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Seeing spatially: people, networks and movements in digital and urban spaces

Recent social movements have been figuratively and digitally ignited in digital media and yet these movements took form, materialised and claimed power in urban public spaces. Digital media and physical urban spaces have become interdependent dimensions of social movements. Together, they can provide 'spaces' for people to interact for the establishment of human agency and the expansion of social networks of the movements. By reading social movements spatially, this article offers to conceptualise the dialectical interplay between digital media and physical urban spaces in the making of contemporary social movements.

Keywords: Internet, digital media, urban space, social media, social movement

The entanglement of digital media with social movements has become a significant force transforming societies. Recent uprisings, from the Arab Spring to Spanish *Indignados*, from Occupy Wall Street movements to the Malaysian Bersih, have incorporated digital media as one of their important dimensions. However, while the new social movements may have been figuratively and digitally ignited in social media spaces such as Facebook and Twitter, the movements themselves took form, materialised and claimed power far outside digital social networks. They transpired in public urban spaces, on the streets and in the squares. Digital media do provide new opportunities for cost-effective networking, mobilisation and diffusion of contentions. Yet, a digital media-based movement is rarely an end in itself. Rather, a new means of providing existing social movements with a new layer of space where (communication and information based) non-corporeal activities can take place. Digital media and physical urban spaces have become interdependent dimensions of social movements. Together they can provide 'spaces' for people to interact for the establishment of human agency and the expansion of social networks of the movements. How, then, should we conceptualise the relationship between digital and urban spaces in the making of contemporary social movements?

There are many studies devoted to the democratising potential of digital media and the role of the Internet in facilitating transnational and global movement (Ayres, 2005; Bennett, 2003; Della Porta et al., 2006; Fisher et al., 2005; Juris, 2008). In studying movements' tactics and strategies, the Internet has been applauded for its capability to facilitate movements to transcend national boundaries (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001; Walgrave et al., 2008). Yet, there are very few studies that link digital media

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with ways that movements are created, expressed, lived and experienced spatially and locally in physical settings. Further, studies that delve into the linkages between digital and urban spaces in the formation of social movements and collective action – with notable exceptions (Castells, 2012; Marolt, 2008; Calhoun, 2007; Lim, 2002; 2003; 2006) – are a rarity.

Across the humanities and social sciences, the past three decades have witnessed 'a spatial turn', a shift towards geographically sensitive work with attentiveness to context, difference and the pre-eminence of locale. Built on the work of sociologists of space, such as Simmel, Foucault and, especially, Lefebvre, Marxist thinkers, such as Harvey, Soja, and Massey and others, reintroduced a spatial consciousness in social sciences and established a central place for spatial analysis in social theory. Space is socially produced and serves as a tool of thought and of action, as a means of production, control, domination and power (Lefebvre, 1991, 26). Since space, knowledge and power are necessarily related, 'it is somewhat arbitrary to try to disassociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand' (Foucault, 1984, 246). The implication of the intricate relationship between space and power is important to social movement research. Social movements are about the engagement of power. They entail social processes and relations that are spatial as well as historical. Space is, therefore, not merely a container of activism, but it 'constitutes and structures relationships and networks […]; situates social and cultural life including repertoires of contention; is integral to the attribution of threats and opportunities; is implicit in many types of category formation; and is central to scale-jumping strategies that aim to alter discrepancies in power among political contestants' (Martin and Miller, 2003, 144–45). In discussing contentious politics, a term that has come to replace 'social movements' within sociology, spatiality is useful to 'analyse the ways in which geography matters to the imaginaries, practices and trajectories of contentious politics' (Leitner et al., 2008, 158). The articulation of spatial analysis in debates spanning the studies of social movements and geographies of activism more generally is entrenched in two perspectives: one is grounded in a territorial framework 'where locally bounded grievances are articulated into wider collective'; the other is rooted in a relational framework which 'emphasises a fluid politics of place where the interconnected nature of political action is brought to the fore' (Davies, 2012, 273). While seemingly contradictory, some scholars (Davies, 2012; Nicholls, 2009; Leitner et al., 2008) suggest that it is essential to engage these two related frameworks and to employ spatial concepts that embody both frameworks, such as territory, scale and networks, in interrogating empirical processes of social movements (Davies, 2012).

Manuel Castells (2004), who views network society as being structured and built around digital networks, argues that contemporary networks of movements can

transcend the barrier of space and time and thus can challenge the space-time-bound power relations. The ability to connect to the Internet, Mitchell (2003, 144) argues, has 'profound implication for the locations and spatial distributions of all human activities that depend, in some way, upon access to information'. However, while perpetuating new spatial structure, network society à la Castells is not necessarily placeless. The networks connect specific places, spaces that acquire meaning through identity politics in certain moment in time, to specific information and communication flows. In examining the Egypt revolt in 2011, Castells (2012, 61) argues that the Internet revolution 'does not negate the territorial character of revolutions throughout history. Instead, it extends it from the space of places to the space of flows'.

