman, 2010). Zuckerman is especially referring to Global Voices Online⁸, the blogging platform he co-founded in 2004, hosted at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School. Global Voices Online shares and translates local citizen media and blog posts from areas in the world which usually do not make it to the global news.⁹ Yet, a study of Global Voices Online, performed in 2006 by the Govcom.org Foundation, which examined the extent to which the local reports are discussed in other places, showed that the conversations did not travel far—they were rather clustered regionally (Rogers & Govcom.org Foundation, 2006).

From a technological point of view, the effect of the narrowing Web described by Zuckerman is explained by a gradual process of localisation of Web-based and mobile communications technologies. Richard Rogers (2008) describes the evolution of the politics of Web-space by dividing it into four periods, starting from the perception of the Web as a global, hyperlinked space, followed by a period in which the Web was perceived as a public sphere, then transformed into isolated islands of content that marked the “Web as social networks” period, followed by its current politics of localisation, what he also terms “the revenge of geography”, where the Web’s organising mechanisms, such as search engine algorithms and IP-based Web-services no longer distinguish between Web-spaces and geographical spaces. From a Web-space perspective, then, the ‘Battle of Seattle’ is placed in the “Web as public sphere” period, whereas current events in Egypt, Tunisia, and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa represent the “revenge of geography” period. The rapidly localising digital technologies, characteristic of the period in which the

discourse about digital natives emerged, is also characterised by increasing control of nation-states on digital technologies (as evident in Egypt's Internet shut-down, to name one example), as well as by the increase in access to the Internet through mobile phones which in many developing countries is now more prevalent than access from PCs (International Telecommunications Unit, 2010).

Arguably, the growing localisation of ICTs has transformed the structural fit between transnational advocacy networks and ICTs. Until recently, civil society organisations have been the hegemonic agents for social change using ICTs. They were quicker than governments and other institutions in adopting digital technologies, and thus changed power relations between them. Alternative media outlets such as the Independent Media Center (Indymedia)¹⁰ which was established in the aftermath of the 'Battle of Seattle' successfully competed with the traditional hegemony of mass media outlets such as newspapers and broadcast electronic media, and were effective in mobilising and informing sympathisers of various causes from around the world. However, as ICTs became more local, the hegemony of transnational networks and organisations withered, and the agency of change shifted from the organisational level, to the individual (Angelina, 2010). In the same way that institutions such as governments and mass media corporations have had to adjust to the new digital spaces a decade ago, civil society organisations now need to rethink their paradigms to adapt to the current developments in digital technologies. Last decade's natives, then, become 'settlers', or 'immigrants', in contemporary digital space, while at the same time new actors need less adaptation in using the new technologies for social change. In the short history of the Web and of digital spaces, then, this is perhaps the moment in time when the discourse about digital natives comes into the picture.

New forms of digital activism are less reliant on existing structures of organisation, fund-raising, and framing of campaigns. Instead, activism for social change by actors termed as 'digital natives' is characterised by individuals and groups promoting immediate, local causes, relaying information and mobilising for action through their immediate social networks.

Such activities changed the ways 'campaigns' were thought of so far. Current debates on whether launching a Facebook group may or may not attract a critical mass of members that will eventually lead to social revolutions have not yet been resolved, but the spontaneity of action, the granular level of the causes, as well as the lowered threshold of the agents and initiators, are typical of the current trends in digital activism that are different from previous practices from a decade ago.

Examples from all over the world abound. Among the less-celebrated of the countless examples is a digital initiative called Gaza Youth Breaks Out (GYBO).¹¹ What started as a provocative manifesto posted on Facebook by individuals who knew they should remain anonymous for the durability of their cause,¹² became a youth-movement of young Palestinians who wished to break out the current situation in Gaza, being critical not only of Israel's closure policy, but also of the fracture between Hamas and Fatah. Their concern was to make a specific place – Gaza – a better place to live in. The manifesto was circulated outside Facebook and has reached audiences from all over the world ; it both enabled the local mobilisation of youth in Gaza as well as raised support for the humanitarian situation in Gaza in ways that reached beyond the well-worn political debate about Gaza. When Facebook eventually froze their account, GYBO moved to Twitter, Youtube and other digital spaces, but their geographical cause has remained the same.

