Grassroots

ISA RC48 Social Movements, Collective Action and Social Change

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Note from the RC48 President

Dear Colleagues, Members of RC48

I'm pleased to present the second RC48 Grassroots newsletter for 2022.

The issue is focused on to the topic of 'TikTok and Social Movements'. This proposal pays special attention to an increasingly emergent theme in the social movements research: the Internet and "computer-mediated" communication have changed both the organizational structure of social movements and forms of individual participation in the movement, and consequently the process of mobilization. The Internet plays a central role in protests and demonstrations: mobilization, information and organization are almost always conveyed by the Net.

The social media create opportunities and increase participation, providing a useful "place" for engagement and thought-sharing, also supporting the development of common understanding and shared meaning. The social media build bonds between people sometimes with different identities but united against a common enemy; they also facilitate the creation of large and sustainable interpersonal networks or coalitions.

If the Internet became a "public space," where social movement can shape discourse on relevant policy issues and create common meanings, the social media platforms enable diverse groups to discuss, plan, and act collectively.

"The recent growing popularity of TikTok has transformed the cultures and practices of social movements worldwide. Through the platform's participatory affordances, many users find meaningful ways to engage with the platform and its cultures, by

Note from the RC48 President

leading and participating in a variety of activist initiatives for global awareness, social change, and civic politics" (J. Lee and C. Abidin, Introduction to the Special Issue of "TikTok and Social Movements", Social Media + Society, 2023). This is, in summary, one of the key reasons why the Grassroots Committee decided to propose such a topic: the investigation of new platforms and Socials of which social movements make regular use can be noteworthy to our members .

Our Grassroots recall a very sad news: the sociological world lost a giant of contemporary sociology and great scholar of social movements, Alain Touraine. Our vice-president for research, Geoffrey Pleyers, has sent a tribute to the memory remembering that "he leaves us with a vision of the world and societies in constant transformation through the action and ideas of the actors and social movements."

A great sociologist always in search of the substance of politics and the breath of society, attentive to the potential of the "social actor" and the notion of conflict that guided his research; a man deeply committed to democracy, but at the same time with a critical attitude towards its processes and consequences. I want to remember Alain Touraine with the following quote from Pourrons-nous vivre ensemble? Egaux et différents (1997):

"Far from breaking with the democratic spirit based on individualistic universalism, the multicultural society is the fulfilment of the democratic idea, as it recognises the plurality of interests, opinions, and values. This is why it is so threatened by the two complementary aspects of demodernisation: mass culture, on the one hand, and identity obsession, on the other; in other words, cultural globalisation, and cultural fundamentalisms, which so easily lead to the extermination of minorities in the name of ethnic cleansing and religious purity."

This number includes a schedule of the RC48 Program at the XX ISA World Congress in Melbourne and the **PhD Workshop** that will take place just one day before the start of the **Congress on**

Note from the RC48 President

Saturday 24 June at the Crowd, 9 am-1 pm. All our members are invited to participate.

All usual, the aim of the RC48 programme organizers was to include the largest possible number of emergent topics related to social movements and collective action and to open strong cooperation with other ISA Research Committees. In fact, the different sessions point out several issues from general to specific and approach the collective action research field from numerous perspectives. We encouraged members to find common themes to propose to the Congress and to try to find new trends of research that could be attractive for both young and senior researchers alike. In addition to the sessions inspired by the Congress main topic, several sessions aim to explore young participation and collective action, environmental movements, and climate justice as well as other emerging issues in social movements research. Of course, the different regional and gender perspective were included in the choice of sessions and abstracts.

This number of Grassroots is a good opportunity to invite you to participate in the **Business Meeting on Thursday, 29 June 2023: 17:30 - 19:20, MCEC, 211**, I wish to have a large participation in order to make important decisions all together.

It's time for balance. After five years as RC48 President I aim to share with you all the progress achieved but also the several difficulties faced. First of all, the pandemic that did not allow as to meeting in person for a long time, this has certainly been the greatest difficulty during these years of presidency, and it is the reason why I'm really excited to meet you again in person at the Congress in Melbourne. Despite this, the RC48 committee managed to organise two online conferences with good success in term of participation, of which the proceedings will be published soon, the first with Springer at the end of July. Many more details, such as Grassroots restyling, RC48 website, etc., will be discussed at the Business Meeting.

Note from the RC48 President

Finally, as usual, this Grassroots presents a list of recent publications by members of RC48. To circulate information of last publications in the field and give visibility to work by members of RC48 are two among our fundamental aims. These will also encourage and facilitate collaboration among our members. Please RC48 colleagues continue to send us information about publications and events, we would be glad to add them to the next Grassroots newsletters.

I think this will be one of the last chances to say thank you to the board members who closely collaborated with me in leading the committee: Camilo Tamayo Gomez, Tova Benski, Benjamin Tejerina Montaña, Natalia Miranda, and Kaan Agartan, with the hope of continuing our fruitful collaboration in this and other settings.

Hoping to see you all soon in Melbourne! 😊

Your sincerely,

Liana M. Daher
President RC48

About RC 48

The Research Committee on Social Movements, Collective Action and Social Change (RC48) is part of the International Sociological Association (ISA). It was founded as a Working Group in 1992, under the presidency of Prof. Bert Klandermans. In 1994, it was recognized as an ISA Research Committee. The objective of RC48 is to foster intellectual, academic and scholarly exchanges between researchers of broadly defined social movements, collective action and social change. The RC48 is currently based at the Collective Identity Research Centre (Department of Sociology 2, University of the Basque Country, Spain).