In his assessment of Castells' *Network Society*, Marolt (2008) observes that Castells 'recognises the importance of describing empirical changes in our experience of space and time'. Citing Lefebvre (1991, 129), Marolt (2008) concurs that social relations in the network society have a social as well as a spatial existence. People's experiences are very much embedded in 'where' they live, work, play and interact. While 'the "network" has been identified as dominant organizing principle for society, individuals continue to craft identities on their own, with one foot in their physical and the other in their virtual everyday lives' (Marolt, 2008, 118). In this regard, people are going online without supplanting themselves from their places, where their bodily experiences are rooted. By reading social movements spatially, as spatial networks that engage both physical urban and digital media spaces, this article puts forward a spatial analysis to scrutinise the relationship between movements, urban space and digital media. By so doing, this article also offers to conceptualise the dialectical interplay between digital media and physical urban spaces.

Civic spaces, social networks and the spatial networks of social movements

The association between urban space, digital media space and movements can be understood in relation to networks. Social movements, especially in the form of protests, can also be understood as networks of people who share a common objective and/or a common enemy (opponents) and come together in a series of public display of expression. Diani (1992) envisages social movements as social networks of informal and formal organisations. By treating movements as networks, we make the relationship between movements and their spatial location explicit (Diani, 2000).

There are three ways to look at the importance of networks in social movements. First, social networks are where social movements originated and are built up upon foundations. Second, social networks are where a (local) contention is communicated, expressed and disseminated widely to a large audience and potential participants. And third, contemporary social movements, unlike an individual (and often locally isolated)

spontaneous protest, are networks of various contentious politics and/or geographically dispersed actions that are associated with each other based on solidarity and collective identity.

Traditionally and historically, social movements are built upon existing social networks located in specific physical and cultural spaces. Social networks here are 'social systems with abstract and concrete relationships' (van Dijk, 2001, 4). They are formed among individuals with similar jobs connected by networks of unions/organisations, or similar beliefs connected by networks of religious organisations or similar interests connected by interest/hobby organisations. Such social networks are typically formed in physical places as well. In these networks, people interact with each other socially and, over time, build a sense of unity, solidarity and a collective identity. In times of crisis, whether social, political or economic, people turn to such networks to communicate their grievances and, eventually, seek opportunities to change the situation collectively.

Decline of physical civic spaces

In contemporary urban life, however, spaces in which traditional ways of social networking take place have increasingly disappeared. Modernisation and rapid urbanisation have drastically transformed urban life, turning cities and towns into gigantic dwelling places where people no longer live together as a community. Modern societies have increasingly developed under the logic of neoliberal capitalism, where spaces and times are colonised and commoditised by capital. Financial anxiety, increased time pressure, increased work hours, moral panics and increasing inequalities are products of neoliberal logic and policies that make up the very structure of societies. This logic is materially translated and reflected in the spatial structures of contemporary cities, where spaces are organised and structured based on the accumulation of capital at the expense of social cohesion. Increasing social stratification and inequalities are manifested in struggles over public space leading to the re-zoning of the parks and the squares – making them part of a residential, rather that public zone – or the exclusion of the 'undesirable' through regulations and physical designs (Harvey, 1990).

Under this logic, *civic spaces*, 'those spaces in which people of different origins and walks of life can co-mingle without overt control by government, commercial or other private interests, or *de facto* dominance by one group over another' (Douglass et al., 2002, 5), have become spatial lacunae of the modern city. Commercial establishments alone do not always cause the decline of civic space and social connectedness. Traditionally, many of these commercial places took on the role as a civic space where all kinds of people would gather not only to dine, drink or do other activities associated with such places but also to engage in conversations with friends, neighbours and strangers at affordable costs and limited commercial impositions (Douglass et al.,

2008, 11). The coffee shop and the pub in North America and Europe are examples of such places. In Japan, *sento*, the privately owned public bath house, was a civic space where people gathered not only to bathe but also to interact with each other. In the aggressive commercial development of the 1980s bubble economy 'public baths were targeted as a "block busting" technique by land developers who would buy and demolish them to break down community solidarity against the loss of housing to commercial buildings' (Douglass et al., 2008, 11). In 1990s, there was only a handful public baths left in central Tokyo (Douglass, 1993).

A similar story is happening in the Philippines, where shopping malls and supermarkets continue to displace *sari-sari* stores. *Sari-sari*, a small variety store that provides basic food items and other necessities at economically sized quantities, has been a constant feature of residential neighbourhoods in the Philippines and has become an integral part of every Filipino's life (Magna Kultura, 2011). More than just a store, *sari-sari* is also a place to hangout, chat and play. A typical *sari-sari* store provides benches in front of the store where men would spend some time drinking and women discussing the latest local news and gossip. Following afternoon playing sessions, children would stop there to buy snacks and take a rest. The number of *sari-sari* in Metro Manila declined from 750,000 in 1975 (*The Economist*, 1996) to only 80,000 in 2009 (Magna Kultura, 2011).

