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Jørgensen, Andreas Møller

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Kunuk took it to the streets of Greenland: single-issue protests in a young online democracy

Andreas Møller Jørgensen

Ilisimatusarfik, University of Greenland, Nuuk, Greenland

KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

Single-issue protests and online mobilization have proliferated in the wake of social media. While significant ground has been covered regarding the changing possibilities for mobilization, the question of how specific circumstances condition the political impact of online mobilization and public protests has received much less attention. During the last couple of years, Greenlanders have increasingly employed Facebook to mobilize the populace and arrange public demonstrations with noteworthy results. Arguing that single-issue protests cannot be separated from the issues they are concerned with, the paper explores how a single and potential trivial political issue – a new parliament building – developed from a prestige project supported by a nearly unanimous Parliament into a public-contested issue and a failed political project. The paper invokes Actor-Network Theory to account for the trajectory of the issue and how it was translated along the way as actors built and broke alliances. The concepts of mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes are employed to shed light on the conditions of possibilities for the emergence, development and impact of the protest against the parliament building. Finally, the paper discusses social media's impact on the image of politically engaged Inuit and on the power relations between citizens and parliament in Greenland. This discussion is of paramount importance as Greenlanders are struggling with their colonial heritage while they are constructing Greenlandic democracy.

Introduction

> *I definitely believe that the Greenlanders are becoming more aware that political participation matters. It's a consciousness that's growing in the population.* (Interview, February 26, 2015)

A painting from the 1860s by Aron of Kangeq[1] depicts a blubber trade between a Greenlandic hunter and a Danish trade manager of The Royal Greenland Trading Department. The trade manager's assistant places a finger on the scale and cheats the hunter of his rightful price. Everyone sees it, but no one does anything about it. Not the hunter, nor the crowd of people that has gathered around the scene. It would be seen as offensive to challenge the authoritative trade manager. The traditional Inuit virtues of reticence, modesty, and taciturnity became means of self-repression (Lynge, 2003). What would Kunuk have done, Lynge asks? Kunuk is a figure of legends: a skilled hunter who has witnessed violent repression throughout his life, who detests any kind of chieftaincy but who is also reticent, modest, and taciturn. Kunuk would have placed a finger on the scale, tip the balance and ensure a fair trade without offending the perpetrating authorities, Lynge replies. Kunuk was not self-repressive, he had a good sense of what is right and just, and he was polite and humane.

The origin of the Kunuk legend is unknown – it has been passed down through generations, altered into several versions along the way, and finally written down in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries (Rasmussen, 1924; Rink, 1866) – and Aron made his painting sometime in the 1860s when Greenland was still a Danish colony. Much has changed since then. Most significantly, in 1979, Greenland became a Home-Rule within the Kingdom of Denmark. Parliamentary multiparty democracy was introduced and an independent national parliament, Inatsisartut, was established (Dahl, 1986). For the first time Greenlandic politics was to be decided by Greenlanders themselves. Arguing for what he believed to be the necessary skills and virtues in a self-governing people in transition from colony to independence Lynge recalled the

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[1] Aron of Kangeq (1822–1869) was a Greenlandic hunter, writer, and painter. His paintings often depict the encounters between Inuit and Danish colonizers.

legend of Kunuk. Each and every Greenlander had to be Kunuk if they were to stay clear of self-repression, govern themselves democratically, and honour the traditional Inuit virtues.

In 1996, the internet hit the shores of the world's largest island. Since then, and especially during the last decade, Greenlanders have employed the internet to create for themselves new ways of political engagement and participation. While national and local governments primarily use the internet to provide information and to a lesser extent consult the citizenry, citizens use it increasingly to monitor politics and politicians, push the political agenda, display political convictions, and organize protests. The year 2014 saw two major protests that substantially challenged the institutional political power. In August, protesters convinced the national parliament to discard the plans for a new parliament building. A month later, protesters caused the downfall of the Government. Rather than placing a discrete finger on the scale, the most articulate and visible Kunuks as of today mobilize likeminded through social media and take it to the streets.