The ISA was founded in 1949 under the auspices of UNESCO. With more than 5,000 members coming from 167 countries, the ISA is currently the most important international professional association in the field of sociology. Its goal is to advance sociological knowledge throughout the world, and to represent sociologists everywhere, regardless of their school of thought, scientific approaches or ideological opinion.

The on-going scientific activities of the ISA are decentralised in 55 Research Committees (RC), 3 Working Groups (WG) and 5 Thematic Groups (TG), each dealing with a well-recognized specialty in sociology. These groups bring together scholars who wish to pursue comparative research on a transnational basis and they constitute basic networks of scientific research, intellectual debate and professional exchange. Although they must fulfil certain minimum requirements, RCs have complete autonomy to operate. Each RC's governing body is the Board, formed by a President, a Secretary, and a variable number of board members. RC48 participates in the organization of both the ISA World Congresses, celebrated every 4 years since 1950 (Zurich), and the ISA Forums of Sociology, also celebrated every 4 years since 2008 (Barcelona).

In contrast to the ISA World Congress, which has a more professional and academic character, the forum's original purpose was to establish an open dialogue with colleagues doing sociology in public institutions, social movements, and

About RC 48

civil society organizations. This means that every two years, we are involved in the organization of a worldwide event. In between ISA World Congresses and forums, our committee organizes smaller scientific meetings called RC48 international conferences. These meetings tend to be more narrowly focused than other ISA events and, on average, they gather between 30 and 60 scholars. Consequently, colleagues can make longer presentations, and we can go hold deeper and more enriching debates.

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In memoriam. Alain Touraine, a sociologist of the production of society by itself

Geoffrey Pleyers, Vice-President of the International Sociological Association

The French sociologist Alain Touraine passed away on 9 June, aged 97. He leaves us with a vision of the world and societies in constant transformation through the action and ideas of the actors and social movements. He won international recognition for his work on the post-industrial society and the new social movements and was a keen theoretician of modernity. He remains one of the most influential sociologists in many European countries and across Latin America. Through his personal (his wife Adriana Arenas was Chilean) and intellectual life, Alain Touraine was closely linked to Latin America. They were in Santiago during Salvador Allende's government and witnessed Pinochet's coup in 1973. Fifteen years later, his major work on Latin America, "The Word and the Blood", portrayed the continent a few years after the fall of the military dictatorships.

Born in 1925, Touraine graduated in history from the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1950. He devoted his research in the next two decades to industrial society and the social conflict that drove it. Work was then at the core of social life, and Touraine valued it deeply. However, from the end of the 1960s, he was among the first to grasp the sweeping change that post-industrial society would bring. Not that the conflicts over the distribution of resources and the time of the factories were over, but in this emerging society, culture, education, information and communication progressively overtook the production of material goods as the central element in the orientation of society and the stake of social conflicts. Domination was not only played out in the workfare but also in areas such as education, consumerism and information. Resistance and the transformation of society were, therefore, also played out in these areas. With the expansion of access to higher education and consumption of material and cultural goods, in 1968, workers went on mass strikes, people in Eastern Europe, African-American students in the United

In memoriam. Alain Touraine, a sociologist of the production of society by itself

States and students in Mexico demanded democracy, and students across the world proclaimed a creative and cultural revolution against a social, cultural and political model.

Touraine studied this post-industrial society that was emerging before his eyes through the social movements that produced it: May 1968, the 1970s student, feminist and ecologist movements, and the Polish trade union Solidarnosc. Progressively, he gave more space and importance to the "personal subject", the individual who seeks to become the author of their life and an ethical actor in society, to the point of considering this personal subject as a central historical actor in our world. It led Touraine to perceive early on the growing importance of the assertion of dignity and the demand for respect in contemporary movements. He considered the Zapatista Mexican indigenous movement that rose in 1994 as one of the clearer incarnations of this struggle. The centrality of the affirmation of dignity in the face of oppressive systems and regimes was to spread to all continents with the revolutions and citizen revolts that marked the decade of the 2010s, from the Arab revolutions to the 2019 Chilean uprising and the 2022 rebellion of women in Iran. The construction and affirmation of this "personal subject" are also played in less visible arenas, including in everyday life and internal conflicts of individuals, through " resistances of the singular entity towards mass production, mass consumption and mass communications through the mass media. We cannot oppose this invasion by universal principles but only through the resistance of our singular experience", as he wrote in 2002.

Society had changed drastically since the industrial world in which Touraine had grown up and that he had studied with so much energy. Not only in material matters or with the new media and information flows that his student Manuel Castells analysed so brilliantly. Society's main "cultural orientations" had also changed. As Touraine explained in 2005, "It has become difficult to believe that, [as was the case in industrial society] only by integrating ourselves into society, its norms

In memoriam. Alain Touraine, a sociologist of the production of society by itself

and laws, can human beings become free and responsible individuals". In our world, it is no longer society and the social that are the criteria for defining good and evil, but the individual-subject in his creative freedom and as the author of her own life and ethics. However, in the past decades, new "total powers", to take his words, aim at taking control over people's lives and cultural orientations down to the innermost being of the individuals, and reactionary movements rose with the old call to order and identity to oppose the emancipation of ethical subjects in our era of late modernity, to which he has devoted his work for the last 15 years.