The desire for economic growth has shifted the notion of development from the public to the private realm where 'exurban corridors, office parks, business campuses, privately-planned residential communities and outlying commercial centres ... [containing] impressive concentrations of office jobs and hotel space account for extremely high volumes of retail sales, but they have no parks, libraries or police forces' (Knox, 1993, 2). The spatial configuration has significant social implications in our everyday life. All social endeavours require appropriate spaces (Lefebvre, 1991, 59). In other words, the decline of civic space is equivalent to the decline of social networks that bond similar people and bridge diverse people with social reciprocity and mutual trust – decline of *social capital* (Putnam, 2000).

Digital media as social networks and social space

Digital media, especially social media such as Facebook and Twitter, has become integral to the rhythms of everyday mundane sociality. Digital media, particularly social networking platforms, has about networking and networks of people. In today's world where public spaces and physical cultural spaces no longer retain their function as dominant social space, digital media plays important roles in nurturing daily sociality where concrete and abstract relationships, strong and weak ties, are formed. Regrettably, the importance of new/social media networks intensifies concurrently with the deterioration of traditional social networks and the disappearance of public and civic spaces from urban settings.

Admittedly, social space produced in digital media operates under the very same logic of neoliberal capitalism. Social media, such as Facebook, is not free from market forces. It is, in reality, a technological product of the industrial mechanisms provided and sustained by venture capital and capitalist investment. And yet, its value and power derive from the participation of its many users. Social media epitomises the expansion of the digital economy that has exploited the free labour of individual subjects. Participation in social media must be understood in relation to 'defining characteristics of contemporary capitalism – namely its user-focused, customised and individuated orientation' (Palmer, 2004, 1).

Civic spaces can be created in such commercial environments, although the personal and collective experiences in this environment might always be on the verge of commodification. Rather than creating an authentic juxtaposition of the civic and the commercial, it may reflect a *pseudo-heterotopia* of consumerism (Foucault, 1986). Social media networks do not inherently generate civic spaces, let alone an ideal public sphere where people communicate rationally and converse in meaningful public deliberation (Lim and Kann, 2008). Social media is social. For urban middle-class youth, these social media networks are spaces where they are immersed in the everyday mundane sociality – to express themselves, interact with each other, flirt, play and have fun – none of which is readily categorised as part of civic engagement. And yet, to a certain degree social is political and vice versa, allowing for these new social networks to facilitate and amplify 'a culture that helps establish a foundation, a training ground and a learning space for individuals to express their opinions, to exercise their rights and to collaborate with others' (Lim, 2013a, 19). This participatory culture can be employed for civic engagement and, potentially, be borrowed for meaningful participation in social movement networks.

The very reality of contemporary urban social networks has a direct implication to recent social movements. Recent protests in Tunisia, Egypt and Malaysia (Bersih 3.0) were first kindled through social media networks, which are integrated into daily practices of sociality. This means that individuals were, first, connected to each other socially, not by political association. Most of the Facebook users who joined protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis and the Kuala Lumpur streets were first-time protesters. They joined social media for social purposes; the majority of them were neither political activists and nor political to begin with. Dissents and protests were propagated through the already existing social networks – spaces where people communicate socially and culturally and participate in collective cultural production – rather than through networks of political activists.

Establishing spaces and networks of social movements

Social movements are not spontaneous endeavours. They emerge in complex historic conditions, evolve and are formed gradually through the everyday building and expansion of social networks and spaces of resistance, a growing diffusion of collective contentions and increasingly articulated and collectively framed claim-making acts (Bogad, 2005, 47). The making of social movements, first and foremost, is about how to inspire and mobilise people to collectively challenge the status quo and create change. The implication of this is that a non-crisis situation does not provide a fertile ground for establishing social movement networks as people have no or little reason for change. Sometimes, however, a sense of non-crisis is not a reflection of the actuality but a result of a systematic attempt to render injustice, inequalities and contradictions invisible.

Hidden transcripts and subaltern counterpublics

How do social networks generate a social movement in a repressive milieu? James C. Scott (1990) in his book *Dominations and the Arts of Resistance* argues that even in the repressive environment people can still build networks for potential social movements through the covert making and nurturing of a *hidden transcript*. As opposed to a *public transcript*, in which interactions between dominators and their subordinates are open and public, Scott (1990, 4) uses the term *hidden transcript* for the critique of power that takes place offstage and cannot be seen or heard by power holders. These are 'speeches, gestures and practices that confirm, contradict, or inflect what appears in the *public transcript*' and materialise in the forms of stories, rumours, complaints, songs and artworks, among others (Scott, 1990, 4–5).

In systems where the state controls information, such as China, Egypt, Tunisia, pre-*reformasi* Indonesia and, to a certain degree, Malaysia and Singapore, spaces where *hidden transcripts* can be articulated and nurtured are limited. Paradoxically, it is the practice of domination, of control and repression, that creates the *hidden transcript*. The more severe the domination is, the more pressing the need to produce a *hidden transcript*. *Alternative* views need an *alternative* space. The subordinates thus need an alternative space to the dominant *bourgeois* public sphere to create

> venues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of the dominant group … to articulate and defend their interests … [and] to expose modes of deliberation that mask domination by absorbing the less powerful into a false 'we' that reflects the more powerful. (Fraser, 1997, 81)

Fraser (1997) calls this *subaltern counterpublics*, which are 'a necessary precursor to the launching of the powerful social movement' (Bogad, 2005, 48).