The paper explores the conditions of possibilities for the emergence, development and outcome of the protest against the parliament building. The exploration is guided by the framework of mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes (McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). However, because the protest against the parliament building cannot be separated from the issue itself, we need to expand the focus and trace the wider trajectory of the political issue. Thus, the framework above is expanded by the notions of relational actors, translation and issue politics (Marres, 2007) that are employed to trace and account for the trajectory of the parliament building; how it developed from a prestige project supported by an almost unanimously Parliament into a contested public issue which among other took the forms of online mobilization and street protests, and, finally, into a failed political project. Before the conclusions, the paper compares today's politically engaged Greenlander, of which protesters are one important configuration, with the legend of Kunuk and discusses the impact that the internet has had on the image of politically engaged Inuit and on the power relations between the people and the Parliament.

The internet and single-issue protests

A growing body of literature explores the relation between the internet and especially social media, on the one hand, and mobilization and protests, on the other hand (Garrett, 2006). Focus tends to be directed at the improved possibilities for mobilization that social media provides and questions often evolve around how protesters mobilize themselves, who participates, and who does not (Anduiza, Cristancho, & Sabucedo, 2014; Bekkers, Beunders, Edwards, & Moody, 201; Nam, 2012). These are very important questions to be addressed in order to understand social media's impact on the proliferation of protests and in order to evaluate the democratic legitimacy hereof. What is much less explored is how specific circumstances condition the development and outcome of such protests (Garrett, 2006).

Garret suggests that the emergence, development and outcome of ICT facilitated protests and social movements can be studied by employing the framework of mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes (McAdam et al., 1996). Mobilizing structures are formal and informal social structures as well as tactical repertoires of familiar forms of action that enable individuals to organize and engage in political collective action. Opportunity structures are conditions that are favourable to social movement activity such as the political system's accessibility, the stability or fragmentation of the political elites', and elite allies. Finally, framing processes designate the strategic attempts to craft and disseminate

the narratives used to justify or discredit political movements (Garrett, 2006). The concepts have a lot to offer with regard to the study of protests in an information society and I maintain, in line with Garrett, that the framework is an effective analytical orienting device. It is, however, limited in at least two ways. First, it is too static to account for the dynamics of social movements, the issues they struggle with, and their opponents (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Second, while there is a significant relation between social movements and the case investigated in this paper, the latter is more abrupt, short lived, and is in general akin to today's internet mediated contestation (Van den Hoven, 2005) and single-issue campaigns (Ward, Gibson, & Lusoli, 2003). The protesters in Greenland were united solely for a single cause and, which is perhaps even more striking, single events, and did not claim allegiance to any specific movement. It is, in other words, difficult to separate the emergence, development, and outcome of the single-issue protest from the trajectory and fate of the parliament building itself.

We need, therefore, to explore the trajectory of the political issue before and beyond the actual protests. An actor-network theoretical (ANT) approach to politics is especially suited for this task because it explicitly characterizes democratic processes as particular practices of issue articulation (Marres, 2007). Articulation not only implies that the issue in question is constituted along the way. Rather, because everything is what it is due to its relations (Law, 2009), the actors are also constituted as they get involved in and direct the trajectory of the political dispute. The protesters, for example, come into being only in relation to the issue of the parliament building. Likewise, the adversaries are also constituted as such in the course of the political dispute. Actors, then, continuously take part in the constitution of each other and political issues. They do so by translating actions and events and by building alliances between each other (Latour, 1990). Actors that support and are supported by strong alliances have a greater impact on the construction and trajectory of a specific political issue. Translation, however, is always potentially treacherous, why alliances always are open for change.

ANT leaves no explanatory room for the concepts of mobilizing structure, opportunity structure, and framing process. We need not, however, discard these concepts per se. Instead, we are to establish them from the ground up. The distinctions drawn by these concepts come in handy insofar as ANT does not offer any vocabulary for differentiating among the multiple ways in which the emergence and outcome of single-issue protests are conditioned. In other words, where ANT provides the vocabulary for a detailed account of an issue's trajectory, the framework of mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing processes lets us generate generic lessons about the conditions of possibilities for single-issue protests.

Method

In this paper, ANT's methodological mantra to follow the actor (Latour, 2005) is translated into follow the issue. In order to follow the issue of the parliament building and explore its trajectory, we are in need of rich context-dependent information, which in-depth case studies provide (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The researcher has lived in Greenland for five years and worked at the government-owned online citizen portal, Sullissivik.gl, for three and a half years prior to conducting the study. The experience of working and living in Greenland necessarily influences the study in implicit and important ways. In addition, the paper makes explicit use of several types of data: press material, statistics and research literature on current and historical politics, political and administrative reports, drafts, and proposals, data from Facebook groups and pages as well as loosely structured one-to-one, group, and online interviews with citizens, parliamentarians, and public administration employees.