Touraine worked tirelessly until the end, with the strength of his ideas and his ability to grasp essential events, driven by his eagerness to understand this world. At 97, his thinking was as lively as ever. And, as always, he was working on his next book. He leaves a world in upheaval. His analyses will be missed to help us understand it. But he also leaves us analytical and conceptual tools, a vision of the world not as a pure system of domination but as the product of actors in the conflict to orient this society and reclaim its values.

RC48 Programme at the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne, Australia, June 25-July 1, 2023

XX ISA World Congress of Sociology
Melbourne, Australia | June 25-July 1, 2023
Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre

Resurgent Authoritarianism:
Sociology of New Entanglements of
Religions, Politics, and Economies

www.isa-sociology.org

RC48 Social Movements, Collective Actions and Social Change

Monday, 26 June 2023

10:30 - 12:20

RC48
10:30 - 12:20
665 Social Movements, Socio-Ecological Practices and Climate Change
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

RC02
10:30 - 12:20
JS-3 Fossil Capitalism, Climate Breakdown, and Green-Left Strategies
📍 105 (Level 1, MCEC)
Join Live Event on 26 June, 10:30 - 12:20

15:30 - 17:20

RC48
15:30 - 17:20
666 Social Movements and Transitional Justice 'from below': Exploring Grassroots Activism in Armed Conflicts and Post-Conflict Contexts
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

RC36
15:30 - 17:20
JS-14 The Rise and Fall of Authoritarian Populisms (Hopefully)
📍 203 (Level 2, MCEC)

17:30 - 19:20

RC48
17:30 - 19:20
667 Social Movements, State and Civil Society: Perspectives from the Global South. Part I
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

19:30 - 20:50

RC48
19:30 - 20:50
668 Social Movements, State and Civil Society: Perspectives from the Global South. Part II
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

Tuesday, 27 June 2023

08:30 - 10:20 ⏲

RC34

08:30 - 10:20
JS-30 Youth and Crises of Democracy: Exploring the Democratic Potential of Young People's Participation (1)
📍 105 (Level 1, MCEC)

Join Live Event on 27 June, 08:30 - 10:20

10:30 - 12:20 ⏲

RC48

10:30 - 12:20
669 Social Movements Challenges in a Post-Pandemic World: New Agendas, New Dynamics
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

RC34

10:30 - 12:20
JS-37 Youth and Crises of Democracy: Exploring the Democratic Potential of Young People's Participation (2)
📍 105 (Level 1, MCEC)

Join Live Event on 27 June, 10:30 - 12:20

15:30 - 17:20 ⏲

RC48

15:30 - 17:20
JS-41 Globalization-Induced Resistance Movements (involving Displacements, Identity and Ecological issues). Part I
📍 106 (Level 1, MCEC)

Join Live Event on 27 June, 15:30 - 17:20

17:30 - 19:20 ⏲

RC48

17:30 - 19:20
670 Social Movements, environment and social justice
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

Join Live Event on 27 June, 17:30 - 19:20

RC44

17:30 - 19:20
JS-49 Labor Unrest, Social Revolts and Revolutions, 1851-2020: Findings from the Global Social Protest Database
📍 CCH1 (Level 2, Crown)

RC48 Programme at the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne, Australia, June 25-July 1, 2023

Wednesday, 28 June 2023

08:30 - 10:20 ⊙

RC48	★ ➕ 🖐	🏛 ⊕ 📹	08:30 - 10:20 **671 The construction of dissent: strategies and collective identities** 📍 *211 (Level 2, MCEC)* **Join Live Event on 28 June, 08:30 - 10:20**

RC34	★ ➕ 🖐	🏛 ⊕	08:30 - 10:20 JS-61 When Students Protest about the Climate Crisis: Realities, Reactions and Results 📍 *106 (Level 1, MCEC)*

10:30 - 12:20 ⊙

RC48	★ ➕ 🖐	🏛 ⊕	10:30 - 12:20 JS-67 Urban Collective Action 📍 *P1 (Level 1, Crown)*

15:30 - 17:20 ⊙

RC48	★ ➕ 🖐	🏛 ⊕	15:30 - 17:20 672 Violent Extremism and Authoritarianism: Which Relation with Social Movements? 📍 *211 (Level 2, MCEC)*

17:30 - 19:20 ⊙

RC14	★ ➕ 🖐	🏛 ⊕	17:30 - 19:20 JS-81 Music and Society: Identities, Resistances and Politics through Musical Production. Part I 📍 *106 (Level 1, MCEC)*

RC48 Programme at the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne, Australia, June 25-July 1, 2023

Thursday, 29 June 2023

08:30 - 10:20

RC48

08:30 - 10:20
673 Gezi in Retrospect: Recalling Mass Protests and Reclaiming Alternative Political Imaginations
211 (Level 2, MCEC)
Join Live Event on 29 June, 08:30 - 10:20

10:30 - 12:20

RC48

10:30 - 12:20
JS-93 La Lucha Contra Los Extractivismos En América Latina y El Futuro De La Región I Struggle Against Extractivism in Latin America and the Future of the Region
CCH1 (Level 2, Crown)

15:30 - 17:20

RC48

15:30 - 17:20
674 Gender Mobilizations in Times of Rising Authoritarianism
211 (Level 2, MCEC)