Historically, religious spaces, as exemplified by churches in the Black movement in the United States, mosques in the Iranian revolution and temples in the Korean movements, can take on the role of sites for *subaltern counterpublics*. Similarly, secular places such as universities and labour unions can also become such sites, shown by the University of Belgrade in the Serbian *Otpor* (anti-Milosevic) movement and Korean universities and labour unions throughout decades of struggles towards democratic governance. Additionally, communal rituals and routines in the forms of chanting, singing or dancing, among others, can also be sites for *transcripts* of resistance to be created, communicated and practiced. Practices of the Ghost Dance, the circle dance, were believed to have contributed to Lakota *resistance*. In nineteenth-century New Orleans, Congo Square, a gathering place where 'dancing, singing, the drumming and the oral tradition of story telling all came together and were performed' (Rodriguez, 2007, 153), was a vital space for West African slaves and their Indian allies, not only for cultural expression, but also for their quest of freedom.

However, in the contemporary urban setting, such sites have become a rarity or, if they do exist, they operate under the dominance of particular identity politics making these spaces inaccessible to diverse publics. Under authoritarian regimes, universities are policed, controlled and depoliticised and labour unions are destroyed. Communal activities have generally disappeared, displaced by commercialised individual endeavours. In the event that physical spaces are commodified, repressed and/or impossible, digital media can potentially facilitate activists to form *subaltern counterpublics* needed in the fostering of *hidden transcripts*.

In Tunisia, where the Arab Spring in many ways began, online *hidden transcripts* can be found as early as 2001 in *TuneZine*, the first known online political forum of the country. Satirical by nature, this *Zine* (a play on the words maga*zine* and *Zine* Ben Ali, the President) became the space where Tunisians discussed taboo political issues such as human rights, economic problems, freedom of expressions and religion (Strohl-Grun, 2003). Under the Ben Ali dictatorship, satire was found, in part, on the radio and on the streets. But political satire took a new life and was rejuvenated through the participatory culture of social media. Youssef Cherif (cited in Villa, 2001), a Tunisian student, testifies:

> Satirical anecdotes were common to Tunisia, even though not as open [as now]. We always had jokes about the 'cop-president and his hairdresser wife,' [but] I am not sure if these radio shows had political impact … The big impact comes from the Facebook pages that disseminate pictures and videos (old or new) and that are touching the population.

In Egypt, one example of a *hidden transcript* is found in the form of 'We are all Khaleed Said' Facebook group devoted to the political martyr Khaleed Said, who was beaten to death for his efforts to spread awareness about police brutality and corruption (Lim,

Figure 1 Fake movie poster for the 'Gecko vs Crocodile' movement in Indonesia

2012). This group, triggered by the anger of the death of Said, allowed thousands of Egyptians to freely discussed issues of human rights, state oppressions and democracy that were otherwise taboo. Many of them, including one of the administrators, used 'fake' Facebook usernames. Digital media enable its users to practice a politics of disguise and anonymity, which, according to Scott (1990), is part of *infrapolitics*, in which the narrative of the *hidden transcript* is communicated in public, or in an overlapping space between private and public.

Yet, there are limits to the activists' ability to disguise their identities. In some countries, the government routinely cracks down on Internet activism. After the 2009 Iranian revolt, the Iranian government arrested and detained many online activists. Sattar Beheshti, a Green Movement blogger who frequently criticised the regime, despite not using his full name on his blog, was tracked down and arrested. He later died in custody, reportedly as the result of the torture he endured during the interrogation (Contributor, 2012).

In the recent anti-corruption movement in Indonesia, called 'Gecko vs Crocodile', a *hidden transcript* was cultivated in digital media, particularly through the usage of Facebook and YouTube, in the form of visual political satire and humour. The 'Gecko vs Crocodile' movement refers to a 2010 Facebook-driven movement that was used by

Indonesians to support anti-corruption deputies, symbolised by a gecko, in their fight against the Indonesian Chief Police detective, symbolised by a crocodile (Lim, 2013a). The *hidden transcript* was found in a large amount of amateurish artwork devoted to the movement: digital posters, cartoons, animations, songs and video compilations. Most of the artwork made use of the icon – a gecko and a crocodile – as their central themes. One of the most attractive ones is a digital piece that resembles a movie poster, titled 'When a Gecko Testifies' (see Figure 1). This slick and professional-looking poster showcases all 'actors' related to the case and points out that they are part of the mega soap-opera of Indonesian politics (Lim, 2013a).

Digital space does not invent *hidden transcripts*. This space, however, can emerge as an alternative space where the nurturing of *hidden transcript* in physical space has become difficult to sustain due to the control by and crackdown of authorities. A sociologist, Cherian George,[1] in looking at a digital media-driven movements in the 2011 Singaporean Election, argues that the relative success of oppositional movements in the recent election can be attributed to their ability to continuously develop the *hidden transcripts* through social media.

