**Responding to terrorism with peace, love, and solidarity:**

**‘Je suis Charlie’, ‘I Heart MCR’, and ‘One Love’**

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**Abstract**

This article explores the affective responses to terrorist attacks in Western Europe, visually manifested through the memes ‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘Peace,’ ‘I heart MCR,’ and ‘One Love.’ By invoking the universal peace and solidarity signs, these responses mobilised an iconic repertoire that framed the responses as peaceful retaliations to terrorist attacks in solidarity with the victims and in that respect, helped to visualise and foster positive emotions in times of crisis. Indeed, the memes were articulated as the antidote (love) that can defy the brutality and hatred of terrorists. This article challenges this view in two ways. First, the article argues that the visual interventions constitute technologies of emotional governance that police subjects about whom to love, to whom solidarity should be extended and when and where those feelings should be displayed. Second, drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze on Francis Bacon, this article demonstrates that by propagating iconic representations of solidarity, peace and love, ‘meming’ attends to the logic of the sensational and the cliché and thereby falls short of contesting terrorism through *sensing* peace, love and solidarity. Finally, the article addresses how the violence of sensation can release the invisible forces that can be made productive in celebrating life.

**Keywords:** visual approaches, memes, affect, terrorism, Deleuze, ‘Je suis Charlie.’

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**Introduction**

On January 7, 2015, armed with Kalashnikovs, the Kouachi brothers attacked the Paris headquarters of the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, killing eleven employees.[[1]](#endnote-1) The next day, an eruption of affects emerged following the moral indignation the brutal killings caused. Various memes quickly spread under the hashtag #JesuisCharlie. In January 2015, ‘Je suis Charlie’ had for a slogan ‘l’amour plus fort que la haine’ (love: stronger than hate) and after the November Paris attacks, the Eiffel Tower was collated to the universal peace sign, as the second image above shows. ‘Je suis Charlie’ is at the origin of a multi-languages trend that replicates and alters the slogan to new victims of terrorism in Western Europe. More recently, responses to the Manchester attacks mobilised a similar response with the slogans ‘I heart MCR’ and ‘One love’. These visual and affective interventions draw on a long repertoire of anti-war movements by invoking the universal peace sign and the solidarity ribbon and in that sense, performed a visualisation of peace and solidarity. This article challenges this view by showing that they create a system of meaning and order that institutionalises an emotional guideline for how one should feel about terrorism and how solidarity should be expressed (and importantly to whom). As such, the article provides an innovative discussion which brings together visual security narratives with emotions discourse and collective affects within emotional communities.

Memes of solidarity to victims of terrorist attacks in the ‘West’[[2]](#footnote-1) sensationalise terrorism and represent a kind of affects that are conditioned as much as condition future emotional responses to terrorism. In other words, they constitute technologies of emotional governance that police Western bodies’ responses to terrorism: emotions of peace, solidarity and love become normative exigencies that should be manifested by attending vigils, concerts and by sharing memes on the digital sphere. The visual responses are therefore interesting sites for examining how affective responses to Islamic-based terrorism are entangled with relations of state power and the ways in which everyday actors appropriate memes as a form of policing. The article explores this tension and unfolds as follows. The first section establishes the visual approach that foregrounds the performativity of the peace and solidarity narrative. By mobilising an iconic repertoire of anti-war movements, this section shows how ‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘I heart MCR’ and ‘One love’ have become visual tropes for pacifism and solidarity. The second part develops the stages via which structures of emotional governance materialise, from the initial traumatic event to the formation of affective communities of mourning and lastly to the emergence of a sanctioning regime shaping individuals’ emotional behaviour. Drawing on the work of Gilles Deleuze ([1981] 2003) on the painter Francis Bacon, the last section of this article regards the manifestations of peace and love as sensational rather than attending to a more authentic *logic of sensation*. This critique is significant as the interventions of peace, love and solidarity in the ‘West’ seek to respond to the brutality and the horrors of terrorism by encouraging something considered as its peaceful antidote. Indeed, because love is ‘stronger than hatred’, love can conquer the fear and violence that terrorism spread and acts as a citizens-led counterterrorism initiative.

**Seeing and feeling memes: ‘Je suis Charlie’ ‘I love MCR’ and ‘One Love’**

*The challenge of the aesthetic Turn in International Relations (IR)*

Images make specific knowledge-claims about reality and are able to represent key events in world politics (Hansen, 2015: 265). In contrast to mimetic forms of representation which attempt to capture the world ‘as it really is’ and which have regrettably dominated the field of IR (Bleiker, 2001a: 510), aesthetic approaches acknowledge the inevitable distance between reality and its representation, and seek to understand the human mediations that guide the interpretations of reality (Bleiker, 2009: 19). Fortunately, the aesthetic Turn has blossomed in the last decade and has developed a real pluralist agenda (Bleiker, 2001a; Bleiker, 2001b; Bleiker, 2009; Sylvester, 2001; Williams, 2003; Campbell and Shapiro, 2007; Danchev and Lisle, 2009; Weber, 2008; Sylvester, 2008; Heck and Schlag, 2012; Moore and Farrands, 2013; Andersen et al., 2014). Various scholars in this Turn would agree that art has profound implications for how we understand the world and the field of international relations (Danchev and Lisle, 2009: 775). For example, Campbell and Shapiro note that visual culture affects practices of securitisation and militarisation (Campbell and Shapiro, 2007: 132). Williams (2003) rightly asks how it is possible to examine the War on Terror without understanding the effects of the repeated images of the falling Twin Towers. Others have pointed to the political significance of posting images of people who are ‘not afraid’ on the British website wearenotafraid.com following the 7/7 bombings (Weber, 2006), or to visual effects of the ‘remediation’[[3]](#endnote-2) of the 9/11 United Airlines Flight 93 (Weber, 2008), or lastly, to the significance of the images of tortured prisoners in Abu Ghraib (Hansen, 2015).