The analytical task is twofold. First, the trajectory of the parliament building issue is reconstructed from the data. The reconstruction is especially attentive to the diversity of actors, the multiple ways in which they direct the development of the issue, how the issue is translated along the way, the alliances that are built, enforced and broken, and the continuous making of actors and issue. Second, in order to disclose the conditions of possibilities for the emergence, development, and outcome of the protest, the mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing processes are established. This implies that we widen the analytical gaze somewhat from the local processes.

The trajectory of the parliament building issue

For at least a decade, the Greenlandic Parliament has been looking for new buildings. In 2006, the Parliament decided for an expansion and renovation of the building that houses the Parliament and the Parliament's secretariat, the Bureau for Inatsisartut. During public tendering, the costs rose from 2.64 to 7.93 million GBP. Because of the rising costs and because the Government prioritized educational facilities, the Parliament discarded the proposal in 2007. Instead, it was suggested that a former hotel was purchased and used by the Bureau for Inatsisartut, thus leaving free space in the existing buildings for new parliament facilities. This solution never passed the ideational stage because it was impractical to separate the Parliament and its secretariat and because the Government wanted to use the hotel for student housing (Presidium of Inatsisartut, 2013). In 2012, a ten-storey building housing a shopping mall and the Central Public Administration was constructed in the centre of Nuuk. The building divided the public opinion and it was soon nicknamed among other 'Rivejernet' (The Grater) due to its threadlike metal exterior décor (Nyvold, 2012). A year later, a new proposal for a parliament building saw the light of day. A workgroup consisting of the Bureau for Inatsisartut and the Ministry of Housing, Building and Infrastructure recommended that the old buildings were replaced because they were too small, suspected to be infected by mould, and outdated (Presidium of Inatsisartut, 2013). During the six months that it took for the Presidium of Inatsisartut to make the proposal ready for a vote in Parliament, the projects' scale and costs escalated significantly. In June, it was estimated that it would be about 3000 square meters and cost about 10.05 million DKK (Presidium of Inatsisartut, 2013). In the final draft of 27 November 2013, it was estimated that it would be anywhere between 3000 and 5000 square meters and cost between 10.05 and 20.1 million GBP (Udvalg for Forretningsordenen, 2013). The location for the building was not chosen as of yet but was to be decided upon in collaboration with the municipality of Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, which is in charge of city planning in Nuuk (the capitol of Greenland). All parties, except for the Democrats, voted for the proposal and a 0.32 million GBP grant was allocated to the preparatory work. The Democrat's sentiment and argument echoed the resistance towards the prior construction projects:

> *It is not wise financially and it is not fair considering the needs of the population. The Democrats believe that the money can and should be used much better. We believe it is wrong to spend so much money on a building to Inatsisartut, when our children are educated in dilapidated and unhealthy class rooms. We believe it is wrong to spend so much money on a building to Inatsisartut, when ordinary people must live with the consequences and effects of mould in their homes, because there is no money for renovation. And finally, we find it wrong that politicians once again place themselves before the people.* (Demokraterne, 2013)

At this time, the project received little public attention and few critical responses were raised in the popular press and on Facebook. Notwithstanding the lack of publicity, some significant actors were deeply engaged in framing the issue and in building alliances. Thus, an almost unanimous Parliament agreed that a

new building was required because of the state and functional limitations of the current buildings. As we will see, these functional concerns later yielded to symbolic arguments. The Democrats broke the Parliament alliance and contrasted the desire for a new parliament building with the needs of the population. As the Parliament passed the proposal, the issue changed into a question of the location of the new building. This change brought a new significant actor, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, onto the stage. In the ensuing months, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq and Bureau for Inatsisartut identified three potential locations for the building: Aqqaluk's Square, a historically significant green patch, Nuutoqaq, the colonial harbour, and Arsiffik, which is downtown. On 6 June 2014, the Bureau for Inatsisartut applied for a permit to construct the building at Aqqaluk's Square (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014b).

