The Power of Viral Expression in World Politics

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Thank you.

Almost two decades into the twenty-first century, tweets, hashtags, memes, and viral videos have become commonplace elements of political discourse—consider the #JeSuisCharlie hashtag campaign, the viral images three-year-old Syrian boy Alan Kurdi, and the ongoing litany of diplomatic provocations issued by U.S. President Donald Trump. In this context of rapidly circulating digital content, new opportunities abound for provocation, compassion, and other forms of impassioned expression. To be sure, emotionality has long been integral to political discourse, as leaders, experts, and social movements cultivate awareness and channel energy around matters of public concern. But digital media technologies are now accelerating, amplifying, and distributing affective forms of political expression. Such changes are in turn altering the way language and discourse function to constitute political community in fields such as diplomacy and transnational advocacy. This chapter traces the outlines of what I term "viral expression" as a social practice and assesses its contribution to the power of discourse in world politics.

Hashtags and other forms of digitally circulated political expression are shifting the form and location of political discourse in important ways. To begin with, the circulation of such content is a function of the algorithmically driven social media ecologies they enter rather than the formal political authority of their authors. Expressions by heads of state can attract attention, but so too can the messages of celebrities and activists. And all achieve public visibility through the distributed activities of ordinary people who retweet, share, post, and comment. Moreover, viral expression is received and retransmitted by an "audience" that is not fully constituted prior to the practice of expression itself. Unlike speech acts in which a speaker delivers a message to a defined constituency, viral expression is part of a social

performance whose audience is a distributed field of co-producers. Understanding emotional language in this context thus requires excavating some key assumptions on which the study of political discourse has traditionally rested.

Digitally circulating expressions need to be understood with respect to both content and form. Studies of language and discourse in IR have tended to privilege symbols and metaphors with attention to their cultural meanings and rhetorical functions. The digital reproduction of political expressions serves as a reminder, however, that language forms part of a social practice whose impact is not confined to the meanings attributed to it by users (Riley, 2005: 5). Language and discourse are interconnected with embodied performances, and their political significance is tied to a context of social practice (McCourt, 2016). Digital expressions are hybrid compounds of linguistic utterance and paralinguistic performance—not the illocutionary utterances with performative significance that comprised Austin's primary concern but peculiar, emotion-expressing forms of perlocutionary language that he ultimately neglected (Cavell, 2005: 176). What I am calling "viral expressions" are akin to digitally circulating bumper stickers whose political significance lies in both the message they deliver to an audience and the mimetic practices they elicit through circulation.

Understanding the politics of viral expression also requires parsing the peculiar forms of instrumentality they sustain. The cultural and political impact of emotional expression is mediated by a distributed field of digital practice and the algorithms that filter content and modulate public attention within that field. The emotional impact of a given expression may not be understood until after a process of digitally mediated circulation has taken effect. Viral expressions may cultivate or condition public responses in ways that are consistent with salient

feeling rules (Koschut, this volume). But digital practices also circulate such expressions in ways that creatively transpose feeling rules and structures from one social field to another. In this way, investigating viral expressions uncovers both vehicles through which "feeling structures" are reproduced and sites on which those feeling structures are themselves constituted and reconstituted.

Assessing the political impact of viral expressions poses special challenges. Skeptics will argue that digital content such as tweets, memes, and viral videos amount to mere noise: distracting entertainment but neither credible commentary nor effective rhetoric. I am reluctant to accept this dismissive stance, for several reasons. First, while viral expressions may not immediately change minds or policies, they can give rise over time to new concerns and expectations that inform determinations regarding which problems are considered pressing and which solutions viable. More importantly, though, if digital practices are creating new forms of entertainment, their impact becomes tied to both their content and the practice-generated solidarities they enable. One theory's distraction is thus another's bounty: Rather than dismiss the celebrity or presidential Tweet as ill-informed, we might instead trace its peculiar sociocultural byproducts.