Heck and Schlag (2012: 15) examine how the *TIME* Magazine’s front cover of Aisha, a mutilated Afghan woman, with the caption ‘What happens if we leave Afghanistan,’ invoked a ‘responsibility to protect the endangered female body’ and thus greatly limited the prospect of removing US troops from Afghanistan. Images are thus integral to contemporary understandings of war and security and have a co-constitutive relation with reality with significant policy implications (Debrix and Barder, 2012: 1). Moreover, art can enhance creative responses towards security problems *in lieu* of limited strategic thinking (Bleiker, 2006). From the point of view of IR, the question is not whether icons can determine policy outcome, or whether people are emotionally affected by images, but ‘whether images can create, deepen or solve international conflict’ (Hansen, 2011: 275). In that respect, ‘Je suis Charlie’, ‘I heart MCR,’ and ‘One Love’ may not merely be responding to violence with solidarity and love but may also be controlling representations of terrorism and our affective response to terrorist attacks. Such memes constitute visualities that encourage ‘us’ to feel love, peace and solidarity toward the victims of the attacks and members of that mourning community while they tell ‘us’ to feel the opposite toward the attackers and ‘their’ community. This emotional regulation thus dispenses ‘us’ from thinking politically and emotionally about terrorism beyond this victim-perpetrator script.

In security studies, the aesthetic turn has gained such momentum that security textbooks are now including visual approaches to security.[[4]](#endnote-3) A majority of these contributions, as Andersen et al. (2014: 85) observe, have focused on the role of images in improving our explanations of world political events. They have less discussed how visuals such as memes create ‘charged atmospheres’ and ‘structures of feelings’ online, in sites of mourning or in marches, and how, in turn, these become significant and lived (Anderson, 2016). Visualities are highly charged with emotions and affect audiences in a different way than texts (Andersen et al., 2014: 101). As such, this article is concerned with how certain affective atmospheres, a type of experience that occur ‘across human and non-human materialities, and in-between subject/object distinctions’ (Anderson, 2009: 78), are released by the memes ‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘I heart MCR,’ and ‘One Love’ and in turn, how they are deployed as technologies of emotional governance. Indeed, these memes create affective spaces that are greater than the sum of individual subjects, or the artist behind their creation. Their strength and presence can be felt ‘in the air’ across humans and non-human objects.

*Memes in visual research*

The visual has often been separated from the discursive in social sciences, in particular in approaches that locate agency in materiality, whether these materialities are walls, space, architecture or networks. Hansen (2015: 274) argues that icons ‘do not “speak” foreign policy in the absence of textual discourse.’ Instead, they require text to be circulated and reproduced (Hansen, 2015: 274). In this light, images are performative but not on their own; they are about a second-order communication. For some, images unbind their full performative force from the simultaneous reception of the text *and* its accompanying image. Iconic power, for instance, ‘stems from a mutually constitutive (horizontal), not a hierarchical (vertical) relationship between aesthetic surface and discursive depth’ (Mitchell, 1980: 3). For others, language is too limited to account for how art and aesthetic approaches shape our somatic understanding of the world. Andersen, Vuori and Mutlu (2014: 85) assert that the visual matters in world politics in a way that is ‘categorically different’ than words. The meaning of linguistic texts unfolds progressively along different semiotic codes while images are experienced as a whole before being considered for its individual parts (Andersen et al., 2015: 442). While the first is more diffuse and discontinuous, the second is instantaneous and has immediate emotional capacities.

Put more simply, visuals appeal to our emotions and affect our bodies more directly than words, partly because what affects us viscerally are things that cannot be represented so easily with language, such as music, painting and images. Painting and being a spectator of art create a sensation that belongs to the body. In fact, “sensation is what is painted” (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 35). This was, according to Deleuze ([1981] 2003: 35), ‘Cezanne’s lesson against the Impressionists: sensation is not in the “free” or disembodied play of light and colour (impressions); on the contrary, it is in the body, even the body of an apple.’ Thankfully, the visual Turn offers an adequate methodology for investigating the material realm – how images generate meaning for example – outside of the analysis of text (Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams, 2015).

Memes are particularly interesting to study as they mutate both text and image and as Shepherd (2017: 221) has recently argued, they are a reminder that specific qualities are found in the digital image. Memes are part of a wider movement toward digital participation by imparting agency on their ‘everyday’ propagators. As Yao (2016: 153) explains, ‘[m]emes are representative of a catalogue of significant popular cultural moments, where the online community itself curates and assigns value through processes of dissemination, replication and/or imitation.’ Visual research in the digital age also results in ethical tensions, ‘with questions about what constitutes ‘the visual’, who owns it, who can reproduce and educate about it, where it resides, how it can be manipulated and construed, with what effects, and who has the skill to manage it’ (Shepherd, 2017: 221). Memes are generative of meaning and of social reality. They impose a certain order and truth. They provide easy and immediate access to information which are compressed into ‘pocket-sized’ media images that can go viral and generally have changed the way in which we engage with politics (Yao, 2016: 153). The memes explored in this article tell us what solidarity, peace and love are and are not in the context of terrorism, and what they entail in affective sites of commemoration. Just as the colour amber tells us to be cautious and the colour red indicates danger, the memes ‘Je suis Charlie’ ‘I heart MCR’ instructs us on what solidarity and love are and how they should be displayed and importantly to whom. They inform our understanding of the world and guide our emotional behaviours, and as such are agents of affect-production themselves.

Richard Dawkins (1976: 192) first coined the term ‘meme’ in 1976 in the *Selfish Gene* to define a new kind of ‘replicator’ gene, a unit of cultural transmission enacted through imitation and which is responsible for the ‘soup of human culture.’ Memes, according to Blackmore (2000: 52), ‘are stories, songs, habits, skills, inventions and ways of doing things that we copy from person to person by imitation.’ One of the most powerful meme, for Dawkins (1976: 192), is the idea of God, which is ‘fertile’ in turning brains into vehicles for its transmission. The belief in the existence of God is the result not only of mutation, but also of the propagation and replication, through written words, music and art, while slightly changing the meaning of God each time it is transmitted. Memes become stable because they have a high capacity for survival, and this capacity ‘results from its great psychological appeal. They offer a superficially plausible answer to deep and troubling questions about existence’ (Dawkins, 1976: 193). They solicit the interest of audiences through simplification and resonance to what has already been experienced. Memes are by nature something that imitate, extend and replicate, and in the case of the memes analysed here, by mobilising and repackaging a long iconic tradition of visual symbols of solidarity and peace.