WG08

15:30 - 17:20
JS-102 Mobilizing Emotions by Social Movements and in Contemporary Humanitarian Effort
CCH1 (Level 2, Crown)
Join Live Event on 29 June, 15:30 - 17:20

17:30 - 19:20

RC48

17:30 - 19:20
675 RC48 Business Meeting
211 (Level 2, MCEC)

RC10

17:30 - 19:20
JS-112 To Participate or Not to Participate? Social Movements 4.0 and the Return of Dichotomies
105 (Level 1, MCEC)
Join Live Event on 29 June, 17:30 - 19:20

RC48 Programme at the XX ISA World Congress of Sociology in Melbourne, Australia, June 25-July 1, 2023

Friday, 30 June 2023

08:30 - 10:20

RC48

08:30 - 10:20
676 Globalization-Induced Resistance Movements (involving Displacements, Identity and Ecological issues). Part II
211 (Level 2, MCEC)
Join Live Event on 30 June, 08:30 - 10:20

10:30 - 12:20

RC48

10:30 - 12:20
677 Assessing the Trajectories of People's Movements in South Asia
211 (Level 2, MCEC)

15:30 - 17:20

RC48

15:30 - 17:20
678 Generational Creativity in Contemporary Youth Activism
211 (Level 2, MCEC)

RC09

15:30 - 17:20
JS-132 The Prospects of a Pluriversal Transition to a Post-Capitalist, Post-Carbon Future
106 (Level 1, MCEC)

Saturday, 1 July 2023

08:30 - 10:20 ⊘

RC48

08:30 - 10:20
679 Nature vs Culture: emerging conflicts and citizens' rights
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

Join Live Event on 1 July, 08:30 - 10:20

10:30 - 12:20 ⊘

RC48

10:30 - 12:20
JS-141 Future Visions, Strategies, and Contentious Politics. Part I
📍 105 (Level 1, MCEC)

12:30 - 14:20 ⊘

RC48

12:30 - 14:20
680 Agrarian and Rural Movements : Changing Dynamics and New Alliances
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

14:30 - 16:20 ⊘

RC48

14:30 - 16:20
681 Future Visions, Strategies, and Contentious Politics. Part II
📍 211 (Level 2, MCEC)

ISA RC48 PHD workshop programme

Date: Saturday June 24, 2023

Venue: The Crown - Promenade 3
8 Whiteman Street, Southbank, VIC 3006, Melbourne, Australia

Schedule

9:00 am – 9:15 am
Introduction and Welcoming Remarks
Liana M. Daher
President RC48

9:15 am – 10:15 am
First Session

Aliye Nur Kelesoglu
University of Malaya, Malaysia
PhD project: In Search of Hegemony: A Qualitative Analysis of Rival Islamic Movements in Malaysia
Commentator: Liana M. Daher

Sérgio Barbosa
University of Coimbra, Portugal
PhD project: Protest Mobilization on WhatsApp: Explaining Participants' Approaches Before and During COVID-19 in Brazil
Commentator: Natalia Miranda

Marian Orjuela
University of Heidelberg, Germany
PhD project: High-risk leadership in contexts of violence and conflict: forms of protection developed by women leaders and defenders in the Colombian Amazon
Commentator: Benjamín Tejerina

10:15 am – 10:35 am
Comfort Break

ISA RC48 PHD workshop programme

10:35 am – 12:00 pm
Second Session

Liam McLoughlin
University of Technology Sydney, Australia
PhD project: A Gramscian Approach to Australian Climate Movement Strategy
Commentator: Camilo Tamayo Gomez

Mariana Calcagni G.
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
PhD project: Peasant Food Movements
Commentator: Natalia Miranda

Lea Loretta Zentgraf
Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
PhD project: Gender. Power. Food: women's claims and actions in Food Movements in Germany
Commentator: Benjamín Tejerina

Maryam AlHajri
University of Edinburgh (UK)
PhD project: Marginalised Stories: Social Movements in Qatar during the 1950s-60s
Commentator: Camilo Tamayo Gomez

12:00 pm – 12:15 pm
Comfort Break

12:15 pm – 13:00 pm
Panel Discussion: How to improve our PhD projects?
All participants

Grassroots On Focus: "TikTok and Social Movements'

In this edition of Grassroots, we are presenting an 'on focus' approach to the topic of 'TikTok and Social Movements'.

In alliance with the peer-reviewed, open access journal Social Media + Society, we are publishing four articles that are addressing the challenges and opportunities that social media, and in particular TikTok, are bringing to Social Movements scholarship.

These are the four articles that we have selected for this "Grassroots on Focus":

1.Introduction to the Special Issue of "TikTok and Social Movements"
Jin Lee and Crystal Abidin

2.Playful Activism: Memetic Performances of Palestinian Resistance in TikTok #Challenges
Laura Cervi and Tom Divon

3.#StopAsianHate on TikTok: Asian/American Women's Space-Making for Spearheading Counter-Narratives and Forming an Ad Hoc Asian Community
Jeehyun Jenny Lee and Jin Lee

4.TikTok as a Key Platform for Youth Political Expression: Reflecting on the Opportunities and Stakes Involved
Ioana Literat and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik

If you like to access the special issue published on Social Media + Society about this topic, please click here.