This chapter sets out to understand the power of viral expression as a distinctive mode of emotional language, characteristic of political life in the early twenty-first century. I begin by considering language as a vehicle of emotional expression, using ideas from social theories of communication (Carey, 1989; Peters, 1999) and philosophies of language (Cavell, 2005; Massumi, 2002). I then draw from media theory to consider the impact of digital technologies and practices on the phenomenon of emotional expression. Here, I suggest not that emotional

expression is new to the digital age but that social media, through distributed agency and algorithmic filtering, allows for the acceleration and amplification of viral expression. In the third and fourth sections of the paper, I consider examples from Twitter diplomacy—including but not limited to that of Donald Trump—and explore the impact of viral expression on the constitution of political community in world politics.

Language as Emotional Expression

Language serves as a vehicle for social displays of emotion. Emotions involve psychological and physiological processes seemingly located within human bodies, but they are also routinely made public through various forms of embodied expression: facial reactions, bodily gestures, tones of voice, and written and verbal language. Language can both describe and express emotional states; linguistic utterances need not be *about* emotion or emotions to have affective potential. Not only do human beings accompany language with hand gestures and "body language" (Farnell, 2001; Fierke, this volume; McNeill, 2000), but we inflect linguistic utterances with tones that supply emphasis, urgency, and other affective valence (Ross, 2014: 110-111). The many linguistic utterances we encounter on a daily basis—marketing slogans, evocative poetry, stern imperatives, or statements of outrage—are inseparable from the tonalities and affective associations that invest language with power. Even ordinary language imbues certain words with affective qualities: when a speaker implores me to complete an assigned task "now!," she or he expresses impatience; when my completion of the task is met with "good job!," I feel the speaker's satisfaction. As creatures of language, we are socialized

into neurolinguistic schemas that tether words and tones to specific affective responses. Language is thus part and parcel of the brain's capacity to express and process emotion (Reilly and Seibert, 2002: 542).

As with iconic visual images and socially recognizable bodily gestures, certain words become invested with special intensity and significance. Metaphors, abstract concepts, and other conceptual representations become triggers for the eliciting conditions associated with emotion (Gallese and Lakoff, 2005; Lakoff, 2012). Theories of social interaction suggest that symbols are words and images that have been charged with "emotional energy" through repeated social interaction (Collins, 2004: 37). Drawing from the work of Ernesto Laclau, Ty Solomon shows that, without attention to the "affective investments" that endow language with "force," it is hard to explain why some linguistic utterances achieve cultural and political impact and others do not (Solomon, 2014: 729). These contributions demonstrate not just that language has emotionality but that this affective dimension invests it with social and political significance. As political actors recognize such emotional power, they can invoke the metaphors, analogies, comparisons, and ideas with emotional connotations (Koschut, this volume), in order to cultivate certain emotional responses through language. Terms such as "terrorist" and events such as "Pearl Harbor" possess emotional investments that give them distinctive power as linguistic utterances.

In practice, there is variation in the extent to which the emotional significance of language is known prior to its public performance. Emotions can seep into linguistic utterances, as speakers deploy words across different contexts, and as those words resonate with listeners' memories and expectations (Ahmed, 2004: 13). The result is that emotional language is not

consistently instrumentalized, since speakers cannot always know in advance which words and symbols will engender exactly which affective results. Moreover, the emotional power of language may exist independently of representational content recognizable for its affective connotations. As the philosopher Stanley Cavell argues, emotional forms of expression are evidence that language is concerned with not only representing reality and performing action but also "revealing desire" (2005: 187). In his account, these "passionate utterances" are fundamental to the thick forms of human interaction of which language is a part. Human beings use language for more than transmitting information and performing actions in the Austinian sense. We routinely—and often imperceptibly—imbue linguistic utterances with the thousand tiny pauses, tics, stresses, accelerations, and other inflections that together supply human interaction with affective energy. As Cavell puts it, we are "expression machines" (2005: 187).