*Mobilisation of anti-war and anti-nuclear icons*

‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘I heart MCR’ and ‘One love’ have mutated some of the stories of the anti-war and anti-nuclear movements of the 1960s. Yet, meming is always imperfect, so when replicated, memes may be inaccurate, embellished or simplified (Blackmore, 2000: 53). In that respect, they have the power to re-narrate stories in ways that fit the context and space in which they are expressed. One reason instant icons immediately spread around the world and create an emotional response is due to the seductive familiarity and resonance they offer (Hansen, 2015: 271). It is by exploiting previous symbols that memes such as ‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘I love MCR’ gained recognition. In effect, icons provide ‘believer-friendly epiphanies and customer-friendly images’ as they invoke previous signifiers (Bartmański and Alexander, 2012: 2). We are more receptive to ideas when we have already been introduced to them.

‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘One love’ and ‘I heart MCR’ did not simply emerge out of nowhere and referred not to one specific icon but to several generic linguistic and visual emblems that, viewed from the context of their history, are not value-free. For example, the slogan ‘I am Charlie’ drew on the previous ‘Nous sommes tous Américains’ published by *Le Monde* two days after the September 11 attacks (Colombani, 2001). ‘Je suis Charlie’ can also be a reference to the utterance ‘I am Spartacus’ in Stanley’s Kubrick’s 1960 film *Spartacus*, a moving expression of solidarity for the individuals accused of supporting communism during the McCarty era, or again to the expression ‘ich bin ein Berliner’ delivered by President John F. Kennedy in West Berlin on 26 June 1963, demonstrating American support for the people and government of West Germany. They denote a sense of loyalty to subjects who are considered victims of injustice: Spartacus faces a harsh punishment from the Romans for breaking free from the guards and leading a group of fugitive gladiators; Berliners, who, as a consequence of communism, live separated from their families and friends since the construction of the Berlin wall; Americans, who were victims of the worst terrorist attacks on their territory; the employees of Charlie Hebdo, and the inhabitants of Paris and Manchester, who were targeted by ISIL. ‘I heart MCR’ too, was not created after the Manchester attacks. The logo was first designed by an organisation launched after the 2011 riots in Manchester against ‘anti-social behaviour’ and is itself influenced from the infamous ‘I love New York’ logo designed for a marketing campaign, which was also influenced by pop art (Worley, 2017) and

Like posters, icons make use of metonymies, whereby a part stands for the whole, as a flag stands for the nation-state, the symbol of the pen for freedom of speech, and the semaphore signals ‘N’ and ‘D’ created by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), for the universal peace sign (Aulich, 2007: 15), as can be shown below.



This symbol became the international peace sign and mobilised mass movements objecting a wide range of causes, from military interventions such as the war in Vietnam, to the lack of civil rights for people of colour and more generally, these interventions opposed the power of the state and its police forces. The British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament formed a counterculture of activists that called on the British government to take the lead in unilateral disarmament. By 1968, the ‘peace and love’ moment gained the French political consciousness and created a political crisis referred as ‘Mai 68.’ This crisis was symptomatic of a general discontent with an authoritarian and capitalist order and precipitated the occupation of universities and factories, which worsened because police interventions in those contested spaces. The primary memory of people who lived through this short month of sexual and political revolution is the liberation of free speech (Bertaux et al., 1988: 81) and a commitment to social justice (Litwack, 2002: xv). [[5]](#endnote-4)

Memes, therefore, easily select content, simplify it and take it out of context to repackage it into something else (Yao, 2016: 168). Symbols encompass a variety of meanings that will, in time, fade from political consciousness. The signifier will remain the same but the signified changes, confounded with other signifieds or disappear altogether. While the universal Peace and Love symbol is iconic and has been re-used in different settings, the origins and meaning of the symbol (nuclear disarmament) has not marked individuals’ memory in the same way as the signifier. The meme that collated the Eiffel tower to this symbol mobilised a repertoire of pacifism, political dissent and anti-war attitudes without fully investigating this tradition, for the symbol demanded the state not to use force. If ‘Je suis Charlie’ is to become an icon for solidarity, peace and love, it is likely to become a visual trope for pacifism, or at least a shortcut for solidarity in the face of terrorism, and escape the kind of analysis and scrutiny that other signifiers beset because of their iconicity. But what is important is that the meme was palatable to a large audience because it had a (global) familiar resonance to an iconic time and was thus tangible. Indeed, memes gain their power from their timelessness and seriality (Rintel in Yao, 2016: 168).

*Inter-iconicity and inter-emotionality*

Memes point to the web of prior knowledge on which emotional responses to terrorism are produced. It calls to the ‘inter-iconicity’ of images, that is, according to Hansen (2015: 269), ‘the way in which an icon supports its claim to iconic status through referencing older icons.’ By doing so, memes evoke prior emotions and call on subjects to re-interpret and re-embody in a new context. This move is made easy because visuals are a close partner to emotions: ‘if seeing is, in fact, believing, then seeing is also feeling’ (Andersen et al., 2014: 101). Moreover, emotions are not isolated experiences in time but are rather intertwined across temporalities. Indeed, as Eroukhmanoff and Teles Fazendeiro (2018: 256) note ‘emotions seldom remain the same as time passes, but neither do they change completely or remain disconnected to each other across time.’ Inter-iconicity is thus also embedded in inter-emotionality by referring to a prior web of emotions in times of peace, war and solidarity such as referring to the anti-war movements of the 1960s. The memes and their embodiments in affective sites are therefore not completely novel but instead have recourse to a prior set of ‘mixed emotions’ (Ross, 2014). The inter-emotionality and the replication and propagation involved in responding to terrorism with memes are fundamental in understanding them as ‘sensational’, which will be discussed in the third part of this article.