The decision to locate the building at Aqqaluk's square, however, tapped directly into an ongoing local controversy between Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq and another noteworthy actor, Nuuk Local Historical Association. Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq was planning to restore and rebuild the colonial harbour, which the Local Historical Association contested. On 18 May, the association had demonstrated against Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq (Høegh, 2014). The demonstration was followed by 898 signatures (Nuuk Local Historical Association, Facebook update, 4 June 2014) and an open letter to the Municipal board on 6 June – the very same day that the Bureau for Inatsisartut applied for a permit to use Aqqaluk's Square – arguing for the preservation of the colonial harbour (Nuuk Local Historical Association, Facebook update, June 6, 2014). A third-party petition site – www.skrivunder.net – was used to collect 381 out of the 898 signatures. Facebook was used to disperse the online petition and create awareness of the demonstration. Nuuk Local Historical Association was, therefore, already alert and mobilized when the decision to locate the new parliament building at Aqqaluk's square was made public and it promptly objected to the decision (Kristensen, 2014a). Though the association would not collect signatures again, it would still put up a fight. As Stephen Heilmann of Nuuk Local Historical Association told the press:

> I have told my old friend, Lars-Emil Johansen (President of Inatsisartut), that as long as I live he will not be allowed to build a parliament on Aqqaluk's Square … Both Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq and Inatsisartut know our position so we will not create a new petition against the parliament building. But we promise to continue our work to preserve the old Nuuk.
> (Kristensen, 2014b)

The parliament building had become a contested issue involving at least two adversaries: The Parliament and the President of Inatsisartut (the presiding officer of the Parliament) on the one side and Nuuk Local Historical Association on the other. At the beginning, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq was placed on the same side as the Parliament. The Municipal Board, however, sought a mediating part and announced on 30 July that Nuuk residents would be consulted on the location of the parliament building through an online vote. The location of the parliament building was no longer a mere administrative matter but a full-fledged contested public question. It was, however, to be resolved by Nuuk residents only. The rest of the population was not to have a say on the whereabouts of the parliament building. The consultation was open from 20 August until 1 September (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014c) and all Nuuk residents at 16 years of age and older could vote. Though the Bureau for Inatsisartut had only applied for a permit to use Aqqaluk's Square, voters could choose among all three locations that were initially identified during the preparatory work. As a fourth option, voters could choose none of these locations. They could also comment their choice. By inviting Nuuk residents into the decision process, a new actor, the voter, was outlined and brought into play. This new actor served as a fresh partner with whom the municipality could fix the alliance with Nuuk residents, which had suffered somewhat during the recent controversy with Nuuk Local Historical Association regarding the renewal of the colonial harbour.

Once the location had become an issue of public vote, the Bureau and the President of Inatsisartut started to address the voters directly and advocate strongly for Aqqaluk's Square. Two leaflets were produced and sent to all Nuuk residents, a Facebook page dedicated to the project[2] was created and all material was accumulated on a sub-site to the Parliament's website. One leaflet constructed a historical argument that Aqqaluk's Square had been the centre of Greenlandic democracy since 1857, why it was the ideal location for the new parliament building (Bureau for Inatsisartut, August 2014a). The other leaflet argued strongly for Aqqaluk's Square and debased the two other locations (Bureau for Inatsisartut, 2014b). At the same time, the argument for the building shifted. Instead of focusing on the practical limitations of the old buildings, it was argued that the new building should reflect the Greenlandic people, be an iconic building, and a source of pride. Thus, the building was by the Bureau and the President of Inatsisartut translated from a practical into a symbolic issue. The arguments presented in the leaflets were repeated on the Facebook page and on the website. The attempts to persuade the voters, however, were not successful but instead viewed as propaganda (Nyvold, 2014a). Critical voices argued that democracy was not introduced until 1979 and that the first Parliament had its seat in the very same buildings that the current Parliament wanted to abandon. In addition, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq disclosed factual flaws in one of the leaflets (2014d) and on the Facebook page (2014e). Meanwhile, political parties that initially voted for the new building started to separate themselves from the approach and the arguments employed by the Bureau and the President. On 20 August, Inuit Ataqatigiit, which was the second largest party in Parliament, wrote in an open letter to the President of Inatsisartut:

> We demand that the President of Inatsisartut clarifies to the public that it is only him and the Bureau for Inatsisartut that are behind the campaign. This is necessary because many hold the view that it is a unanimous Inatsisartut that has chosen the location of Aqqaluk's Square and that it is a unanimous Inatsisartut that is behind the campaign. (2014)

Much critique was raised by citizens on diverse Facebook arenas including the page created by the Bureau for Inatsisartut. The Bureau deleted the critical posts and comments from its page. The Bureau excused the deletion and explained that it was a mistake that had happened during a Facebook update. The citizens did not believe the explanation and even more public outrage ensued (Nyvold, 2014b).