By providing spaces for *subaltern counterpublics*, digital media helps citizens of Egypt, Tunisia and Malaysia to ascertain the possibilities of resistance through everyday practices, thus providing room for identity politics. In Foucault's term (1980), this kind of struggle in seemingly unimportant sites is called 'local resistance'. While seemingly benign this medium has the potential to become an instrument for oppressed individuals and groups to temporarily escape from the normalising process of society and to foster more autonomous means of collective identity (White, 1991).

Framing the narrative

As space and networks, digital media can be utilised to create *subaltern counterpublics* and nurture *hidden transcripts*. It is not, however, inherent to successful activism. While we can create as many Facebook movement groups as possible, there is little likelihood that any of these online movements would be translated into a meaningful social movement. Lim's study of Facebook activisms in Indonesia shows that the majority of movements created on Facebook failed to gain a significant number of followers (Lim, 2013a). Participatory culture in social media belongs more to the realm of popular culture and, thus, it is limited in its ability to facilitate political mobilisation. These limitations are derived from three circumstances, as follows (Lim, 2013a, 19):

> First, in social media, the network is vast and the production and circulation of information is constantly accelerated. This environment is more genial to simple and/or

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1   A keynote presentation at the International Conference on Social Media Culture in Yogyakarta, 22 September 2011.

simplified narratives than complex/complicated ones. Second, social media is not independent from the large media system. Social media activism, thus, needs to attune with 'the incredible shrinking sound bite' culture of mainstream media. Third, social media is not detached from its techno-material aspect, namely the distribution and device of its access. With a high concentration of social media access in urban areas, the narrative of activism always competes with entertainment content tailored for urban middle-class consumers. Furthermore, a high proportion of users access social media from mobile devices that are tailored for the quick bite experience.

In social media, activists need not only to 'construct a cultural frame, or set of impassioned, shared meanings, that justify and motivate collective action' (Tarrow, 1998, 21) but also to mould the narratives of movement to fit the nature and limitations of social media. In studying social movements, scholars employ the concept of *frame* to explain how meaning is constructed to legitimise collective identities and actions (Gamson, 1992). *Frame*, a term coined by Goffman (1974), refers to schemata people use to organise perceive and make sense of their experience in the world (Snow et al., 1986, 464). By rendering events meaningful, *frames* function to organise and guide actions (Snow et al., 1986). *Frames* for collective action perform this function by simplifying reasons and rationales for participation. Beyond usual social movement framing, to be successful in social media, movements need to *frame* themselves to impersonate successful viral stories in mainstream popular culture, namely to employ simplified narratives that embrace the principles of contemporary culture of consumption: *light package*, *headline appetite* and *trailer vision* (Lim, 2013a).

To illustrate this dynamic, it is useful to visit some empirical examples. In Indonesian context, the two most prominent and successful social media campaigns are 'Gecko vs Crocodile' and 'Coins for Prita' movements. The latter refers to the story of Prita Mulyasari, a 32-year-old mother of two, who fought for justice after being prosecuted for libel for complaining about the service at a private hospital in an email to her friends and relatives. In this story, tens of thousands of Indonesians joined a support page for Mulyasari on Facebook, shared their outrage on Twitter and donated money to pay her court fine. While representing complex problems, these two cases were framed in social media in much simpler narratives. Both were framed as simple, non-ideological archetypal stories of hero vs villain through victimisation-framing that identifies specific villains whose actions purportedly threaten weaker or smaller individuals or groups. This framing reflects a popular framing used in Disney culture and folktales that does not incite any dissonance, morally or ideologically (Lim, 2013a). Such framing has been a part of social movement struggles throughout history.

A comparable case is also exemplified in the Tunisian revolt through the story of Mohammed Bouazizi's self-immolation. In this story, Bouazizi, a street vendor who never finished high school, was 'framed' as an unemployed university graduate who was slapped by a female police officer, even though nobody knew whether the slap

really happened. This victimisation-framing, supported by the powerful symbolism of Bouazizi's burning body images, culturally and politically resonated with the entire population and fired up the resistance of the highly educated urban middle class youth (Lim, 2013b).

Staging the movement in digital and urban spaces

Even with the emergence of digital media-driven social movements, public demonstrations are still very part of social movements. Even though 'some feel that the public demonstration is obsolete – that public space no longer exists, or that power is now too fluid and dispersed to be contested by gathered masses of people' (Bogad, 2005, 52), staging the movement in urban public space is still perceived as the most powerful way to collectively express dissent, to express the strength of the movement and, especially, to directly challenge the dominant power. Such public demonstration can also be a tool to grow the movement (to attract new participants) and to define collective identity for a group/culture/movement.

Visible and invisible, present and hidden

Social movement effectively consolidates by its *invisibility* (being invisible to the authority or the opponent); the vast and convivial digital media provides the space for this mechanism. In contrast, it should claim its power but its *visibility* (being visible to the authority or the opponent) through public display of resistance, which can only be materialised by either 'occupying' public space and/or 'opening' public space. Manoeuvring in both digital and physical urban public spaces, the movement can control when and where it appears and disappears. Power is everywhere and is indispensable in any social construct (Foucault, 1980). While it is not possible to erase power or to oppose the knowledge/power relationship in which the movement actors produce and participate, the ability to be *visible* and *invisible* – *present* and *hidden*, alternating between *online* and *offline* spheres – creates a possibility for a movement to articulate its own view, identity, subjectivity and its own emancipation project through online and offline practices.