Special Issue: TikTok and Social Movements

Introduction to the Special Issue of "TikTok and Social Movements"

Jin Lee [ID] **and Crystal Abidin** [ID]

Abstract

This Special Issue of "TikTok and Social Movements" emerges from an attempt to map out the landscape of social movements happening on TikTok, drawing from the online symposium "TikTok and Social Movements" hosted in September 2021 by the TikTok Cultures Research Network, a research portal for interdisciplinary scholarship on TikTok cultures. The recent growing popularity of TikTok has transformed the cultures and practices of social movements worldwide. Through the platform's participatory affordances, many users find meaningful ways to engage with the platform and its cultures, by leading and participating in a variety of activist initiatives for global awareness, social change, and civic politics. Within this context, this introduction to the Special Issue titled "TikTok and Social Movements" begins by thinking about how social media pop cultures have served as a vehicle for mobilizing and engaging in social movements for social (in)justice and politics in the era of social media. By situating TikTok, a nascent platform and culture of short video, within the ongoing discussion of digitally mobilized movements and social justice, this introduction addresses several crucial points to consider when discussing TikTok cultures and social movements that are happening or interrupted on the platform. These points are interrogated with more details and cultural contexts in the five case studies and three expert commentaries in this Special Issue. Specifically, the collection of papers interrogate how TikTok's interactive and creative affordances have augmented and altered our cultures, practices, politics, and power dynamics of engaging with publics for various beliefs and social agendas.

Keywords

TikTok, short video, social movements, social justice, social media

Introduction

The recent growing *popularity* of TikTok has transformed the cultures and practices of social movements worldwide. Despite several concerns regarding the app—mostly regarding its weak security (Chae, 2020; Dziedzic, 2020), moral panics incited by malicious content on TikTok (Purwaningsih, 2018), and a few countries' (temporary) bans on the platform as a result (e.g., India in 2020 and the United States in 2022 for state devices; Zaveri, 2023)—TikTok has rapidly grown as the "hottest app of 2021" (Jackson, 2021) and remains as the "most-downloaded app of 2022" globally (Koetsier, 2023). Its interactive features (e.g., short video, voiceover, meme template, background music, duet, greenscreen) and popular genres (e.g., dance, comedy, challenges; see Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022, for "TikTok challenges") have enriched social media cultures with creativity and helped users to engage with each other, with social issues, and even with contentious issues like misinformation and online toxicity with relative ease and casual fun.

Many TikTok users have established cultures of "vernacular creativity" (Burgess, 2006) wherein "ordinary" cultural participation and practices "emerge from highly particular and non-elite social contexts and communicative conventions" with digital technologies of storytelling (p. 206). Through the platform's participatory affordances, many users have found meaningful ways to engage with the platform and its cultures, by leading and participating in a variety of activist initiatives for global awareness, social change, and civic politics. This includes Young TikTok users' climate activism (Hautea et al., 2021); growing anti-racist movements, such as the continuation of "Black Lives Matter" on TikTok (Janfaza, 2020) and migrant workers' call-outs of

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xenophobia in a host country (Kaur-Gill, 2022); and emerging hashtag streams like #StopAsianHate in response to increasing violence against Asians during the pandemic (Hanson, 2021); and #OkBoomer which details intergenerational tensions and connections within society at large (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). TikTok's creative affordances powered by artificial intelligence (AI) technologies also facilitate the formulation and development of identity politics and cultures on the platform. Recent examples include Indian children's creation of their vernacular digital cultures on TikTok against parenteral surveillance (Sarwatay et al., 2022); LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex) users' use of various filters to advocate for diversity (Simpson & Semaan, 2021); young users' meme cultures as consciousness building work (Anderson & Keehn, 2020; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Zeng & Abidin, 2021); and older generations' collaborations with younger generations (Hood, 2020). Its unique audiovisual memetic cultures also provide a window for people in various fields to build their professional identity (Hartung et al., 2023) and to communicate their knowledge with others in more playful manners (Southerton, 2021; Zeng et al., 2020). However, social movements on TikTok are not always shaped for social justice actions, but may often also advocate for specific beliefs that mirror global politics, such as anti-vaccine movements, the distribution of misinformation (Basch et al., 2021; Southerton & Clark, 2022), and far-right movements (Weimann & Masri, 2020).

The Special Issue emerges from an attempt to map out the landscape of social movements happening on TikTok, drawing from the online symposium "TikTok and Social Movements" hosted in September 2021 by the TikTok Cultures Research Network (n.d.). By showcasing five case studies on TikTok and social movements across different cultures, politics, and languages, alongside three expert commentaries on TikTok methodologies and cultures, this Special Issue explores how TikTok as a nascent platform and culture has been a locus of contestation for social (in)justice and politics. Specifically, the collection of papers interrogate how TikTok's interactive and creative affordances have augmented and altered ways of mobilizing and engaging with publics for various beliefs through the vehicle of social media pop cultures.

Social Movements Through/in Social Media Pop Cultures

Various terminologies have been interchangeably used to describe collective and networked actions for beliefs or social change, including "activism" (Svirsky, 2010), "(civic) advocacy" (Reid, 2000), "grassroots" (Payne et al., 2011), and "political participation" (Conge, 1988). Among these terms, a "social movement" is an overarching concept that generally encapsulates two broad practices: First, the pragmatics and logistics of physical events in the public spaces

like protests; and second, the collective actions and outcomes of mobilizing the public in digital spaces, like social media posting, and the immaterial labors of support, like watching and consuming advocacy messages on social networks (Diani, 1992, 2000; Tufekci, 2014; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). In other words, social movements are "online and offline networks of (in)formal relationships between individuals, groups, and/or organizations, who share mutual interest or collective identities and mobilize various types of resources (e.g. affect, attention, action, material capital) on the issues that they are advocating" (Abidin & Lee, 2022, p. 16).