As critique built up, a curious compound actor consisting of the Bureau, the President, and the Parliament was constructed. The President of Inatsisartut was viewed as the main architect behind the entire project and the Bureau was critiqued for being too political and acting as the President's right hand. The President, on the other hand, argued that he was merely acting on behalf of the Parliament, which had passed the proposal. And, as noted above, members of Parliament started to separate themselves from both the President and the Bureau. Thus, old alliances between the Parliament and the President were crumbling, while new alliances between Nuuk residents, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, and at least some parties where forged.

On 21 August, three citizens called for and invited likeminded via Facebook[3] to a demonstration, which was to take place two days later on 23 August. The invitation summarized much of the critique as it had developed up until then.

> Do you also think that it is crazy to place the new parliament building at Aqqaluk's Square? Do you also think it is unjust that politicians want to spend about 20.1 million GBP on a new

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[2] https://www.facebook.com/aqqaluksplads/?fref=ts
[3] https://www.facebook.com/events/340565016121126/

parliament building when the money could be used more wisely elsewhere? Do you also think that Inatsisartut's campaign for Aqqaluk's Square is distasteful and manipulative? Show your dissatisfaction together with us when we walk from Nuuk Center to Aqqaluk's Square. Bring your banners and family and friends. The more the better. (Facebook invitation, August 21, 2014)

The invitation to the event quickly spread through Facebook and two days later, 800 out of 4100 invited had announced on Facebook that they would participate in the demonstration. Despite the short notice, approximately 1000 protesters gathered on Aqqaluk's Square (Schultz-Lorentzen, 2014). While this is a small and easily ignored crowd in most other countries, it was estimated to be one of the largest demonstrations ever in Greenland. The targets were the Parliament, the Bureau for Inatsisartut, and the President of Inatsisartut. The demand was not focused. Some wanted to save Aqqaluk's Square, some criticized the approach, and some reinvigorated the argument, which had been made against the 2007 construction plans and which the Democrats had made against the current plans, and demanded that the Parliament discarded its plans altogether and spent the money on public housing and schools instead. The protesters' arguments were all the more weighty because Greenland's economy is strained and dependent on an annual Danish subsidy of approximately GPB 353 million, which is approximately 56% of government revenues. Thus, demonstrators successfully translated the issue, which had been made into a local issue only concerned with the location of the parliament building, into a national question regarding the need for a parliament building.

When Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq's online vote ended on 1 September 2014, 22% of the eligible voters had cast their vote; 3% voted for Aqqaluk's Square and 53% voted for none of the locations (Epinion, 2014). The voters' comments, which were published along with the vote result, once again demanded that the Parliament dropped the project and instead focused on the needs of the population. Because of the public protests (Interview, November 12, 2014) and the vote results, the municipal board decided not to permit that the new Parliament building was constructed at Aqqaluk's Square (Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014b). In the ensuing months, the political support in the Parliament dropped significantly. In June 2015, the President of Inatsisartut publicly announced that the plans for a new parliament building were abandoned altogether due to the waning political support (Bureau for Inatsisartut, 2015). In other words, the Parliament alliance had broken down in face of the alliance between protesters, voters, online consultations and Facebook which had translated the parliament building from a political prestige project that would symbolise the Greenlandic democracy into an egoistic elite project that neglected the needs of the population.

The conditions of possibilities for the single-issue protests

In order to disclose the circumstances of the single-issue protests we now turn to the conditions of possibilities for the emergence, development, and outcome hereof. This is done by establishing the mobilizing structures, opportunity structures, and framing processes. In turn, this abstraction from the local processes will add some support and weight to the account of the parliament building's trajectory.

Mobilizing structures

There is no easy way to estimate the effect of the mobilizing structures on the emergence and impact of the protest against the parliament building. No collective identity was created and the protesters were