Digital media spaces and networks can be used to propagate new narratives, new messages, new ideas that challenge the authority. However, symbolic representation of power is grounded in the memories and histories of public spaces. While the cultivation of the movement, especially when physical spaces are repressed, may effectively take place in the digital media spaces, 'the revolutionary contingent attains its ideal form not in the place of production, but in the street' (Virilio, 1977). The existence of symbolic physical insurgence spaces is, therefore, significant to the staging process of social movement. In this context, occupied spaces are identified through meanings, symbols, narratives and histories associated with the space.

The control of space, argued Castells (2012), symbolises the control over people's lives. By occupying the public space, people symbolically challenge that control and construct 'a free community … as a space for sovereign assemblies to meet and to recover their right of representations' (Castells, 2012, 11). The mass movement, the people movement, becomes a symbolic power when bodies come together, make a claim and be *visible* in the eyes of the public. It is the staging of social movement in public space that translates the movement into a visual power, a spectacle of political bodies. The scene of millions people occupying Tahrir Square of Cairo, Tiananmen Square of Beijing, Monument National of Jakarta or Dataran Merdeka in Kuala Lumpur, is symbolically powerful. Further, the literal spectacle of people power, in itself, is a form of power that disputes the existing power relations embedded in the materiality of the public space. Politics requires the *polis*, the space of appearance, where one appears to others as others appears to one and where they together exist to make their appearance explicitly (Arendt, 1958, 198). The capacity to act in concert for a political purpose, to create the *polis*, is what Hannah Arendt (1958) calls power.

Intermodality: connecting online (digital media) and offline (urban space)

In translating the movement to the mass protest in physical public space, coordination and mobilisation are crucial. How to coordinate individuals and groups before the movement spills out to the physical spaces and while on the streets or squares is significant in defining the position of the movement vis-à-vis the power holder (state authorities).

In its realisation from online to offline, contemporary urban movement relies not only on the digital media. It has to go beyond digital media spaces, especially when the online population is only a small segment of society, as in Indonesia, Egypt, Tunisia and other developing countries. In Indonesia, the Philippines and in Egypt, mobile phones and the more traditional media were extensively used on the ground to communicate and coordinate the actions. Here we see the importance of the *intermodality*, namely the linkages from the Internet and social media to other networks (Lim, 2003).

In the 1998 *reformasi* in Indonesia as well as in more recent (Facebook-driven) movements in 2009–2012, digital media was crucial, but was not the sole source of support for the movements. In 1998 movement, activists had to make online-based information available for a wider range of society by transforming it into readable print material, reproducing this print material by fax and photocopier and disseminating it to a vast audience. Activists and students had to work together with newspaper sellers, street-vendors and taxi drivers to make information originating from the Internet available to society at large. With this process of information dissemination from cyberspace to the streets, in March to May 1998, the informa-

tion about the wealth of Suharto was disseminated all over the country. The avenues ranged from Internet users going to newspaper sellers to kiosk owners and trishaw drivers and through these means it finally reached people from all strata and classes (Lim, 2002; 2003).

A similar scenario was also evident in Philippines with the overthrow of President Estrada in January 2001. In the week running up to the crisis, President Estrada managed to escape from impeachment by the Senate by devious methods (as it seemed to his opponents). This created uproar, and the Internet suddenly became a popular space to talk about this matter. Here the Internet became the main source of information that drove and stimulated resistance toward Estrada. However, rather than use the Internet for organisation and mobilisation, Filipinos relied more on mobile phones and text messages (Rafael, 2003). In the week of the resignation there were 80 million text messages being sent per day (Bagalawis, 2001). A large number of messages were jokes about Estrada, something that had already become a habit over the previous weeks. However, text messages also were very useful in organising mass protests at short notice so it would be difficult for authorities to handle or respond in time. This way the protesters could organise quickly and in remarkable numbers. In the Philippine case, the mobile phone with its text message service provides an important ability to be an extension of the Internet to reach more people (Rafael, 2003). As in Indonesia, the linkages between the Internet and mobile phones and other media were proven to be very powerful.

A similar pattern is also found in the more recent case in the Tunisian revolt (Lim, 2013b). When the massive protests broke out in Thala and Kasserine, two border towns near Algeria, the government isolated the towns and cracked down the protests with brutal massacres. But the information could not be prevented from leaking out. In the towns that had no reliable Internet connection, protesters took videos with mobiles and pocket cameras documenting police brutality and passed these videos to activists. Activists transferred the files to memory cards, put the cards inside sneakers and threw the sneakers over the border to Algeria, where the files would find their way to reach Algerian activists who forwarded them to their peers in Tunis and some eventually got to Al Jazeera's news desk (Lim, 2013b). The *intermodality* of the low and high technologies had propelled the massacres in the isolated towns that would otherwise remain a local account into a national and global affair.