That emotions are emergent properties of language reflects the Romanticist idea that language possesses powers extending beyond its capacity to represent the world (Bleiker, 2009). For Romanticism, expressive language is not a transmission of inner thoughts and emotions to outside observers; the very act of expression is a practice with the capacity to enact some human potential (Taylor, 1989: 374). Charles Taylor thus traces human expression to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century ideas about the role of art and language not as means to communicate a message but as opportunities to discover some inner value or spirit of the artist. Likewise, for Collingwood, expressing inner feelings through art is fundamentally a practice of self-discovery: "Until a man [sic] has expressed his emotion, he does not yet know what emotion it is. The act of expressing it is therefore an exploration of his own emotions"

(1938: 111). Expression is not reducible to strategic efforts to "arouse" an emotion within an audience (111); the audience is in the same position as the expresser, experiencing an emergent translation of unconscious sentiment into social displays of emotion.

This emotional potential of language is independent of the latter's role as a tool of communication *qua* informational transmission (Riley, 2005; Peters, 1999). We often regard language as an instrument that social actors use to transmit internal knowledge or information to others. But not all language involves the delivery of messages to distinct receivers or the performance of speech acts to recognizable audiences. "Communication" itself involves both the transmission of information from senders to receivers and the many performative rituals involving expressive acts of a public nature (Carey, 1989; Peters, 1999). For Niklas Luhmann, individuals are not instigators of communication; "only communication can communicate" because a speaker is only a small node in a larger system in which her or his speech circulates (2002: 156). Emotional language does more than convey information about the psychological state of the speaker, the function accorded by speech act theory to "expressives" such as apologies or congratulatory statements (Searle, 1979: 15). Rather, it expresses and circulates emotional energy within a social milieu, independently of a speaker's instrumental desire to transmit information or an audience's efforts to receive it.

The emotional power of linguistic expression helps to underscore the need to conceptualize language and discourse as embodied social practices. Because it possesses semantic content as well as reciprocal involvement with cognitive capabilities, language has often seemed to exist apart from the embodied world of social practice. However, as McCourt argues, recent contributions to a "practice turn" have sought to restore the thickness of

language and discourse (2016: 480). Theorizing the expressive capacity of language helps to recover the capacity for linguistic utterances to affect action even before their semantic content begins to construct the world through representation. Expressive language is a performative speech act but one whose performance can impact action independently of its content; Massumi thus describes it as "an action on an action" (2002: xix). Investigating expression allows us to treat language as co-implicated in the gestures, faces, and images thereof that we more readily regard as embodied.[1] In this view, facial expressions and visual images are ontologically separate not from linguistic speech acts (Hansen, 2011; McDonald, 2008; Williams, 2003) but from the representational functions of language.

Expressions of emotion through language may facilitate the reproduction of social structures, but they may also re-create those structures. Koschut (this volume) describes the way cultural norms and discourses socialize subjects into certain "feeling structures," and the emotion-producing capacity of language is surely part of that social and political process. But, as the reflections of Collingwood, Taylor, and others suggest, emotional expression through language also possesses potential to reconfigure or resist those feeling structures. The examples discussed below indicate that the circulation of emotional expression through digital media amplifies this potential for change. Individual diplomatic tweets and hashtags may not produce immediate policy change, but their cumulative impact across a distributed social field of remediation may serve to elevate the affective sentiments associated with specific political movements or sites of cultural authority. Political analysis of emotional language must therefore look for its role in both reproducing and reconfiguring prevailing feeling structures.