hardly organized. Instead of identifying with a social movement, protesters united for single events and a few interrelated causes that were united by the parliament building. Some protesters cared for Aqqaluk's Square, some criticized the Parliament's approach, some demanded that the money should be spent on public housing and schools instead. In addition, the protesters did not have a grand repertoire of prior and similar protest to learn from. Protests as such are not novel. The Association of Fishers and Hunters in Greenland, for example, arrange demonstrations regularly as part of the fish quota negotiations (Jacobsen & Raakjær, 2012). Unlike these protests, however, the demonstration against the parliament building was not organized by an advocacy group and it was not a tool in ongoing negotiations. It was, rather, popular dissatisfaction and frustration with policies, politics, and politicians manifested in a single issue. Had the issue not developed in a way that could contain this diversity of concerns, it would, most likely, not have attracted the same amount of protesters and not have had the same impact. The protest on 18 May, for example, that was organized by Nuuk Local Historical Association and which focused solely on the preservation of the colonial harbour, attracted only 35–40 protesters. The proliferation of single-issue protests and campaigns that unifies diverse interests seems to be tightly connected with the spread and increasing political employment of the internet and especially social media like Facebook. At least, protesters themselves, state that Facebook is a necessity for single-issue protests to develop and gain traction (Interview, January 19, 2015). Thus, the social network structure of Facebook seems to be the only thing that unambiguously operates in favour of the single-issue protest against the parliament building.

Opportunity structures

The accessibility of the political elite is a significant factor for the impact of e-protests (Garrett, 2006). With a population of approximately 56,000, 31 seats in Parliament and 70 seats in the four Municipal Boards, there is one parliamentarian per 555 citizens. The political and administrative elites, furthermore, resemble the average population in much greater degree today than during the colonial era, where these positions were reserved exclusively to Danes (Seiding, 2011). Statistically, then, the citizenry is well represented by the legislative bodies. Except for elections for Parliament and Municipal Boards every fourth year, citizens, however, do not have many possibilities to impact legislation. While sessions in Parliament and Municipal Boards for the most part are public, citizens cannot initiate or decide on amendments or recalls (Bureau for Inatsisartut, 2013; Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, 2014a) and referendums are very rare. During the home rule period, there has been only two referendums, namely on Greenland's membership of EU in 1982 (Skydsbjerg, 1999) and on the transition from Home-Rule to Self-Rule in 2008.

Access to the political elite is, furthermore, complicated by geography and demography. With the size of Saudi Arabia and a population size of 56,000, Greenland ranges among the world's least densely populated countries (Statistics Greenland, 2015). Eighty per cent of the land is covered by the Inland Ice, leaving only the coastline inhabitable. There are about 80 towns and settlements spread along the western and southern coastline and a few settlements on the east coast and you can only travel from one town to the next by boat or airplane as no two towns are connected by road. In addition, very few persons make up the power elites and nepotism is a constant threat (Ankersen & Christiansen, 2013; Christiansen & Togeby, 2003).

A small population certainly makes nepotism a real threat. But perhaps it also makes direct public influence more probable because protesters can make use of their personal ties to further causes of public concern. Stephen Heilmann of Nuuk Local Historical Association and the President of Inatsisartut were, for example, old friends. The decisive difference between nepotism and personal direct influence, then, is whether the issues pursued are of private or public interest. In other words, if a person makes use of his or her personal

relations in order to push an agenda that is of both private and public interest, should we label this nepotism or direct political influence? Either way, with 40,260 eligible voters, 1000 protesters make up significant numbers. In comparison, the President of Inatsisartut, who was a key target of the protest, got 400 personal votes at the 2013 Parliament election. With social media like Facebook and online petition sites like skrivunder.net, it has become significantly easier to unite 1000 likeminded and collect 1000 signatures for a single cause.

The emergence of elite allies and the Parliament's lack of control might also help explain the protest's immediate success. As noted above, protesters did not have prior and similar protest to learn from. But neither did the President and the Bureau for Inatsisartut. The political elite did not have any ready response. Once a response was crafted, it backfired and the Parliament alliance started to break up and some elite members started to ally themselves with the protesters. In the end, the President of Inatsisartut, the Bureau for Inatsisartut, and the Parliament left as losers – as legislative institutions that cared more for own needs than those of the population. The immediate political impact, however, did not translate into any long-term changes, which might be explained by the historical stability of the political elite. The President of Inatsisartut has been a leading figure in in the political party Siumut since its inception and Siumut has won every Parliament election except for one since parliamentary democracy was introduced in 1979.