The critical matter in the cases of Tunisia, the Philippines and Indonesia is that the *intermodality* has created a hybrid network and a hybrid space where the digital space and the urban space are networked and overlapped. Castells (2012, 11) calls this a space of autonomous communication that allows a movement to be formed and enables it to relate to society at large by by-passing the control of the power holders over communication power.

Preset and mobile spaces and networks

Contemporary urban movements increasingly revolve around the combination of fixation and mobility. Fixed nodes of urban spatial networks in tandem with mobile ones are used together for recent movements. In the Tahrir revolt, taxi drivers were as important as Facebook, taking advantage of the fact that 'taxi drivers couldn't stop … talking' (Rashed in Lim, 2012, 243). The April 6th Youth Movement activist Waleed Rashed told a story that since 15 January 2011 he started 'informing' taxi drivers about the 25 January protest (Lim, 2012, 243):

> Every time I was in a cab, I would call Ahmed on my cell phone and talk loudly about planning a big protest in Tahrir Square for January 25th, because I knew that they couldn't stop themselves talking about what they'd overheard. Eventually, on January 23rd, a cabbie asked if I'd heard about this big demonstration that was happening in two days.

The story is similar to what happened in Indonesia with the overthrown of Suharto in 1998 (Lim, 2002) and subsequent protests (Lim, 2006). In Jakarta, two social groups among the larger society were identified as the ones that had speedy access to information on urban protests. First were taxi drivers, who always knew where the students/activists would hold street protests as they would like to avoid the traffic jams. The drivers would seek for more details about the protests to engage passengers in conversations. Some taxi drivers in Jakarta claimed to receive stacks of photocopied information from students/activists to be freely disseminated to passengers in 1998 movement. According to some taxi drivers, in those days of student demonstrations, the taxi-radio was frequently used to spread information about the demonstrations (Lim, 2003; 2006).

The second group consisted of the food stall/kiosk (*warung*) owners around the universities where student activists live and carry out their activities. They would chat with students at breakfast, lunch and dinner times. These ordinary people, mostly from lower and lower-middle classes, developed sympathy with the students by listening to their gripes and occasionally supplied food. Political as well as daily rumours and gossip were spread to, from and among the *warung*. The taxis and the *warung* thus became sub-hubs of networks of information flows (Lim, 2003; 2006).

In Tahrir, in addition to the Cairo taxies, friendly coffee shops that are common in downtown Cairo played a significant role as a point of information dissemination (Lim, 2012, 243). The cabs and the coffee shops are among the most important urban artefacts where the social fabric of urban society finds its nexus. The combination of taxis and coffee shops, similarly of taxis and *warung* in Indonesia, also represent the *preset* and the *mobile* modes of communications and information networks. From the taxis, the coffee shops and other alternative hubs, the information reached

many people both at the nucleus and the fringes of urban areas. Thus, the traditional network of information was awakened. The political resistance developed by a small group of young activists, the social media elites, was disseminated to a wider urban society.

Sustaining the movement, physically and virtually

Beyond coordinating, activists also have to sustain the movement. In a repressive society, the sustaining process includes a set of strategies to survive the crackdown and physical attacks from the authorities. Any public demonstration aspect of social movement is no longer about ideas and flows of information, but it involves physical bodies in physical space. The strategy thus is about claiming the physical urban space and surviving it.

In the Cairo protest, Tahrir Square itself 'is based on a concentric overall plan that that offers wide open spaces for thousands to gather' (Al Saleh and Arefin, 2011):

> If downtown were simply a grid system, the protesters could easily be dispersed with little hope of finding a similarly welcoming place to reassemble. But centres such as Talaat Harb and the 6th of October Bridge allow mass numbers to congregate and parade down boulevards greeted by giant metal statues of long-dead Egyptian revolutionaries. At the same time, the system that allows reassembly also denies it. The downtown streets, wide and spacious, can accommodate the easy passage of riot vans, large armoured vehicles and water cannons, unlike other parts of Cairo. (Al Saleh and Arefin, 2011)

In the Tahrir movement, activists strategised around the physicality of the square and informed people on how to manage the physical encounters with police forces by distributing a 26-page manual the night before 25 January 2011 (see Figure 2). This manual provided know-how to collectively 'win' the movement in real physical space, Tahrir Square. How to physically respond to the physical barriers, how to see the movement as a physical manoeuvring and adventure, as well as a physical encounter, are among the core messages of the manual.

In comparison, in the Malaysian Bersih 3.0 movement in Kuala Lumpur, Twitter was used not only to coordinate the protests but also to provide a spatial guidance for participants in manoeuvring the physical coercion by the Malaysia police force. While Twitter helped to globalise the Bersih 3.0 protests (see Figure 3), the majority of tweets come from Malaysia with a high concentration of tweets in Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baru and Penang (see Figure 4). A closer look at the geotagging map shows that central Kuala Lumpur (see Figure 5), where the protests took place, generated the highest number of tweets, such as in areas around Dataran Merdeka, Masjid Jamek, Sulta Abdul Samad building, Strait Trading building, Pasar Seni, Jalan Raja and Jalan

Figure 2 A sample page of the 26-page Tahrir protest manual

Translation (Arabic to English):
Steps for Carrying Out the Plan
1. Assemble with your friends and neighbours in residential streets far away from where the security forces are.
2. Shout slogans in the name of Egypt and the people's freedom (positive slogans).
3. Encourage other residents to join in (again with positive language).
4. Go out into the major streets in very large groups in order to form the biggest possible assembly.
5. Head toward important govern-ment buildings, while shouting positive slogans, in order to take them over.