Mediated Emotional Expression

Emotional expression is routinely displayed through various kinds of mediated communication. Indeed, the history of communication consists of successive changes in material capabilities for sharing linguistic and other forms of bodily expression to wider audiences (Thompson, 1995: 31-37).[2] The written word enables oral societies to translate emotions expressed in physically co-present rituals into written symbols for subsequent distribution; printing allows authors to reproduce and distribute written texts on a larger scale; telegraph lines create the possibility for ordinary persons to exchange small pieces of written text relatively quickly; and email and text messaging makes telegraphic capabilities still faster and more accessible. Mediated communication also facilitates the distribution of gesture and voice: phonograph, radio, film, television, and immersive technologies represent continual efforts to enhance sensory access to non-co-present actions and expressions. Each of these technological shifts involves sensory re-adjustments, as technologies provide prosthetic enhancement to some capability of the human body (Clark, 2003; Hayles, 2012; McLuhan, 1994). Innovations often classified as "communications" technologies are both different ways of transmitting information and different material contexts for sensory-affective expression.

Mediated emotional expressions have varying impacts depending on context. In some situations, the intensity of an affective response may be obstructed by technologies of mediation—think of the sympathy or compassion lost in the cool formality of an email message. Indeed, the use of emoticons and emojis represents a compensatory effort to enhance text with emotional expression (Novak et al., 2015). In other instances, however, emotional expressions may be amplified by technology; the Halloween broadcast of H. G. Wells' *Invasion*

from Mars, for example, famously induced panic on the streets of New York City (Cantril, 2005). And the repetition of iconic images and symbolic terms affords greater potential for otherwise minimal affective intensity to accumulate over successive iterations. Such dynamics are visible in the aftermath of dramatic events, as when television coverage of the September 11, 2001 attacks circulated iconic images, cultural stereotypes, and historical analogies (Grusin, 2010; Nacos et al., 2011). Mediated communication thus has the potential to enhance opportunities for what Oren and Solomon call the "ritualised incantation" of an emotionally evocative speech act (Oren and Solomon, 2015).

The advent of mobile computing and social media creates new opportunities for mediated emotional expression. Whereas the age of mass media involved the unidirectional broadcasting of emotionally evocative content, the age of social media creates the possibility of multidirectional expressions for which ordinary users become co-producers or "produsers" (Dahlgren, 2005: 158). In this context of what Manuel Castells calls "mass self-communication," traditional boundaries between speaker and audience become blurred because content is being continually re-created through digital practices such as posting, liking, and commenting (2009: 55). Individuals have greater latitude to creatively repurpose digital content rather than passively absorb it (Manovich, 2009). Such developments are having significant political impact on the capabilities of social movements to elicit "personalized" involvement from a distributed pool of supporters (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). In this context, social movements are successful where their rhetorical framings and communications permit followers to curate and recirculate content of emotional significance to them.

Through this element of personalization, digital media are reconfiguring the social context of intimacy. Media technologies have traditionally been regarded as an obstacle to intimacy, insofar as they sustain communication outside the confines of face-to-face interaction. Digital practices confound this traditional picture by enhancing opportunities for the public sharing of emotional expression. Digital reproduction and circulation of voice, face, and gesture “magnify” the expressive capabilities of the body (Hansen, 2004: 8; Thrift, 2008: 184). Social media platforms allow new forms of social performance, as participants curate daily experiences in order to celebrate, contest, provoke, or otherwise express affective states. Whereas critics of digital media describe the result as a depoliticizing context of narcissistic performances (Lanier, 2011; Morozov, 2011; Rifkin, 2009), my concern lies in the altered context for affective forms of linguistic expression. This new environment comprises what Thompson (2011) calls “non-reciprocal intimacy at a distance” (57) because digitally mediated expression no longer relies on the back-and-forth exchange of response and acknowledgment associated with proximate forms of communication. Rather than occasional tools of communication, digital technologies have become ambient or “always-on” environments constitutive of human experience (Deuze, 2011; Peters, 2015; Turkle, 2008).