Framing processes

While the parliament building was continuously translated, the mobilizers, protesters and the protest were subject to much less framing processes. The adversaries did not frame the protests as more or less democratically legitimate. Rather, in the aftermath of the protest, the President of Inatsisartut said that he understood and respected the protesters' message and that public debate only was to be desired (Thorsen, 2014). The positive framing of the protest by all parties might be explained by the fact that citizen involvement is high on the popular political agenda. It is especially prominent in light of the country's colonial history. As they move towards greater independence, Greenlanders distance themselves explicitly from the way politics was conducted during colonial rule. For Greenlanders, it is not a hypothetical scenario that policies are passed and implemented without their consent. It is lived history. Political non-involvement is judged in light of this history, which no one wants to repeat. In light of this, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq's online consultation was pitched as an entirely new way of engaging the population and symbolized a radical brake with politics as usual. In contrast, the Parliament, the President of Inatsisartut, and the Bureau of Inatsisartut came to symbolize disengagement from public interests. The project was translated from an 'iconic signature construction, which may be a source of our Greenlandic nation's pride' (Bureau for Inatsisartut, August 2014b) into a symbol of a Parliament out of touch with the population and politicians caring more for political prestige projects than public interests.

Discussion

The paper was introduced with a recollection of Lynge's appeal to the virtues of Kunuk. Lynge's portrait of Kunuk is not to be read as an accurate depiction of traditional or original Inuit. Several alternative versions of the Kunuk legend tell incompatible tales of a man that responds to suppression with aggression and violence. If we read these legends as essential descriptions, we would have to choose which one captures reality the best. The appeal to Kunuk is, rather, a historically conscious and strategic call for the virtues

which Lynge deemed necessary in a self-governing people in transition from colony to independence. The protesters in the case above, obviously, make up but a small portion of the people. It is, however, interesting to compare Lynge's image of Kunuk with the politically engaged protesters as of today because they embody the two interrelated forms of practices that Greenlandic democracy continuously is shaped by: an identity line, which represents traditional Inuit virtues and ways of living, and a modernity line, which represents capitalism, market logics and globalism (Adolphsen, 2003). We can therefore ask: Do the protesters in the case above compare to the identity line as represented by Lynge's Kunuk or is the online politically engaged protester significantly different from this image?

For starters, the protesters were not self-repressive. The decision for a new parliament building had as much democratic legitimacy as one can possibly wish for within the limits of a representative democracy. Only the Democrats voted against the proposal and they only had two seats in Parliament out of 31. The protesters, however, did not succumb to the authority and democratic legitimacy bestowed upon the Parliament. In addition, the protesters had a good sense of what is right and just in the sense that they assessed the Parliament's plan for a parliament building against the backdrop of Greenland's economic predicament and against the more pressing issues of public housing and education. However, unlike Kunuk, they were not reticent, modest, and taciturn and they did not mind offending the authorities. When faced with policies they deemed unjust, they did not place a discrete finger on the scale. Instead, they mobilized likeminded through social media and took their political disagreements and frustrations to the streets. By making it easier to mobilize likeminded and orchestrate demonstrations, the internet and social media in particular have tipped the power balance slightly between the protesters and the Parliament. As the case study illustrates, protesters united behind a common but flexible cause can make a change in parliament politics. This kind of political participation evolves around single issues and has a short intense life cycle. When people unite behind a single issue, they dissolve once the issue is resolved or once they have expressed their frustrations. Next time they meet on the streets –and it tends to be the same crowd of politically engaged people that meet up (Interview, February 26, 2015) – the issue, the paroles, and the banners have changed. It is, therefore, difficult to construct a uniform movement that could carry political changes forth in the long run. In other words, online mobilization and protests impact politics issue by issue. This is a disappointment to some protesters:

> It was a waste of time to come up with arguments and create debates. It didn't lead to anything concrete. It didn't lead to any changes as such. I think that the case against Aleqa [the Premier] illustrates this the most. A new election was held. But to what purpose? (Interview, February 27, 2015)

With Dean (2010), we might say that protesters do not challenge or overthrow but influence the society of which they are part issue by issue. Thus, political alienation and mistrust are addressed not by strengthening the representative ties but by publicly contesting parliament politics. Furthermore, evidence suggests that the protest against the parliament building is not unique.