With easy access to the internet and the popularization of social media, we have observed how ordinary internet users take up the online space to develop social movements as collective activism and protest, and as everyday politics and advocacy. This is well captured in the rise of numerous social movements across the globe since the early-2000s. Within the Asia Pacific region, where the efforts of the TikTok Cultures Research Network are concentrated, a few examples include the South Korean candlelight vigils for social justice that was initiated in the blogsphere in the 2000s (Kim & Kim, 2009), the Arab Spring movements on Twitter for democracy in the early-2010s (Bruns et al., 2014), the #MilkTeaAlliance hashtag activism promoting pro-democracy across Southeast Asia (K. Lee, 2021), and Chinese people's online protest against Xi's strict zero-Covid policy and surveillance on WeChat and Weibo (Gang, 2022).

Everyday politics at the micro level have also become common, as evidenced in the burgeoning "identity politics" trends in social media. It is popularly sighted that social media users showcase the uniqueness and individuality of their intersectional identities in their casual social media posts of their lives, experiences, and thoughts (e.g., Bhandari & Bimo, 2020; Dyer, 2017; Warfield et al., 2016). If identity is social performance (Goffman, 1959), ways to perform identity in social media pop cultures are contingent upon the norms, cultures, and designs of media platforms and communities (Dyer & Abidin, 2022). Thus, a myriad of movements and politics in social media are the processes and outcomes of negotiations between individual users; industries; media elements such as platform technologies; and environments such as algorithms, cultures, and economies.

These social movements quickly build up via the networked structure and culture of social media (Cammaerts, 2015; Diani, 2000; Papacharissi, 2015; see also boyd, 2010), fueled by various social actors. For example, influencers serve as "opinion leaders" of leading the flow of information (Martin & Sharma, 2022). Their roles as "nodes" at which individuals gather and build bonds on social media, and as "mediators" of values circulating through media contents (J. Lee & Abidin, 2022, p. 547), help social movement messages spread and (potential) participants get connected for collective action. Media users also spread the flows by consuming, sharing, and reproducing the original messages, often with

their edits and interpretations added. The connections between the users, including their (in)direct interactions, the intimacies, and other affective registers yielded, function as momentums of the movements by forming "affective publics" (Papacharissi, 2015). When feelings and affects are communicated, channeled, and shared through the interactive and networked affordances of social media, the "mediality" of social media platforms "invites affective gestures that provide the basis for how individuals connect and tune into the events in the making" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 62). This helps the public "feel their way into what movement[s] mean" but in a connective way, which further ignites, powers, and disrupts social movements in various manners in social media (Papacharissi, 2015).

As such, digitally mobilized social movements often quickly scale up, spurring people's attention and emotion instantly, mobilizing internal and external resources, and empowering participants and protestors of the movements (Mundt et al., 2018; Tufekci, 2014, 2017). Yet, these characteristics of social media pose some challenges and concerns as well. While engagements from the online grassroots can be effective at amplifying messages and soliciting prime attention, it can also lead to the emergence and popularization of "slacktivism," wherein people take an illusionary sense of achievements and participation through simple clicks of the "like" and "share" buttons, not necessarily making concrete engagements with the messages and advocacies (Morozov, 2009). Also, hatred and violence are often sparked and circulate online through pop culture artifacts like memes, which can make social movements more contentious. When geographical conflicts like warfare or such discourses are brought into the social media space, media practices and contents can lead into a mass mobilization on social media, endorsing military propaganda, armed with xenophobia and nationalism (Kuntsman & Stein, 2015).

When social movements become easily accessible via the simple act of click, individuals operationalize the idea of social justice in various ways, reflecting their interests and beliefs. While social justice is commonly associated with fairness, equality, and democracy (Fraser, 1999; Sandel, 2011; Walzer, 2020), the ways people interpret the idea of social justice are quite varied, particularly in animating people's attention in social media. At the same time, in the wake of cancel culture, the idea of social justice sometimes can become extreme (Lewis & Christin, 2022; Norris, 2023). For example, call-outs of people with alleged misdemeanors and mistakes can entail aggressive media practices like public-shaming, cyberbullying, and doxing (Bouvier & Machin, 2021; J. Lee & Abidin, 2021).

Taking into account such complex layers of social justice advocacy in social media pop cultures, we have elsewhere suggested our conceptualization of "social justice" as "the fairness and political/moral correctness of a society or a media environment in its divisions, redistributions, and awareness of rewards and burdens" (Abidin & Lee, 2022, p. 12). The

concepts of fairness and correctness are not indicative of the same idea, but rather, are differently operationalized in communities, dependent on community norms, values, and community discourse around how resources—both material and immaterial—*are* or *feel* "fairly" distributed. Ironically, for this reason, social media themselves serve as a site of competition for resources where social justice is newly configured, challenged, and advocated in relation to the media characteristics. Attention, visibility, and fame that function as new currencies in the social media environments are now understood as weapons to galvanize movements (Abidin, 2021; Milan, 2015; Tufekci, 2013). On TikTok, these multi-layered meanings and aspects of social movements appear in a more convoluted manner, arising from the unique platform culture of audiovisual meme virality (Kaye et al., 2022).