In this context, acts of intersubjective reciprocity exist within more diffuse and on-going processes of mediation. To begin with, expressive performances are continually “remediated” (Bolter and Grusin, 1999) across diverse platforms and outlets, as when tweets become the basis for news stories within conventional print journalism. The medium in which an emotional expression is first produced is only the start of a process of remediation across multiple mediums with diverse technical capabilities. In addition, emotional expressions are subject to

complex processes of selection and pattern recognition afforded by algorithms (Amoore, 2018; Parisi, 2013). The algorithms driving social media sites serve to select and focus attention on certain "viral" expressive statements at the expense of others. Moreover, algorithms perform this focusing function in and through the digital activities of curation that imbue expressive language with an element of embodied performance (Finn, 2017). The result is not only the transmission of emotional expression across distances but also the selective and continual elevation and remediation of certain expressive acts within a social environment.

Twitter Diplomacy

As technologies change the social context of communication, new modes of political expression become possible. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, the possibilities of viral expression are still being discovered. We thus see not so much a patterned field of social practice governed by recognized standards of competency (Adler and Pouliot, 2011) as an ad-hoc experimentation with the affective dimensions of digital communications. In this section, I draw examples from recent uses of "Twitter diplomacy" by U.S. President Donald Trump to illustrate the peculiar power of digitally circulating emotional expression. While the populist nature of these examples is in many ways unprecedented, Trump's tweets are products of a social and technological environment that is affording opportunities for circulating various emotional forms of political expression.

As IR scholars contend with the phenomenon of digital diplomacy (Bjola and Holmes, 2015; Duncombe, 2019; Owen, 2015; Seib, 2016), the foreign policy provocations of Donald

Trump offer telling signposts. Since August 2017, Trump has produced a steady flow of public statements on the subject of nuclear weapons development in North Korea. In April of that year, after soliciting diplomatic commitment from the Chinese government to help arrest North Korea's nuclear weapons program, Trump tweeted that "North Korea is looking for trouble" and that the U.S. would "solve the problem" without China's involvement if needed (11 April 2017). The rhetoric escalated in late summer with the bellicose "fire and fury" comment at a cabinet meeting at Trump's golf course in New Jersey (8 August 2017)[3] and a statement to the UN General Assembly in which Trump vowed that armed conflict could lead the U.S. to "totally destroy North Korea" (19 September 2017). Most recently, tweets between November 2017 and January 2018 have personalized the conflict, as Trump referred to Kim Jong-un as "short and fat" (11 November 2017) and asserted that his "Nuclear Button" is "much bigger & more powerful" than Kim's (2 January 2018). Such statements are especially noteworthy considering the fragility of nuclear diplomacy.

There are various conceivable explanations for such statements. We might follow Todd Hall (2017) and regard them as part of a broader performance of provocation, designed to elicit a reaction of outrage from North Korea—perhaps a law-breaking reaction that would warrant a decisive military response and precipitate regime change. The tweeted provocations could instead form part of a larger campaign of instilling pessimism in traditional diplomacy and multilateral governance (Carnegie and Carson, 2019), perhaps in an effort to legitimize a new era of bilateralism. In a different vein, these statements may form part of a strategy of what Bjola and Manor (2018) term "domestic digital diplomacy," having less to do with North Korea and more to do with domestic politics and an effort to promote popularity, offset a record of

failed policy initiatives, or distract from negative publicity surrounding alleged collusion with Russia. Each of these explanations affords important insight, but my concern is less with the motivations behind the behavior and more with understanding how and where it achieves political effect. These exercises in Twitter diplomacy circulate in specific social media environments, and they are received against an evolving backdrop of media content.