**Governing emotions: the institutionalisation of emotional responses to terrorism**

*Affective communities of peace, love and solidarity*

This section is concerned with the ways in which everyday affective communities of peace, love and solidarity, coalesce around a common suffering, (re)appropriate memes which reproduce relations of power and find themselves policing actors who do not conform with the emotion norms of the community and/or who stand outside the community. How affective communities come into being start with a sense of ‘we-feeling’ amongst everyday actors. By ‘everyday actors’ I do not mean that victims of terror attacks and actors who propagate memes receive emotional scripts passively. On the contrary, as the Introduction of this Special Issue notes, everyday actors are key in subjugating, resisting, re-appropriating emotions and return them back to the sender. What the analysis of the memes show is that visual memes constitute tangible artefacts initiatied by everyday citizens around which communities of mourning can be wrapped. Despite that memes of peace and love are then used by the state, everyday actors are at the forefront of the circulation of memes and are the protagonists of the peace, love and solidarity story to the extent that these interventions can be viewed as citizen initiatives to counter-terrorism.

During the benefit concert ‘One Love’ for the families of the victims of the Manchester attack, concert-goers did note a sense of ‘we-feeling’ and belonging that run through after the city had been hit by terrorist attacks. One interview illustrates this sense of ‘we-ness’ (Grow, 2017):

It's so upsetting. It's really hard. Whether you knew someone [who went to the concert] or didn't, everyone has been affected one way or another. We've come together and that sense of community and love is quite amazing.

Traumatic events can trigger a collective emotional understanding and form ‘affective communities’ (Hutchison, 2016) or communities of ‘tears and suffering’ (Truc, 2016: 118). An ‘affective community’, according to Hutchison (2016: 4), is one that is ‘welded together, at least temporarily, by shared emotional understandings of tragedy.’ Emotions can create collective forms of agency that are needed to rebuild communities and thus help shape the post-trauma environment. Affective communities are consolidated through the performance of practices involving physical assemblies, apparent through the marches and the beds of flowers given by people observing silence at the sites of the attacks, and the sharing of similar emotions manifested through posting and sharing ‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘One Love’ and ‘I heart MCR’ on the digital sphere. The ritualization of practices is enacted through mimetic activities, for instance by photoshopping or simply sharing memes, in digital cultures. Those activities construct shared values and ‘cultural sensibilities that embody what people see as their communities’ (Shifman, 2014: 60). Those rituals are an essential part of the community-formation and posting the meme on the digital sphere signals support for the cause and hopes for inclusion in that community.

In affective communities, emotions expressed by members of the community towards other members differ from those expressed to outsiders. The community bond is reinforced from the inside as well as from the outside. Positive emotions such as empathy, sympathy and loyalty develop amongst members of the community whilst negative emotions of enmity can sometimes be encouraged towards non-members (Koschut, 2014: 546-547). A dualism between insiders, who support Charlie Hebdo and who spread ‘One love’, and outsiders, who receive some indications by stigmatisation that they are not part of the community, marks the boundary of those affective communities. While inside the community, positive emotion norms of amity are demonstrated, it does not necessarily mean that members of that community are free to feel what they want or free to express opposition. In affective communities, emotions do not ‘float freely’; participation in the community depends, to a certain degree, on compliance with emotional patterns of affect control (Koschut, 2014: 541-42). Indeed, there is certain amount of emotional governance at play in emotional communities.

*Emotional governance*

Emotional governance entails the general management of emotions in the public sphere and the implementation of an emotional apparatus to cope with terrorism that in the end, police emotional responses and chastise individuals if and when they express emotions that are incompatible with the dominant frame. Structures of emotional governance whereby ‘appropriate’ emotions guide individuals about what to feel for the victims (love and solidarity), for the perpetrators (anger and horror), take shape in different stages. The first stage occurs when a traumatic event triggers the creation of an affective community and when emotional states start looking alike, or in other words, when individual feelings turn collective. Affective communities have rituals – like posting memes – that will foster commonalities, shared beliefs and experiences in time. For example, individuals who posted the first ‘Je suis Charlie’ in January 2015 are more likely to propagate the meme collating the universal peace sign with the Eiffel tower in November 2015 and the ‘I heart MCR’ following the Manchester attacks. The sharing of memes grows as a common practice that speaks to a collective experience of trauma and visions of horror and which also presents an element of predictability and comfort. What was once a deep personal feeling of love and solidarity turns out as a collective emotion when that feeling begins to enter the realm of representation, by expressing it outward in the meme and then by sharing those memes online. Collective expressions of peace, love and solidarity are anchored as an emotional knowledge or emotional ‘know-how’ guiding individuals about how to emotionally feel and behave when terror attacks happen. How everyday individuals feel in relation to the collective emotional knowledge will in turn position them in or outside that affective community.

Narratives of solidarity, peace and love, though, are not created out of nowhere. Emergency responders in the UK are assigned to find coping statements that can help repair and rebuild society after catastrophic events. Take Lucy Easthope, the emergency recovery lead at the Cabinet Office, who stated in *the Guardian* that messages such as ‘I heart MCR’ are not completely ‘spontaneous’ but orchestrated by emergency responders who are tasked to show the strength and the ability of the country to recover quickly from disasters by putting services back together. As Easthope (2017) notes, ‘The ‘I heart messages’ that appear in cities, in the wake of a terrorist attack, are not thus always spontaneous. The statements from local politicians, imbued with messages of resilience and defiance, emphasising that it will be “business as usual”, are carefully planned in advance’ (Easthope, 2017). In France, the French state also exploited the ‘Je suis Charlie’ sign during the ‘Republican March’ on 11 January 2015 and ‘called the street’ to protest; indeed the march was an official ‘state demonstration’ launched by politicians and thus directly associated with state power (Boussaguet and Faucher, 2017).