In less than six months, GYBO transformed from a digital initiative to a social movement, without adapting the structure of a civil society organization. It did not have a media strategy, did not have accountability commitments to funders, it did not launch a planned campaign.

Rather, they made use of their situated knowledge—both of their life in Gaza, and of the digital tools they have at hand, to promote social change in their local place.

The historical contextualisation of digital activism does not serve to claim that current practices replace previous ones. Digital natives do not replace previous actors for social change such as CSOs and transnational advocacy networks. Rather, it sketches the spaces in which digital natives operate, one that is both digital and geographical and that is populated not only by natives, but by other types of actors and stakeholders characterized by their respective practices. With these renewed meanings loaded into the concept of digital natives, the following part concludes this chapter by returning to the conceptual discussion of digital natives and their digital places of birth.

Conclusions: Hybrid Spaces, Situated Knowledges

This chapter attempted to reintroduce a spatial context to the term 'Digital natives'. The shift from focusing on 'native actors' to 'native places' enables bypassing some of the problems and ambiguities attached to the term. Instead of struggling with the problems of ontological dichotomies and exclusions that come with the characterisation of a group of actors and users, it treats the 'digital native space' as a continuous space that is constantly evolving and that simultaneously hosts a complex network of actors and practices, digital natives among them. As Palfrey and Gasser claimed, and as described by Rogers from a Web space point-of-view, this space is

characterised by hybridity, both of digital and geographical spaces, of various digital mechanisms and technologies and of a heterogeneous set of actors.

This is very much in line with Shah's conceptualisation of a digital native space as a flatland, a "free floating space, which is at once improbable and real, and where the elements that constitute older forms of change processes, are present but in a fluid, moving way, where they can reconnect, recalibrate and relate to each other in new and unprecedented forms" (Shah, 2010, p. 30). As demonstrated in the previous part of this chapter, forms of public protests facilitated by digital technologies may not be completely new, but they introduced an unprecedented dedication to the local place. This dedication, however, does not entail that the knowledge produced by local forms of actions are confined to local spaces. The protests in Egypt were inspired and influenced by the events which took place in Tunisia a month earlier, where digital technologies also played a significant role in disseminating information and mobilising action. The GYBO initiative in Gaza started more or less at the same time and had similar characteristics, but the type of action and knowledge about the local issues was adjusted to the situated place. In that sense, knowledge produced by current forms of digital activism travels from one place to another, but is constantly localised and transformed to fit the local actors and their causes.

This type of knowledge is very different from the previous dominant use of digital technologies by transnational networks. As described above, transnational networks of activists often times failed to effectively address, or even see, the situated causes and issues of local places. The current dedication to the local place can be thus interpreted in terms of a counter practice, one that alludes to Donna Haraway's concept of situated and subjugated knowledges (Haraway, 1991). Transnational advocacy networks on the Web may be described as adopting "the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway, 1991, p. 195), while granular activism dedicated to local places may be described in terms of the grounded knowledge, that albeit its partiality, encompasses greater complexity.

This brings me back to the anecdote about the hibiscus flowers and the graffiti which I described in the prologue to this chapter. Despite my commitment to environmental issues which I try to pass on to my daughter, my taller gaze was a 'gaze from nowhere' and failed to notice the graffiti that she found so disturbing and demanded an immediate action for change. Admittedly, my response to her dedication entailed an act of 'othering', of treating her devotion to remove the graffiti from the streets as something that is by all means very cute, but incapable of understanding the complexities involved in the real politics of change. The conceptualisation of digital natives as a young generation of users may entail a similar act of 'othering' that views their politics of change as different, while at the same time failing to notice that despite

their difference, they are very real. I suggest that by shifting our 'othering' gaze from the indigenous actors called digital natives, to the indigenous landscapes in which various types of actors operate, we can benefit from learning about the complexity, heterogeneity and multiplicity of situated knowledges and practices that take place in hybrid geographical and digital spaces.

I conclude by returning to the terminological problem of digital natives. Consider, for example, how the current generation of digital natives would behave ten or twenty years from now, when they are no longer 'young' and when digital technologies and spaces would probably be very different from the way we know them today. Would they still be considered 'natives' in these future spaces? Would they rather become 'immigrants' or 'settlers' in the spaces considered their place of birth, as is the case now with CSOs having to adapt their campaigns and strategies to social media platforms? It may very well be so that the paradigm of the 'native', with its connotations of subjugation of power and chronological orders attached to it, will be abandoned in the future. For now, the term is here to stay. As Shah claimed, we would rather treat the concept of digital natives as an umbrella term, or a "placeholder" (Shah, 2010, p. 13). Following Shah, and by focusing on the return to the local cause, this chapter treated the concept of digital natives as "a holder of place".