Consider an earlier example from Trump's Twitter feed. In the days following a January 2017 missile test by Iran, he declared that "Iran has been formally PUT ON NOTICE for firing a ballistic missile" and noted his dissatisfaction with the Iran nuclear deal. The statement was repeated in person by his short-lived National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, who explained that the Iranian test had violated the controversial nuclear agreement two which Iran had agreed in 2015. It was a strong reaction, considering that most experts did not consider the missile test to have violated the terms of the nuclear deal (Kenyon, 2017). But the meaning and significance of the statement was unclear (Landler and Erdbrink, 2017), and, as one reporter noted, Flynn "offered no specifics on what the dire-sounding 'on notice' means" (Wright, 2017). As a result, it is tempting to dismiss the statement as superficial and politically inconsequential rhetoric.

However, the theory of expressive language discussed earlier suggests that the statement's power stems less from its content and more from the tone conveyed by the emphatic declaration "ON NOTICE." This emotional language, unrecognizable under norms of diplomatic decorum, resonated with populist rhetoric in recent U.S. politics. Here, I follow Boucher and Thies, who emphasize the need to situate twitter activity as part of a broader "social behavior of online community engagement" (2019: 717). Libertarian and anti-

government sentiment has been expressed in social media through the trope of putting allegedly underperforming elected officials "on notice." On Twitter, the hashtag #OnNotice appeared with increasing regularity over the course of the 2016 U.S. election cycle, as frustrated constituents pledge to exact retribution for political misdeeds. Sometimes appearing alongside #Primaried, #OnNotice reflects a *Zeitgeist* of populist empowerment that was characteristic of the 2016 elections more generally (Oliver and Rahn, 2016). The appropriation of the term by right-leaning populism was ironically popularized in part by American television celebrity Stephen Colbert. In his satirical conservative persona on the *Colbert Report* (2005 - 2014), Colbert regularly spoke of putting liberal ideas and leaders "on notice."[4] The statement, seemingly out of place in the context nuclear brinksmanship, had migrated from a context of populist rhetoric in which expressions of frustration and defiance were thriving.

To his domestic audience, then, Trump's statement aligned with populist enthusiasm. Its significance lay partly in the irony associated with popular appropriation of the authority to reprimand. But the statement is significant also for its tone. "ON NOTICE" expresses the defiance of a constituency that feels alienation from the machinations of international and domestic policymaking; this defiance and alienation stem from a specific context of feeling rules relating to status,[5] but the expressive Tweet re-purposes those affective sensitivities in the context of counter-proliferation diplomacy. Moreover, the Iran tweet allows populist defiance to resonate with public anxieties surrounding the domestically controversial Iranian nuclear agreement of 2015. And this instance, along with the more recent statements directed at North Korea, perform an ethos of vigilance and bravado in the face of regional threats from East Asia and the ever-present risks associated with nuclear weapons more generally.

This instance of “Twitter diplomacy” is more than a simple articulation of Trump’s “America first” foreign policy agenda. It is true that the nuclear diplomacy tweets are consistent with the political rhetoric and tone of Trump’s broader politics of status (Wolf, 2017). Yet, as Todd Hall’s contribution to this volume suggests, we cannot afford to assume a direct correspondence between micro-level discursive evidence and familiar macro-level stories about identity or collective emotion (Hall, this volume). What is remarkable about the case of #OnNotice is its non-recognizability as a discursive statement of American nationalism. The power of such digital statements lies less in their content than in the emotional expressions they evoke through a process of circulation. The virality of viral expressions consists of their potential to elicit diverse and distributed, but nevertheless resonant, acts of digital political engagement.[6]

The Power of Viral Expression

While the content of Trump’s tweets is surprising, his use of digital tools for diplomatic performances is not as unprecedented as political commentary might indicate. As various observers have noted, for example, the Iran nuclear deal was the subject of very systematic social media campaigns, from the White House, the U.S. State Department, and the Iranian foreign minister Javad Zarif (David, 2016: 138-140; Duncombe, 2019; Gladstone, 2015; Gordon and Sanger, 2015; Lerner, 2015; Seib, 2016). In the wake of Russian intervention in Crimea, the U.S. State Department launched a hashtag campaign #UnitedForUkraine, which the Russian foreign ministry then worked to re-appropriate (Lüfkens, 2016). By the time Trump assumed

the Oval Office, the use of social media for diplomatic pronouncements was well practiced by leaders such as Obama, Zarif, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Popes Benedict and Francis, and others (Lüfkens, 2016; Seib, 2016). Some actors are more routinely using digital media to provoke controversy, but all forms of diplomacy are increasingly embedded in this new environment (Manor, 2019).