*Stages of emotional governance*

The first stage of emotional governance is at the centre of the organisation ‘I heart Manchester’ who state that they are ‘a small band of incorruptible symbol, like-minded individuals who share the same passion- love and affection for our city’ (I love MCR, 2017). The initial stage of emotional governance is thus also about (re)affirming the affective community’s identity and articulating that they ‘stand together’. What do (all) people of Manchester do? They (all) love Manchester! It is not only that love is felt by its members, but love must be spread by calling on subjects to demonstrate love towards the city, its products and its people. Indeed, they ‘love to shout about all the things that make Manchester one of the world’s greatest cities’ (I love MCR, 2017).

The second stage of emotional governance is the crystallisation of ‘feeling rules’ in the affective community. Feeling rules are conventions that regulate the display of certain kinds of emotions that operate as other types of social rules insofar as they delineate a zone within which individuals can feel jealousy, sadness or solidarity without any shame for that particular feeling (Hochschild, 1979: 565). While it may be appropriate to show solidarity and love towards the victims, the police forces who neutralised the assailants, and the members of other Western European ‘mourning communities’, demonstrating other sentiments toward them may be ill-fitted in a post-terror attacks context. Those feelings, using Alison Jaggar’s (1989: 166) term, may be ‘outlawed’ because they are incompatible with the dominant emotional framework. The appropriateness of emotions is determined by the ‘feeling rules’ associated to a social situation, which demand that emotions may be ‘managed’ accordingly. This is what Hochschild (1979: 561) calls ‘emotion work’ or ‘deep acting’, the attempt to change one’s feeling to suit the appropriate emotional regime (but emotion work is not the outcome of that pursuit). Feeling rules become more rigid in time since collective emotional states are reinforced, and individuals are less likely to break with the emotional norm to avoid any disruption; in fact, members will reinstate feeling rules voluntarily. Feeling rules may also bestow members of an affective community the right to claim the monopoly over a particular feeling. For example, while ‘unconditional love’ is what defines ‘I heart MCR’ community, ‘mindlessness,’ ‘chaos’ and ‘war’ is what drives the rioters. Here, the only plausible explanation offered by the ‘I heart MCR’ organisation for the 2011 riots is that the protesters did not love (enough) their city, or at least not with the ‘right’ kind of love. ‘I heart MCR’, on the hand, love their city in the ‘right’ way.

The last stage of emotional governance is when stigma is imparted to individuals who do not conform to the emotional frame or to those who have not yet done the necessary ‘emotion work’. Koschut (2014, 2014: 542) notes that negative emotions of dislike, dissatisfaction or even anger, can be expressed toward those who do not comply with the norms and rules of the community. The final stage of emotional governance is thus taxing, both for its members because it requires to convey negative attitudes toward those who are outside of the dominant frame and for the outgroups because they become victims of prejudice, can be momentarily ostracised or permanently excluded. As Jaggar (1989: 166) writes, people who experience unconventional emotions may feel confused or pay a high price for not complying. In the case of the ‘I heart MCR’ organisation (2017: Video), ‘spreading love’ is considered as a corrective to anti-social behaviour against the ‘mindless idiots who raided our city’. The logo ‘I heart MCR’ symbolises ‘resilience, solidarity, defiance, and civic pride’ of an ‘undivided’ community, unless the social ordering of the city is challenged, as the 2011 riots did, in which case some individuals (rioters) are excluded and disgraced (‘idiots who do not love their city’).

Hochschild (1979) talks of ‘emotion sanctions’ in the sense that some emotional states are authorised while others punished. Such stigma in the post-Charlie Hebdo attacks environment was observable toward the ‘Je ne suis pas Charlie’ partisans who were cast out of the political debate. The sanctioning regime also targeted an 8-year-old pupil who was questioned by the police for challenging the minute of silence in class and ‘apparently siding with the terrorists’ (Le Monde, 2015), a ‘totalitarian flashback,’ argues French sociologist Emmanuel Todd (2015: 12). By not adopting the official emotional frame and refusing to perform the emotion management demanded by the affective regime, an ideological stance can be disrupted, as the case of 8-year-old boy illustrates. As Hochschild (1979: 567) notes, ‘deep acting or emotion work, then, can be a form of obeisance to a given ideological stance, lax emotion management a clue to an ideology lapsed or rejected.’

The role of memes is thus that they constitute technologies of emotional governance that help remind communities of mourning of their traumatic experience, remind subjects about feeling a certain way towards victims and perpetrators, and charge the air, the streets and the materialities of these sites with certain affective atmospheres. Because affects ‘circulate’ within broader assemblages that are never purely individual, they seize people and things involuntarily by sticking to them (Solomon, 2015; Anderson, 2009). The affects that envelop the One Love and Charlie communities are beyond individual subjectivities, and instead suffuse spaces and the material qualities of sites such as the One Love stadium, the Westminster and London bridges, the Charlie Hebdo offices and the streets of Paris, post-attacks. Atmospheres are not individual, volatile and ephemeral but instead live on and exceed the singularity of the subject and the event when they are posted online or held in memorial spaces. Affective atmospheres of solidarity, peace and love ‘traverses distinctions between peoples, things, and spaces and “envelop”’ and thus press on a society “from all sides” with a certain force’ (Anderson, 2009: 78). Those affective atmospheres thus map spatialities of solidarity, peace and love, where one can easily be ‘caught up’ when one passes by.

Yet, one must ask if such atmosphere of peace, love and solidarity do in reality repudiate the violence of war and terrorism and renegotiate relations of solidarity and ‘One love’ to a broader community. The work of Gilles Deleuze on the painter Francis Bacon can shed light on the distinction between a logic of sensation, which has the force to renegotiate violence, and the logic of the sensational and the cliché, which I argue underpins the memes ‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘One Love’ and ‘I heart MCR’. Because meming is embedded in inter-iconicity and inter-emotionality, the affective responses to terrorism expressed through visual memes repeat, replicate and propagate *representations* of love, peace and solidarity and as such, fall short of bringing those emotions into being.