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Endnotes

- 1 Jansen, Fieke. 2010. "Digital Natives with a Cause? Thinkathon. Organized by Hivos and the Centre for Internet and Society on the 6-8 December 2010." Hivos. <http://www.hivos.net/Hivos-Knowledge-Programme/Themes/Digital-Natives-with-a-Cause/News/Digital-Natives-with-a-Cause-Thinkathon>.
- 2 Note that the 'nativity' referred to originally is that of a language, rather than a place of birth, a point to which I return.
- 3 The turn from the 'cyber' and 'virtual' to the 'digital' is based on Rogers (2009). For an overview of the umbrella of terms related to 'digital natives' see Shah, 2010.
- 4 See, for example, the Merriam Webster Dictionary definition for 'Native'. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/native>.
- 5 This chapter does not map all forms of Digital Native activism, but focuses mostly on forms of public protests facilitated by digital technologies.
- 6 This is not to claim that cyberactivism was 'born' in Seattle. Older practices of cyberactivism date back to the 1980s. See, for example, Rheingold 1993.
- 7 See, for example, ("Can Egypt's Internet Movement Be Exported?" 2011) and ("Social Media, Cellphone Video Fuel Arab Protests," 2011).
- 8 Global Voices Online. <http://globalvoicesonline.org/>. Accessed May 2, 2011.
- 9 In March 2011, for example, Global Voices Online reported that the Cameroonian government banned access to Twitter via SMS, an issue that did not travel outside Cameroon in the news space. See Global Voices Online. 2011. "Cameroon: Netizens React

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- 12 The Manifesto was eventually removed from Facebook. But it is still blogged on the group's Wordpress platform. <http://gazaybo.wordpress.com/about/>. Accessed May 2, 2011.

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Annotation

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"The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there." The parameters of Anat's endeavor to define the digital 'native,' 'settler,' and 'immigrant' have incredibly, in merely four years, shifted radically, in a post-Snowden moment that has witnessed Facebook going public and debates over net neutrality, occasioned by the increasingly visible nexus between governments and technology corporations.

Prensky's (2001) seminal essay defines digital natives as young people who "have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age." By this definition, it is undeniable that all the university students I have taught during my career, by virtue of economic privilege and access, belong to this category. However, these experiences have demonstrated to me that there is no magical osmosis of what it means to 'be' digital—in fact, the more native to the manner born these generations are, they are *less* likely to see the potential of technologies as activist tools, due to the proprietary holding pens created by technology corporations. The

visible repercussion of neoliberal practices in the technological sector is an alienation of these digitally native generations from the means of production underpinning the tools they use, forcing their political engagement only at the level of interface. One of the most prominent examples of this would be the rise of the petition site, which has increased exponentially with the popularity of social networking and, I would argue, stages a further turn that has been precipitated by the shift from the transnational cause to the local that Anat discusses in her article.

These processes have now created a context that mobilises the labour of these users in the service of often hyperlocal causes that are made visible by the transnational nature of the Web, thus emptying out the category of activism, and problematizing the definition of both protest and demonstration. Is the act of digital participation still considered as an activist gesture? Or do these forms of digital participation foster a different mode of political subjecthood which can readily operate under certain conditions circumscribed by a World Wide Web that increasingly exists in corporate silos? Questions of access, education, literacy, as well as the linguistic fault lines that divide urban from rural in South Asia, somewhat undermine the efficacy of technology

as a tool for protest, although the increasing penetration of feature phones and mobile networks might accelerate these processes. Given these uneven contours that shape 'the digital', maybe the condition of being a digital native is determined by making full use of the technologies that are available to one, and this in itself can be construed as Haraway's (1988) 'situated knowledge.'

Four of the founding questions at the heart of this reader are: 1) how

do technologies change the way we protest, 2) how do we enact activism at the level of the digital, 3) how does the digital shape activism, and 4) how does activism shape the digital. Anat's article engages with all of these questions, and explores what it means when these questions are posed together in concert. The answers to these questions are not straight-forward.

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