The advent of digital diplomacy creates the social and material possibility for a new kind of emotional expression—what I am terming "viral expression." International leaders have long engaged in shaping public opinion and promoting policy through speech. And sometimes their rhetoric is deliberately centered on proclamations with special tonal significance—Reagan's "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall" or Mandela's "ideal for which I am prepared to die." But only in digital environments do such declarations have the potential to circulate rapidly and thus become so readily severed from the localized speeches, protests, or other events in which they are initially uttered. Viral expressions become part of an on-going practice of emotion-inducing circulations that, transcending the episodic, become qualities of a media environment. These expressions are, moreover, "viral" in the sense that they are dependent both upon distributed practices such as liking, posting, and re-tweeting and upon algorithmic reprocessing with the potential to enhance their visibility and impact within an enlarged pool of "hosts."[7] The intent behind an original expression becomes less significant than the pattern of distributed activity it engenders.

Viral expressions function as catalysts for shared circulations of affective experience. The political significance of Trump's Tweets lies both in the signals they transmit to diplomatic counterparts and in the solicitation of affective response among ordinary digital media

participants. Much attention has been paid to the content of Trump's populist rhetoric—its untruthfulness, vulgarity, chauvinism, and so on. But such worries, understandable as they are, miss the potential for his viral expressions to move in what Ahmed (2004) describes as the "sideways" movement of affect across linguistic signs (45, 66). "On notice," "short and fat," and "fire and fury" are significant because they perform defiance to an emergent political constituency whose sense of cultural alienation resonates with the tonalities these provocations express. Trump's populism thrives not on sustained arguments or discrete policy proposals but, as William Connolly argues, on the potential for multiple anxieties to "resonate together" (Connolly, 2017: S28). Moreover, hashtags become mechanisms for a temporary "show of solidarity" (Papacharissi, 2015: 50) without the overt identity-based narratives that would invest these with permanence. Trump's viral expressions re-appropriate the language of diplomacy in a way that performs a distinctly fickle form of populist mobilization.

While populist leaders are making active use of viral expression, as a political form it is available to various actors in world politics. Pro-democracy movements, humanitarian campaigns, and other social movements are increasingly leveraging the potential for viral expression through hashtag campaigns, algorithms, and other forms of digital circulation. Consider the wave of sympathy on social media following the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France, the Facebook networking prompted by the death of Khaled Said in Egypt, or the hashtag campaign centered on the so-called Chibok Girls in Northern Nigeria. In the field of humanitarianism, digital media are fueling an already mediatized practice of witnessing and advocacy, as evidenced by the #BringBackOurGirls appeal and the viral images and memes associated with the victims of Syria's civil war (Carter Olson, 2016; Joyce, 2011; Mitchell, 2016;

Pantti, 2015). Such digital appeals are sustained less by campaign materials disseminated by a central organization and more by the distributed and "personalized" activities of co-production (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013). Moral mobilization through expressive language has a long history, but digital media are enhancing these capabilities both for established political authorities and their competitors.

