

Social Media and Logics of Aggregation in Global Cities

The use of social media in modern day occupy movements has contributed to the aggregation of individuals in public space, and this form of occupation is redefining the role of the citizen. In global cities across the world, recent forms of “occupation” as political protest have reclaimed public space and thus transformed the urban zone into the global zone, where occupiers have influenced a shift in public discourse. The logic of aggregation is a progressive cultural framework proposed Jeffrey Juris, intended to explain the interaction between social media and the gathering of individuals in public space (2012). The present paper will build on this framework to examine how the role of social media influences the flow of information and leads to an aggregation of many individuals in public spaces, and thus transforms the physical space into a global platform. From this platform, individuals have the capability to reshape the social and political systems of the nation-state under the focus of the global lens. The factors affecting the trajectory of these movements will be discussed in the conclusion of this paper.

Most of the recent occupation movements for global justice have taken place in public parks or public squares of global cities such as New York, Cairo and Hong Kong. Many scholars agree that the global city is an ideal location to assemble mass direct action to gain traction and exposure as a movement (Juris 267). Yet none of these scholars articulate why these movements choose to congregate in global cities as eloquently as the renowned sociologist, Saskia Sassen. She first introduced the concept of the global city as a result of privatization defined as national economic

Comment [1]: Occupation has many different connotations such as American occupation of Iraq or the “occupied territories”

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systems opening up to foreign firms and national bodies participating in the global economic system (Sassen 2002). She argues that this globalization effect weakens the nation state as sub-national cities are encouraged to join supra-national entities on the global circuit. Sassen eloquently describes this process as a “re-scaling of strategic territories that articulate the new system” (p. #). In this context of new strategic territories, global cities have the ability to represent public space as located within the nation but belonging to the global circuit. This new concept provides the basis of the explanation for why modern day occupy movements capitalize on global cities as staging grounds for occupy movements, because the connectivity between cities on the global circuit provides the ultimate platform for gaining support and exposure. This paper will discuss how social media operates as the mechanism for gathering massive concentrations of people in public spaces, and why it is so important that the city is the point of concentration for networks to build collective identities and to represent their identity to themselves as well as to the world.

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Beginning in the late 2000s, new social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube gave alternative meaning to the word “viral,” such that it became common to use the term to describe the widespread dissemination of information, rather than the spread of infectious disease. The idea that communication flows can become viral is a central component to the communication and organization of modern day occupy movements (Juris 267). Although social media also benefited protest movements prior to the late 2000s serving as the main tool of communication, the horizontal networks constructed through older social media

such as listservs, only gave rise to communication between existing networks? diverse groups of people but rarely resulted in mobilization. In contrast, new social media has built upon these networks of networks and enabled the organization and assemblage of many diverse groups of people in public spaces (Juris 260). This feat is accomplished through microbroadcasting, generating feelings of solidarity within the social milieu, and the facilitation of physical movement across space.

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Microbroadcasting is the process of blasting out user-generated content to social networks, which allows individuals to circulate information about protests and movements (Juris 267). This process is fast, efficient and most importantly inexpensive if not completely free. The circulation of information occurs in real-time and individuals often post or receive messages continually so feelings of solidarity are generated through constant connectivity within these “person-to-person” networks (Juris 267). One of the distinct features of social media is the ability of these platforms to link different social milieus because of the low barriers to entry and the functional compatibility of these platforms across multiple devices. The accessibility of social media is critical to understanding how unique linkages between individuals explain the more extensive participation in recent occupy movements around the world. Possibly the most important facet of the interaction between social media and occupy movements is the coordination of physical movement across space (Juris 260). Juris sums up this relationship by noting social media “[facilitates] the mass aggregation of individuals within concrete locales through viral communication flows” (267). In effect, social media is the mechanism used to organize the complex interaction of face-to-face communication between

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individuals. Although social media can facilitate communication through networks of networks, occupation of physical space is the key element to developing a common sense of identity ~~through the~~ practicing ~~of~~ collective rituals (Sassen 2002).

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It is clear that one of the most effective tools of social networking is gathering masses of individuals to aggregate in public space ~~in~~ protest. Through the convergence of diverse groups of people who assemble in protest at a particular public space, the composition of the occupation becomes a “crowd of individuals” (Juris 267). This characteristic places an emphasis on individualism where personal narratives can spread rapidly through social media and be woven together by horizontal networks to form a collective perspective. However, the real impact of occupying public space in a global city is in the aggregation of individuals at a particular physical location that transforms the urban zone into a global zone, thus providing the people with a global platform to shine a light on their struggles.

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Sassen would argue that the transformation from local to global is possible because the globalization of economic activity converts the global city into a cross-border region where it represents a spatial unit belonging to both the nation and the global circuit (Sassen 2002). In the words of Sassen, this dynamic new territory belongs to a “new system” and thus may become subject to reclamation, which is where the significance of the occupation movement comes into play (2002).

Occupying public space in a privatized world is an act of reclaiming territory and this act redefines the local space to empower those who were once denied access to power through established avenues. The powerless gain access to the global platform through the global circuit and the benefit from the connectivity between

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global cities that form a supra-national entity. Therefore the global city is seen as a space where powerless individuals can shape history (Juris 261).

While it can be seen that new social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube enable local moments to become global movements, the trajectory of these movements is largely determined by the government's response (Juris 271). The most strategic zones in terms of physical space and conceptual symbolism lie within global cities as public squares and parks. These sites are transformed into global platforms during occupation movements through the use of new social media and the logic of aggregation. The novelty of these movements offers activists the chance to shape history by empowering those who are ordinarily denied access to power through established avenues (Sassen 2002). The problem of sustainability is widespread as these new social media tools may be powerful agents in aggregating the masses, yet, these concentrations of people will often disassemble as quickly as they once assembled after eviction from occupying public space (Juris 267). Therefore, the government's response to these occupation movements by evicting protesters can inhibit the momentum generated by the logics of aggregation. Whether these "crowds of individuals" can be sustained as a "movement with a collective identity" post-eviction, depends on if these movements can find new forms of public visibility (Juris 271). However, it is clear that as the central point of mass concentration the global city is an ideal place to stage and maintain large-scale assemblies of individuals.

This essay raises important questions and makes some bold conclusions. Your use of evidence was appropriate and your broader conclusions had effective support.

I think that while you reference it indirectly, you could detail the difference between logics of agglomeration and logics of networking because it does describe the distinction that you make between the horizontal communications practices and those that draw on existing networks.

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Works Cited

Juris, Jeffrey S. "Reflections on #Occupy Everywhere: Social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation." *American Ethnologist* 39.2 (2012): 260-279. Print.

Sassen, Saskia. "Locating Cities on Global Circuits." *Environment and Urbanization* 14.1 (2002): 13-30. Print.