Tun Perak. Twitter was heavily used to exchange information about places. Among the most frequently used words were names of places such as 'Dataran Merdeka' and 'Masjid Jamek' and references to place-based activities and atmosphere/situa-tion such as: 'walk to', 'escape', 'run from', 'turn right' and 'turn around'. When police fired tear gas and water cannon to disperse the crowd gathered at the Dataran Merdeka, mobile phones and Twitter were used to assist protestors to find alternative routes out of the police barricades. Because protesters can easily use Twitter with their smartphones, Twitter use has made digital and street activism, digital and urban spaces, more seamless, interlocking.

Beyond sustaining the movement in public space, the movement should also be a spectacle beyond its physicality. The globalisation of the movement, therefore, is important. In the Bersih 3.0 case, Twitter was used to connect various protest sites all over the world and to globalise the movement. Similarly, in the case of Tahrir, activ-ists reached a global audience through Twitter, Al Jazeera and large media outlets such as CNN and BBC to globalise the movement and win international support to
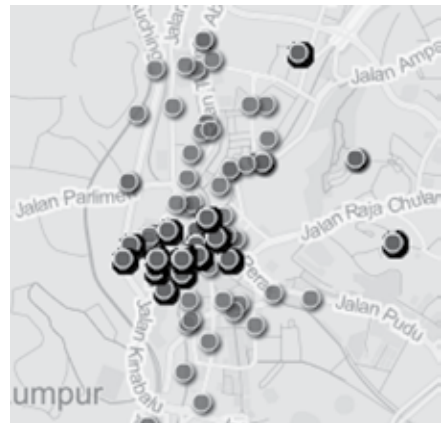
Figure 3 (top) Global geotagged map of Bersih 3.0 tweets, 28 April 2012, 01:00–7:00pm (source: author)

Figure 4 (above left) Kuala Lumpur, Johor Baru and Penang geotagged map of Bersih 3.0 tweets, 28 April 2012, 01:00–7:00pm (source: author)

Figure 5 (above right) Central Kuala Lumpur geotagged map of Bersih 3.0 tweets, 28 April 2012, 01:00–7:00pm (source: author)

protect and sustain the uprising (Lim, 2012). Social media, especially Twitter, and global media allowed a worldwide audience to listen to the voice of the people rather than the governmental authority's point of view.

While the corporeal, bodies, are protesting on the streets and in the squares, their actions are recorded through communication technologies (e.g. mobile phones, smartphones, pocket cameras, television cameras) and broadcasted in electronic space through Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and television channels. Bodies in online and offline spheres are mutually linked; together they create a contemporary public sphere where the movement continues to galvanise the resistance to challenge the hegemony.

Conclusions

Through analysis of social movement as spatial networks in both urban and digital media spaces, this article recognises that 'space is fundamental in any exercise of power' (Foucault, 1984, 252). Social movements can be understood as the act of questioning of the nature and exercise of power in society. Therefore, it is logical that studies and analyses of contemporary social movements should not be detached from our understanding of the importance of both digital media and public urban spaces as social, cultural and political spaces and networks.

The importance of digital media in the formation of social movements cannot be separated from the reality of contemporary urban conditions marked by the disappearance of public and civic spaces, the deterioration of traditional social networks and the decline of social capital. In contemporary urban life, social media emerges as social space that operates under the logic of capitalism and, yet, is nurtured by sociality and participation of its users. Social media is neither agent for change nor a harbinger of democracy. It a *pseudo-heterotopia* of consumerism and is not inherently political. Yet, participatory culture that is nurtured in social media may potentially be employed to establish and sustain social movements.

Beyond providing new opportunities for cost-effective networking, mobilisation and diffusion of contentions, digital media space enables the subordinates to cultivate *hidden transcripts* and create *subaltern counterpublics* needed to the launching of the powerful social movement. It provides existing social movements with a new layer of space where non-physical activities – communication- and information-based – can take place and for a network of movement to be *invisible* from control and repression. However, the actual realisation of power, people power, is only *visible* through public staging and demonstration in public urban spaces. The *intermodality* between digital media, people's social networks and other media, big and small. Examples from cases presented in this article include taxis, coffee shops, *warung*, mobile phones, memory cards and sneakers, and these all makes it possible to create a hybrid network and a hybrid space for social movements to symbolically and materially challenge the hegemonic power.

For contemporary social movements, digital media and physical urban spaces have become inter-reliant. Both, interchangeably and complementarily, can facilitate not only the making of insurgent movements, but, further, to provide 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000) for 'we the people' to engage with power and exercise political agency.

Acknowledgment

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