TikTok and Social Movements

TikTok's unique tools for creativity, such as AI-powered filters, the voiceover function, and interactive features like duets, have reconfigured our ways to engage in, lead, and even disrupt social movements. While not necessarily placing the "social justice" messages upfront, users now convey their messages and beliefs of social (in)justice issues to videos of them singing, dancing, cooking, and performing skits (Abidin, 2021; Boffone, 2021; Kaur-Gill, 2022; Kaye et al., 2022). The participatory affordances of TikTok invite more users to perform and showcase their creativity in their participation in social movements, using TikTok's various functions of content creation, sharing, and reproduction (e.g., Boffone, 2021; Hautea et al., 2021). This everyday use of TikTok becomes a powerful weapon for social advocacy and political messages, formidable enough to make a "real action" in the world through the platform's networkedness. US President Trump's campaign rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in November 2020 was significantly affected, with some events being canceled, after teenage TikTok users and K-pop stans fooled the Trump supporters by sharing the information about their prank of "no show" at the event (Lorenz et al., 2020). Through practices like hashtagging, commenting, sharing, and interactive creation of contents enabled by functions like duets, scattered voices become connected and forge what Bruns and Burgess (2011) call "ad hoc publics," where a group of people are self-organized and develop topical discussions for certain goals on ad hoc basis.

Messages of social (in)justice on TikTok appear to circulate more popularly through TikTok memes—either as audio memes (Abidin & Kaye, 2021) or as aesthetic templates of videos as TikTok's memes (Vizcaíno-Verdu & Abidin, 2022; Zulli & Zulli, 2020). The platform technologies of content creation and participation serve as what Brown et al. (2022) call "affective designs" modulating and amplifying affect among the public. As playful meme culture encourages mimicking through replicability and creativity (Shifman, 2013), TikTok's meme templates lure users to remix and create memetic contents for

self-expression, but within the boundary of "circumscribed creativity" being guided by the platform features and politics (Kaye et al., 2021). This facilitates the gathering of ad hoc publics through the circulation of affects like humor (Sadler, 2022) or hate (Weimann & Masri, 2020) on the platform. Social movements emerging on TikTok mirror such unique characteristics, which introduces new ways of mobilizing and amplifying the movements with creative performance (Boffone, 2021).

When social movements become integral to our daily media use and practice as such, with a low participation threshold enabled by TikTok's creative and participatory affordances, social movements are also adopted as a placeholder for virality, fame, and ultimately stardom on the platform. Joining the popular hashtags or video templates appears to be the easiest way to piggyback the viral trends (Abidin, 2021) or just to "game the system" on social media platforms for attention (Gillespie, 2014) and even negative publicity (Abidin, 2022), while not always necessarily engaging in meaningful ways with the original politic. Public shaming and calling out misdemeanors through duets and replies is also practiced as "a route to rise to internet celebrity" based on TikTok virality (Abidin, 2021, p. 84). This kind of "surface-level" activism is criticized for "jump[ing] on the 'bandwagon'" (Brown et al., 2022, p. 12) as it decontextualizes the complicated layers around activism, depoliticizing the political messages, but feeds into the capitalist ideologies of what Hindman (2009) calls "online eyeball economy" (quoted in Sadler, 2022).

Against these convoluted aspects, how should we study TikTok and social movements? What insights and new knowledges can we draw from a myriad of social movements happening on TikTok, especially in the globally connected media landscape? How does TikTok (re)shape our ways of engaging with societies and doing social justice, particularly given the expansion of the short-video app ecology led by TikTok? Our Special Issue "TikTok and Social Movements" delves into these questions by interrogating five case studies and offering three approaches.

This Special Issue

"TikTok and Social Movements" is our third in the string of Special Issues on TikTok curated by the TikTok Cultures Research Network, which aims to map out the dynamically evolving cultures of and around the platform from different scholarly angles in relation to diverse regional and cultural contexts. In this collection, we focus on how TikTok users spread their advocacy and mobilize collective actions among the anonymous public on TikTok and how TikTok itself serves as a site of various movements.

We begin with Laura Cervi and Tom Divon's article "Playful Activism: Memetic Performances of Palestinian Resistance in TikTok #Challenges," which examines Palestinian TikTokers' performed acts of resistance against Israel-Gaza violence, utilizing meme templates and challenges on TikTok. By paying attention to how Palestinian TikTokers use TikTok's creative affordances and formulate what they call "playful activism," Cervi and Divon suggest that TikTok's unique meme culture serves as a new locus where people are encouraged to "tackle 'hard' topics through the performance of playful communicative styles." When affects on social issues are shared through audiovisual memes as such, activism becomes "more relatable, tangible, and accessible to broader audiences."

When Cervi and Divon examine what elements mediate social movements on TikTok, Xinyu (Andy) Zhao and Crystal Abidin look at a style of social movements on TikTok. In their article, "The 'Fox Eye' Challenge Trend: Anti-Racism Work, Platform Affordances, and the Vernacular of Gesticular Activism on TikTok," Zhao and Abidin study how Asian TikTok content creators utilize audiovisual narratives and components to call out racist undertones embedded in the trending the "Fox Eye" challenge, where celebrities and ordinary users showcase their aesthetically stylized makeup highlighting almond-shaped "fox eyes." They introduce the theoretical concept, "gesticular activism," that is "the dramatization of networked activism work that is contingent upon curating hyper-visible, at times even self-indulgent, performances to adapt to the algorithmic logics of platforms." This notion of "gesticular activism" illustrates how (short) video platforms like TikTok help different actors creatively construct "various personalised audiovisual narratives" to enhance awareness of social issues and collectively challenge social injustice.