**Sensational love, solidarity and peace**

‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘I heart MCR’ and ‘One Love’ are made intelligible through *representations* of solidarity, peace and love. What these memes do then, is address the spectacle and the violent representations of Charlie, Manchester and ‘One Love,’ rather than attend to the violence of the *sensation* of love and solidarity.

*Gilles Deleuze on the violence of sensation*

In the preface of the English edition, Gilles Deleuze writes that the work of the painter Francis Bacon is violent. Indeed, Bacon paints horrors such as crucifixions, monsters and mutilations. It is a ‘special kind of violence’ however; it is a violence of sensation: ‘the violence of a hiccup, of the urge to vomit, but also of a hysterical, involuntary smile’ (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: x). The violence is one that *re*acts, one that is beyond representation. The essence of Bacon’s work, which separates him from other painters and makes him an original painter, is to capture what is beneath representation, like the violence of a scream, by reintroducing rhythm in the act of painting. The sensation that one feels when looking at painting of the Pope screaming, for example, is not inferred from what the Pope fears, since there is nothing in front of him, he is isolated. Rather, the sensation of horror emerges from the scream itself. The Pope ‘screams before the invisible’ and the horror is thus ‘inferred from the scream, not the reverse’(Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 38). Deleuze believes that Bacon is successful at capturing those invisible forces and rendering them visible, visceral, and violent.

 Francis Bacon*, Study after Velásquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X’. 1953.*

Bacon achieves to paint the violence of sensation by avoiding the figurative, the illustrative and everything that constitutes the representational character of painting by isolating the Figure. This work is important because painting, for Deleuze and for Bacon, ‘has neither a model to represent nor a story to narrate’ (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 2). Painting involves instead movements and motions, free of already known stories. To avoid the ‘figurative’ and escape narration, two paths are available to the painter: complete abstraction or isolating the Figure against a field of motionless and uniform colour upon which the Figure presses. The correlation between the Figure and the field of colour itself triggers a sensation beyond representation, a sensation that is violent. Indeed, ‘If the field of colour press toward the figure, the Figure in turn presses outward, trying to pass and dissolve through the fields. Already we have here the role of the spasm, or of the scream: the entire body trying to escape, to flow out of itself’ (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 12).

 Francis Bacon. *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*. 1944.

But painting can be violent in another way, that is, by painting the representational and the signified, the violence of the spectacle and of the figurative (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: xiv). The figurative is there to illustrate an image of an object but does not seek to break with that representation. Conceived in this way, ‘narration is the correlation of illustration’ (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 3) This kind of violence seeks to reconstitute scenes of horror through re-introducing stories of horrors. Deleuze views this violence at odds with the violence created by the sensation of the Figure pressing upon the field of colour and the Figure pressing outward and instead considers it as *sensational* violence, as violence that belongs to the cliché. The violence of sensation acts directly on the nervous system as a vibration while the violence of the sensational is related to the nature of what is being represented (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 3). For what can be painted as sensation is not the representation of an object but the body that sustains its sensation, or following Lawrence and Deleuze, the ‘appleyness of an apple’ (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 3).

Sensation as vibration is,

produced when the wave encounters the forces acting on the body, an "affective athleticism," a scream-breath. When sensation is linked to the body in this way, it ceases to be representative and becomes real; and cruelty will be linked less and less to the representation of something horrible, and will become nothing other than the action of forces upon the body, or sensation (the opposite of the sensational) (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 45).

Clichés, by contrast, are the ready-made perceptions, judgements, the ‘givens’ and values that are invested in representational modes of thinking, which unfortunately are already lodged onto the canvas before the work of the artist, but which must be fought, and which constitutes to a large extent the work of the artist. What I argue here is that the visual responses to terrorism end up reaffirming Western solidarity via sensationalist aesthetics and emotions and neglect the violence of sensation. Following Deleuze, reproducing clichés may be inadequate in really *sensing* love, peace and solidarity, let alone resisting the violence of terrorism or equally the violence of state power.

*Responding to terrorism sensationally*

Having recourse to a repertoire of icons about love, peace and solidarity, condemns memes to an *illustration* of sensation, pertaining to the cliché and the sensational. Invoking a previous iconic framework attempts to cope with the inexpressibility and the non-representationality of sensation and affect. Instead of disrupting previous narratives of peace, love and solidarity, spectacular stories of peace and love are re-introduced and re-mobilized in the memes. As discussed in the first section of this article, the memes rest on an inter-emotionality and inter-iconicity and recapture prior webs of emotions in the hope that they can resonate with the current affective regime as well as shape it. Yet this means that they enter the realm of the illustrative and the narrative and, following Deleuze, fall short of addressing the *logic of sensation*. In this light, the propagation of these visualities seems too simplistic to renegotiate relations of power beyond merely (re)illustrating peace, love and solidarity sensationally. These interventions contribute to the wider ‘spectacle’, a society that presents itself as a nothing more than an accumulation of spectacles, mediated by mass images, appearing ‘as a part of society and as a means of unification’, as Guy Debord ([1967]1994: para 3,4) sketched out in his seminal text *The* *Society of Spectacle*. According to Debord ([1967]1994: para 1), ‘all that once was directly lived has become mere representation.’

The sensational does nothing new but only reaffirms the clichés and the nature of the represented. Understood as a spectacle, the visual interventions manifest themselves as an outpouring of positivity, as a tautology passively accepted and beyond dispute: ‘everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear’ (Debord, [1967]1994: para 12). Not only the spectacle lacks in authenticity, but it robs its members of critical thinking, of realising the immense potentialities that life offers and thus, the spectacle bankrupts life itself. Sensational representations of solidarity, peace and love do not liberate the forceful presence of sensation, the force that sustains solidarity and love for instance (or the appleyness of the apple). Refusing the sensational (and thus representation) is, for Francis Bacon (In Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 61), a kind of ‘declaration of faith in life.’ Bacon may have painted horrors as it were, but this work sought to release the invisible force that screams *at* death. In effect, death is this ‘invisible force that life detects, flushes out, and makes visible through the scream’ (Deleuze, [1981] 2003: 61). It is for the purpose of life and its intensities that we must attend to the logic of sensation.