While humanitarian campaigns seem a far cry from Trump's white nationalist populism, they reflect an unlikely convergence around the political form of viral expression. The circulation of hashtags, streaming video content, memes, and other images is creating new opportunities for the creation of political solidarity. These protean solidarities are notable for their reliance on distributed digital practices. Part of the power of populism in the United States and Europe is its potential to simulate experiences of empowerment for constituencies aggrieved by generations of neoliberal economic policy. Claims to fairness and other viral expressions of defiance have served as useful conduits for public involvement in this context. Similarly, humanitarian activism has sought to promote awareness and solicit contributions through participatory forms of digital co-production. Successful campaigns in the era of mediatized humanitarianism are increasingly forging coalitions through practice rather than around religious or secular doctrines—hence the unlikely marriages of liberal, feminist, and evangelical supporters in campaigns around sex trafficking, genocide, and religious freedom (Bernstein, 2007; Bob, 2012; Ross, 2018). Viral expressions have political power where they succeed in creating political solidarities that transcend ideological and cultural boundaries.

The virtual communities created through viral expression may or may not come to exercise political authority. My contention is not that all viral expressions represent politically

significant social formations. But nor can they be dismissed as mere noise, since they constitute collective solidarities from which claims to political authority may succeed. Trump's foreign policy and other cases involving populist diplomacy helps to illustrate this potential. The solidarities forged through populist forms of viral expression may prove to be fleeting or unsustainable, just as digitally generated waves of humanitarian sympathy may dissipate quickly. But the longevity of these formations is not necessarily a reliable indicator of their potential to engender the affective underpinnings of a claim to political authority. Assessing the political impact of language requires investigating some of its less well-established elements. Massumi thus describes the power of expression as: "the cumulative result of a thousand tiny performative struggles peppered throughout the social field" (2002: xix). Each viral expression thus needs to be understood not for the power it holds in isolation but in relation to the past and future practices with which might resonate.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on language and mediated language that give public expression to emotion. I develop a theoretical account of viral expressions that exist alongside discursive and linguistic representations of emotion, and that are distinct from the semantically rich content to which many discourse-analytic and constructivist theories attribute emotionality. Before linguistic constructions such as metaphors and symbols become associated with sentiments or invested with socially recognized emotions, ordinary forms of expressive language do the quotidian work of displaying affect. Such expressive displays are now regularly mediated by

digital practices with the capacity for both rapid circulation and decentralized forms of viral co-production. In the digital age, we need not wait for the incremental process by which written language or political oratory congeal into metaphors, symbols, and slogans capable of eliciting emotional response. Through algorithmic and viral circulation, linguistic expressions can elicit affective responses in short order.

Whether those affective responses result in politically consequential outcomes remains an important question. Without purporting to settle that question here, I have sought to develop some conceptual parameters that might inform future research. To begin with, my theorization suggests that the emotional power of language cannot be understood by looking only at its content and performances thereof. While recognizable symbols and metaphors represent important indicators of and catalysts for emotion, affective potential may also travel through more mundane forms of expressive language. Second, as digital technologies increasingly mediate emotional expression, the latter shifts from a message-sending action to an "always-on" environmental quality that continually mediates experience. Specific speech acts and discursive events become less significant than on-going processes of distributed co-production and algorithmic selection. Finally, my approach suggests that political analysis of emotional expression in these digital environments should assess its power inductively and not deductively. Viral expressions may create the affective basis for new and unexpected claims to political authority, even in the absence of traditionally recognized identities or institutions.

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Endnotes

[1] Massumi calls this "the direct, mutual involvement of language and extra-linguistic forces" (2002: xix).

[2] I do not offer a comprehensive account of such developments here. One useful synthesis for IR scholars is Deibert (1997).

[3] The statement was: "North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen" (Baker and Sang-Hun, 2017).

[4] Following Trump's "on notice" Tweet, Colbert pointed out the appropriation on his late-night comedy show. See Lewis (2017).

[5] On the role of emotions as giving expression to status concerns, see Koschut (2017).

[6] Here, while I agree with Dean's description of communication capitalism, in which the "message is simply part of a circulating data stream" (2009: 26), I regard such circulations as achieving political impact by engendering solidarities. On the "diffused" resonance associated with Trump's tweets, see Boucher and Thies (2019: 720).

[7] My thanks to Julie White for suggesting this idea of the viral "host."