

OCCUPYING IS NOT THE SAME as demonstrating. Many of the protests of the past year—Tahrir Square, *los indignados*, Occupy Wall Street, and others—made legible the fact that occupying makes novel territory, and thereby a bit of history, using what was previously considered merely ground. Territory is itself a strategic vector in all these very diverse processes of occupation. In the sense in which I am using it, *territory* is a complex condition with embedded logics of power and of claim making, something that it takes work to create, and which cannot be reduced merely to the elementary facticity of ground or land.

To occupy is to remake, even if temporarily, territory's embedded and often deeply undemocratic logics of power, and to redefine the role of citizens, mostly weakened and fatigued after decades of growing inequality and injustice. Indeed, the occupations have revealed to what extent the reality of territory goes beyond its dominant meaning throughout the twentieth century, when the term was flattened to denote national sovereign territory.

The logic of national sovereignty has for some time now been contested and disrupted by the forces of globalization, and it is against this background that the new forms of occupation can perhaps best be understood. Occupy Wall Street entered one of the strategic territories of global finance and, through two months of hard work and much collective deliberation, made a new territory, a territory—at once physical and conceptual—with its own logics of distributed agency and representation. Occupy Oakland moved into a strategic territory of global trade last November, when it temporarily closed the city's port, the fourth largest in the US: This, too, took work and strategizing. The way that Tahrir Square was used during the Egyptian uprising—the work of making an encampment and of keeping it peaceful and habitable over many months—likewise transformed it into another type of territory, created from the intersection of a global political mode and a specificity of place and local history. The violence with which several of those occupations have been countered is another kind of work and reveals what it takes for the state to remake such territory, to reinsert it into an older logic.

In the colonial enterprise, territory had been constituted through logics of domination ownership, and appropriation. In large parts of the world, the work of making of specifically national territory was inseparable from the decolonization struggles following World War II. In its beginnings, the creation of national territory involved gaining autonomy from a dominant power—as with the early US, the many independence movements in Africa, and the many other such struggles worldwide. These were important moments when logics of power and of empowerment coincided in the attempt to create more equal socioeconomic and political systems.

More often than not, however, these original struggles to make a territory of one's own were derailed by elites abusively taking power, leaving citizens impoverished and disenfranchised. Such decay need not only be internal, however. Making a territory of one's own can also entail the colonizing of prior inhabitants of a space, or over time it can creep into the expansion into another people's territory. This takes us back to the contradictions of national territory: Some nation-states have been built on the backs of vast imperial geographies of extraction and domination. In an important sense, however, colonized territories are constituted through logics different from those of nationalizing territory that are driven, at least initially, by logics of self-determination.

Because territory is made, it is inherently unstable—even if some formats, notably national territories, have enjoyed long lives. National rulers have themselves worked hard at nationalizing territory, identity, security, power, rights—all the key elements of social and political existence. A collateral effect of this was that what happened outside the borders of territorial states, whether the impoverished terrains of former empires or the earth's poles, was written out of history.

The cages of the national are now being broken. The current financial crisis is partly a symptom of the debordering of economic, sovereignty, and social frameworks—the electronic space of finance, and the escalating ease and speed of exchange and communication made possible by digitization, break through the time and space of the national. More fundamentally, many of today's catastrophic conditions—the melting of the glaciers, the radicalness of widespread poverty, the violence of extreme economic inequality, the genocidal character of more and more wars—are part of a no-man's-land that absorbed the costs of nation building and the brutal side of capitalism. These conditions are floating signifiers, speech acts that narrate the current situation far more accurately than standard narratives about nation-states, modernity, and “development.” They make legible the landscapes of devastation, both colonial and decolonized, from which the nation was built.

The decay of the “national project” signals the emergence of different territorial vectors. As these century-old cages crumble, we see the rise of new assemblages from bits of territory, authority, and rights once firmly ensconced in national frames. The operational space of global firms is one such assemblage of bits and pieces of multiple national territories. So is the network of global cities. These emergent assemblages mostly cut across the binary of “national versus global.” The Occupy movements are also emergent assemblages of fragments of various national (and global) territories. Their reclamation of public space is also a response to the increasingly palpable insufficiency of the logic of the nation-state.

This emergent condition—which is closely associated with the paradigm of the “global street”—has

freed up territory both as category and as capability; it has turned it into a space for remaking the social and the political by those who lack access to the established instruments of power within the frame of national sovereign territory. This is why the encampments in Cairo, New York, and all the other sites are a critical element within deeper shifts that unsettle the national territorialization of the building blocks of social and political life. And that is why the attempts to make encampments in Syria and in Bahrain mattered even if they failed.

All point to a mode of making the political that is at once global and multisited. It has arisen out of enormously diverse histories and polities, just as nation-states themselves emerged out of such diversity. An essential precondition for such making is the emergence of the city, in all its varied forms: The global street is emphatically an urban street, not a suburban or rural road. Indeed, the larger space enabling this multisited making is the network of global cities worldwide, whose numbers are growing in part as a result of the expanded territorial needs of global capital and global finance. Herein lies an interesting dialectic between the growth of global cities and the growth of multisited Occupy movements. The city emerges as a space where the powerless can make history; it is not the only space, but it is a critical one.

Whether in Egypt, the US, or elsewhere, it is important that the aim of the occupiers is not to grab power. They were and are, rather, engaged in the work of citizenship, exposing deep flaws and wrongs in their polity and society. In my book *Territory, Authority, Rights* (2006/2008), I explored this question of how the powerless can make history, and, further, if they do make history, how they might they do so without necessarily becoming empowered. Powerlessness is not simply an absolute condition that can be flattened into the absence of power. People becoming present and, crucially, becoming *visible* to one another can alter the character of their powerlessness. Under certain conditions, powerlessness can become complex, by which I mean that it can contain the possibility of making the political, making the civic, or making history. Such a mode of contesting power is not unprecedented, but we now see several of the contemporary forms it can take, each in a specific place at a certain time. Yet in all today's diverse Occupy movements, we can see how the powerless can make history without taking power.

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