> In the last two to three years there have been as many demonstrations as there have been previously in the whole history of Greenland. (Interview, February 26, 2015)

Though such events have increased in numbers, intensity, and size during the last couple of years, they are not representative – not of the population nor of the spectrum of political participation. While the internet and social media have made it easier to connect with politically likeminded across the Inland Ice, raise your voice from a distance, and mobilize likeminded, it is unequally distributed. The nationwide private internet penetration in Greenland is 72% and 73% of the population uses at least one type of social media (HS

Analyse, 2013). However, internet access remains expensive and it is primarily city dwellers who are online. Internet penetration is 75% for towns and 53% for settlements (HS Analyse, 2013). Internet access is more reliable and cheaper in Nuuk than in the Northern and Eastern parts, where the customer base is significantly smaller and internet comes via satellites. As a consequence, though there are notable exceptions from the rule, it is primarily Nuuk residents who employ the internet and social media politically. It is, in addition, important to remember that online mobilization and protests make up only one form of political participation and not that which is practised by most people. Thus, a Facebook group dedicated to debating Greenlandic politics attracts around 5800 users and election turn out has since 2002 been over 70% on average (Ackren, 2014). Political participation, then, comes in many disguises among which online mobilizations and protests are but one.

Conclusions

The aim of the paper was twofold: one, to explore the trajectory of the parliament building issue and specifically to address the circumstances of the protests. Two, to assess the impact that the internet and especially social media have had on the ways that political engagement unfolds in Greenland. While the nature of online mobilizations and participants has been investigated to some extent, less attention has been given to the links between historical and structural circumstances, local processes and political impact. In order to explore these links sufficiently, a single in-depth case study of the parliament building issue was conducted. Greenland presents us with a case unlike most others. It is a former Danish colony striving for greater independence. Today, it is an autonomous Self-Rule within the Danish Realm and dependent on Danish subsidiaries. Its parliamentary democracy is not much more than 35 years old. It is massive and extremely sparsely populated, why people look to the internet to tie the population together. And finally, with the rise of social media and especially Facebook people have turned to the internet to unite likeminded, mobilize the population, and arrange political demonstrations with impressive results.

By tracing the trajectory of the parliament building issue, the paper showed how it was translated from a national prestige project supported by a nearly unanimous Parliament into a local and publicly contested issue and back into a failed national political project. Several and diverse actors took part in directing the trajectory of the issue. Most of these actors – the Parliament, the political parties, the President of Inatsisartut, The Bureau for Inatsisartut, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq, and Nuuk Local Historical Association – are instructionally anchored and existed long before the issue. Despite this, some of them were reconfigured along the way. Most notably, a compound actor consisting of the Parliament, the President of Inatsisartut, and the Bureau for Inatsisartut was constructed. Other actors – the mobilizers, the protesters, and the voters – did not exist prior the issue of the parliament building but were constituted along the way. Because of this, it is impossible to separate single-issue protests from the issue which brings them into being. This pushes the question if social movements are any different. Are social movement constituted by the issues they address and, if so, can we reasonably separate the two? It is beyond the scope of this paper to tackle this theoretical question and it is left for others to pick up.

The study showed that protesters mobilized online can make a change in parliament politics issue by issue. However, the emergence and impact of single-issue protests are conditioned by mobilizing structures, opportunity structures and framing processes. Thus, the internet and especially the network structures of Facebook seem to create favourable conditions for the emergence and development of single-issue protests. Internet access, however, is unevenly distributed and connects those most remote the least. The presence of similar conflicts between established adversaries enhances the chance that issues become

publicly contested. The novelty of single-issue protests is simultaneously an advantage and a disadvantage for the development of protests. On the one hand, protesters do not have a repertoire of prior practices but neither does the political elite. The elite's poor communication and handling of the situation thus created favourable opportunity structures for the protest against the parliament building. In addition, size apparently matters. When there are only 40,000 potential voters, 1000 protesters cannot be ignored. Finally, because of Greenland's colonial history, political participation is welcomed in most forms by all parties. As a consequence, it is difficult even for opponents to frame single-issue protests negatively. Furthermore, history provides a vivid background against which diverse actors might frame their actions. Thus, Kommuneqarfik Sermersooq's consultation created a symbolic dividing line between a citizen involving municipality and a disengaged Parliament–President.

The development of new paths for political participation seems to be informed equally by images of traditional Inuit virtues and images of modernism. Online single-issue protesters embody both of these images. Like the Inuit legend of Kunuk, they step up when facing unjust policies and authorities. Unlike Kunuk, they are not taciturn and they do not mind offending the authorities. While protesting certainly is the most vocal and distinctive form of political engagement as of today, it remains, however, but one form of political participation – and by far the most common. Election turnout has been rather stable at 70% and Facebook groups dedicated to political discussion, rather than mobilization, attract far more users. Thus, even though evidence suggests that the internet and especially Facebook primarily foster single-issue campaigns and protests, the impact on political engagement in Greenland is multifaceted.

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