*Resisting sensational love, solidarity and peace*

We must first ask whether art may have the ability to, or even should, comment on ‘politics’, on issues such as terrorism and the War on Terror. Art *has* a political power, yet it is questionable whether this is located in narrating the politics of the moment. Rather, art’s political power, according to Deleuze and Guattari, may be better enshrined in the explosion of the real itself, in the destruction of representational modes of thought, which are not directed toward particular political positions but nonetheless ‘can create sensations that resist “servitude”, “shame”, the “intolerable” and the “present”’ (Deleuze and Guattari in Zepke 2017, 753). As Zepke (2017: 743) observes, although this sensation is itself revolutionary, this does not necessarily mean that art and social movements can work together, rather, ‘they each pursue revolution with the means at their disposal, which in art’s case is aesthetic, the sensation.’ Following Deleuze and Guattari, art’s political potency is found in its capacity to shatter the representational image of thought, and perhaps disappointedly, not in re-imagining ways to respond aesthetically to political issues like terrorism or in aesthetically circumventing current affective regimes like the one propagated after terrorist attacks in Western Europe.

But Deleuze’s ideas of the nature of art are somewhat limited, for he not only asks us to renounce to the representational image of thought but also demands that art not comment on politics. To put it differently, Deleuze’s work in *The Logic of Sensation* frustrates any call for artists and citizens to aestheticize politics. Authors like Deleuze, while perhaps philosophically intriguing and palatable for academics, underlines an elitism that nurtures passivity instead of activism in the academy (Shukaitis and Graeber, 2007: 23).[[6]](#endnote-5) Moreover, visualities of love, solidarity and peace, and the sensational atmospheres they bring into being, are already *here*, speaking about political life and organising emotions around terrorism. There is therefore a great political purchase in interrogating and problematizing those visual responses and in finding a place where visuals can intervene in experiences of political violence and war more broadly.

Scholarship in the ‘emotions’ and ‘aesthetic’ Turns have convincingly demonstrated that emotions and art have a potential for transforming conflict and for resisting hegemonic structures, including the ‘structures of feelings’ that emotionally govern the post-attacks landscape. Although there are legitimate reservations that ‘knowing’ the Other involves forms of projection from the position of the ‘privileged’ (Pedwell, 2012: 166), there is an agreement that positive and mixed emotions like empathy are transformative political tools in conflict resolution. For example, Head (2012: 49; 2016) has argued that the reflexive capacities of empathy and trust play a significant role in reconstructing relationships and can act as a non-violent means of resistance in the context of Israel and Palestine. Crawford (2014: 538) has showed that empathy is essential for the promotion of peace, democracy and human rights and went as far as to suggest that empathy is ‘a potential antidote to individual and institutionalised fear in world politics.’ Further, it has been argued that empathy, more specifically ‘Emphatic Mutual Positioning’, is key in reconciliation practices and can support mediators in their conciliation efforts (Cameron and Seu, 2013). Emotions of solidarity, peace and love should thus not be entirely written off when contemplating responses to terrorism. In essence, a pacifist agenda underpinned by emotions of solidarity, compassion and empathy should support a de-militarised approach to the war on terrorism. Integrating emotions in how we investigate the world already challenges the notion of a dispassionate ‘science’ of International Relations which is prominent in positivist epistemologies; emotions are an integral part of how individuals form and maintain values and as such are essential to observations and knowledge-claims (Jaggar, 1989: 160-161). This recognition, in turn, leads to more situated (and often feminist) epistemologies that are more conducive to questioning the stability of violence, encouraging reconciliation and dialogue between perpetrators and victims, and nurturing harmony than rationalist approaches.

Furthermore, aesthetics has an adequate vocabulary to discuss issues such as reconciliation, oppression, emotional governance and resistance, as Bleiker (2017) notes, and opens up a ‘thinking space.’ Indeed, ‘an appreciation of aesthetics offers us possibilities to re-think, re-view, re-hear and re-feel the political world we live in’ (Bleiker, 2017: 260). This is what Bleiker calls an ‘aesthetic politics,’ the opportunity to step back and challenge dominant conventions to see and sense the world anew. An aesthetics politics aims to investigate how art and visuals constitute reality and how they can inform ways of knowing about the world – thereby using art as a methodology to study IR.[[7]](#endnote-6) While an aesthetic politics may be at odds with Deleuze’s view of art’s political power, an aesthetics politics is less about foregoing representation than about showing the problems with representational practices and mimetism (Bleiker, 2017). Indeed, the first principle of an aesthetic politics is to acknowledge the gap between the representation of reality and reality itself (Bleiker, 2017: 261). Opening up ‘thinking space’ can also answer some of the problems created by the spectacular nature of the memes, by unlocking the space for critical thought.

So instead of abandoning the idea that art and emotions can be productive in combating and transforming hegemonic power or in re-thinking responses to terrorism beyond spreading sensational solidarity, peace and love, we should ask how art and visuals can speak to these emotions, concepts and practices while at the same time resist the sensational. How may we contest this logic and instead address life, its intensities and the invisible forces of sensation? How may memes break with the representation and the figurative of love and solidarity in order to attend to the violence of sensation? This is important work, for when the violence of sensation is rendered forceful and visible, it can triumph over death. Indeed, as Deleuze ([1981] 2003: 62) writes, ‘when the visual sensation confronts the invisible force that conditions it, it releases a force that is capable of vanquishing the invisible force, or even befriending it.’ Hence, if visual responses to terrorism seek to ‘conquer hatred’ with love and solidarity, memes must render the invisible forces of solidarity, peace and love, visible. To do away with the violence of the sensational, we may first think of removing the iconic repertoire the memes mobilise because it is here that the narration and the figurative, and thereby their sensational violence, are located. We may also think of isolating what is painted and painting a vibration, a wave that encounters the flesh, the body and organs. What is essential to the logic of sensation, is resisting the major narratives about love, peace and solidarity that dominate our normative framework for understanding and responding to terrorism and political violence. In sum, this last section sought to shed light on the distinction between two types of violence, the violence of the representation and the violence of sensation, and argued that visual responses to terrorism that seek to ‘conquer hatred’ with love and solidarity can gain from addressing this distinction.

**Conclusion**

This article explored the affective responses to terrorist attacks in Western Europe, visually manifested through the memes ‘Je suis Charlie,’ ‘One Love’ and ‘I heart MCR.’ Memes of peace, love and solidarity guide subjects to feel a certain way toward victims and perpetrators by telling us when, where and importantly to whom it is appropriate to feel solidarity, peace and love. Not expressing solidarity to Charlie was perhaps incompatible with the dominant affective regime that imbued the post-Charlie landscape. Some emotions may thus be ‘outlawed’ while others socially appropriate. Emotional governance takes place in three stages. The first stage is the emergence of an affective community and the (re)affirmation of that community’s identity and emotional position toward terrorism. Second, emotional governance occurs when ‘feeling rules’, rules that inform subjects how to feel and behave, are materialised. The last stage of emotional governance is the most demanding, for it requires members of the affective community to castigate other members for not complying with the feeling rules and to perhaps exclude individuals who may express outlaw emotions. Emotional governance also contributes to the social ordering of society by forcing individuals to politically situate themselves in relation to the affective community. Often this positioning is dichotomous, you are either ‘Charlie’ or you are ‘not Charlie’.

‘Being Charlie,’ ‘loving Manchester’ or expressing ‘One Love’ is not simply about celebrating life, but about preserving a specific kind of life toward which it is worth feeling solidarity, peace and love. The memes reassure that ‘we’ are innocents and that ‘they’ are the evil perpetrators and as such do not go beyond the victim-perpetrator script. In so doing, the affective power that invests the memes silences the violence of the Global War on Terror and re-narrates ‘Western’ responses as peaceful and loving. This interpretation was noticeable during the commemoration for the victims of the November attacks in Paris where celebrity musicians sang famous songs that captured the ‘French spirit’ and recited selected excerpts from French writers about the splendor of Paris. When Jacques Brel’s song entitled ‘When we only have love’ was played, the French government had decided to launch new massive airstrikes on the ISIS stronghold of Raqqa and was overseeing the appalling treatment of asylum seekers in Calais for ‘security’ reasons. Imagining responses to terror attacks as peaceful and loving takes responsibility away from the violence carried out by governments like the United Kingdom and France in the Global War on Terror and reconstitute the Western (white) subject as ‘loving,’ ‘peaceful’ and empathetic to injustice. How can we politically understand violence against ‘us’ when ‘we’ only have love?

Seeing and feeling sensational solidarity, peace and love in this context are shaped by how those emotions are *represented* in the memes and then propagated. When Susan Sontag (2003) wrote about the pain of others, she argued that ‘photographs of victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus.’ Likewise, the memes explored in this article replicate, reduce, and create a semblance that we have ‘one love,’ that ‘we are Charlie’ or that ‘we love Manchester.’ Following Deleuze on the work of the painter Francis Bacon, this article demonstrated that these visual interventions attend to the violence of the sensational, but address little of the violence of sensation. Seeking to conquer terrorism with love and solidarity should instead prompt subjects to re-evaluate relations beyond the spectacular stories of the horrors of terrorism or spectacular delights of solidarity and love within affective communities. To this end, we, as everyday actors, are active agents in the creation and transformation of political life and as such, can refuse the emotional script of victim-perpetrator in our everyday lives. We must renounce the violence of the spectacle and liberate instead the indiscernible forces that have the power to scream *at* death and celebrate life in all its intensities. Researching memes in International Relations is essential as memes often escape the kind of criticism that other modes of communication like texts are subjected to. Offering a critique of memes of solidarity which spread in Western Europe after Islamic-based terror attacks, this article warns that we must be cautious about reading these responses as simple manifestations of solidarity, peace and love and that we should instead pay more attention to the kind of affective governance they bring into being.

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1. Including the caricaturist Jean Cabut, and the director of publication Stéphane Charbonnier. This attack was followed by another attack in a Kosher supermarket in Portes de Vincennes that killed five people (including the attacker). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I write the ‘West’ in inverted commas to acknowledge the fact that the ‘West’ is not a monolithic and homogenous entity. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Weber (2008, p. 139) defines remediation as the ‘representation of one mediums in another’ in the sense that documentaries, films and other television broadcasts ‘recycle’ actual television news broadcast. Drawing on Bolter and Grusin, Weber (2008, p. 139) argues that what is interesting about remediation is its temporal effect, the ‘double logic of mediation.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
4. See for instance Moore and Farrands (2013) in the edited volume by Laura Shepherd on *Critical Approaches to Security*; Sheperd LJ. (2013) Critical Approaches to Security: An introduction to theories and methods. Oxon: Routledge.and Andersen, Vuori and Mutlu Aradau C, Huysmans J, Neal AW, et al. (2014) Critical Security Studies: New framework for analysis. Oxon: Routledge.(2014) in the volume on *Critical Security Methods*, edited by Aradau, Huysmans, Neal and Voelkner. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
5. I want to emphasise that this is the ‘primary memory’ of Mai 68 and that the Peace and Love iconic moment is what is celebrated today, but that sexual revolution and political liberation were not available to everyone, especially not women and people of colour. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
6. Shukaitis and Graeber make this argument about Jean Baudrillard but can easily be extended to Deleuze. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
7. But as Bleiker and Steele note in the Special Forum of *Millennium* celebrating the 15 years of the Aesthetic Turn, an aesthetic politics also recognises that politics itself has an aesthetics, for example through the celebration of national events, ceremonies, parades, the design of national symbols and flags.

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