Jenny Jeehyun Lee and Jin Lee also examine anti-racist activism on TikTok, but with a focus on networked connections between TikTok users within the hashtag space. Their article "#StopAsianHate on TikTok: Asian/American Women's Space-Making for Spearheading Counter-Narratives and Forming an Ad Hoc Asian Community" explains that Asian American female TikTokers' participation of the popularly trending hashtag #StopAsianHate is a way to carve out the space for "ad hoc communities." By creatively sharing their experiences and voices under the #StopAsianHate hashtag, Asian Americans creatively occupy the "community space" "with their presence and cultivation of solidarity on the platform" but on an "ad hoc basis." Lee and Lee's feminist geographic lens suggests social media hashtags as a space-making practice, which becomes more performative and connective, but also temporary at the same time, especially in the pandemic.

Aidan Moir's article "The Use of TikTok for Political Campaigning in Canada: The Case of Jagmeet Singh" pays attention to the newly emerging culture of celebrity politicians on TikTok in relation to electoral politics. Through a case study of the Canadian politician Jagmeet Singh's use of TikTok in his electoral campaigns, Moir shows that TikTok has become a new venue for "celebrity politicians" to develop their electoral campaigns and engage with their potential voters, especially responding to the emerging

importance of social media and political force of young generations. Moir explains that TikTok's creative affordance and issues of social justice are "strategically employed" by politicians for their "left-wing populism" branding. This illustrates how electoral politics are evolving, centering on the presentation and performance of authenticity, in the creative and participatory social media era.

Finally, we invite you to look at Douyin, the sister app of TikTok in China. The article "Short Video Activism *with* and *on* Douyin: An Innovative Repertoire of Contention for Chinese Consumers" authored by Zizheng Yu, Jiaxi Hou, and Oscar Zhou maps out how consumer activism has evolved in the short-video platform environment. In their study on Chinese consumer protest against TikTok's sister app Douyin, Yu, Hou, and Zhou explain how Chinese consumers have taken up the new environment of short-video-based social media platforms, led by Douyin, as an "innovative repertoire of contention for Chinese consumers" for consumer rights. Their discussion on consumers' short-video tactics illustrates how consumer activism is popularly integrated within everyday use of short-video platforms, but is simultaneously moderated by the platform in relation to government policies and regulations around the newly emerging platform environment.

While many people conflate Douyin and TikTok, Kaye et al. (2021) argue that they are two separate apps, differently platformized "to survive in two opposing platform ecosystems in China and overseas" (p. 229). In developing and disrupting social movements, movements on Douyin are significantly influenced by the Chinese government's intervention in the app, user demographics, and platform ecosystems and features like e-commerce (e.g., Chen et al., 2021; Treré & Yu, 2021; Yu, 2021) unlike TikTok. However, there are some similarities between TikTok and Douyin, especially regarding how audiovisual elements are used in spreading and narrating messages of social justice and how memetic content creation forms a new way of shaping politics and developing and engaging in social movements, as illustrated in the five cases in our Special Issue. The continuities and discontinuities between social movements on TikTok and Douyin lead us to ponder how we can expand the current TikTok studies beyond just one particular platform and discuss short-video cultures at large. This discussion can begin by paying special attention to platform specificities and geolocation sensitivities between the two platforms, instead of mistakenly repeating the reductionist arguments of "TikTok and Douyin are the same" or "one is a different version of the other." The five articles of TikTok and Douyin cases in the Special Issue will be a starting point to initiate a conversation on this matter.

While their foci and topics are varied, the case studies in the Special Issue discuss TikTok's unique characteristics that enable the viral spread of audiovisual creative expression in the initiation, mobilization, development, and interruption of social movements. However, these characteristics also point to

another important aspect that should be taken into consideration: When social media users initiate and join social movements, how should researchers navigate the messiness, complexity, virality, and creativity of TikTok cultures? When the virality of contents and messages of social issues fades out, or when people decide to depart from the movements by deleting their contents, how should we approach such temporality and discuss its social values and limits, while also respecting participants' decisions to withdraw their participation?

For example, Lee and Lee intentionally omit the screengrabs of their data to protect the original content creators' rights to be forgotten after the virality of the social movement. Yet, Zhao and Abidin's decision to include visual evidence of their data honors content creators' desires to increase their visibility and reputational value when participating in online social movements, and also preserves the complicated nuances of TikTok visual contents that are difficult to capture in text. Two other papers in this collection, each authored by Cervi and Divon, and by Yu et al., negotiate such ethical concerns and importance of visual elements in the social movements and include screengrabs with identifiable data being omitted via image editing. These different decisions around whether to anonymize the data and how to present visual data are indicative of various approaches to handle TikTok data and interrogate social movements on the platform in relation to its creative and communicative affordances and the broader social media cultures.

The three commentaries in this collection may be useful here, providing valuable insight for scholars to consider in our study of TikTok and social movements. In their commentary "TikTok as a Key Platform for Youth Political Expression: Reflecting on the Opportunities and Stakes Involved," Ioana Literat and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik address the complicated aspects of TikTok and the platform cultures which can be a harbinger of "youth political lives and expression." For instance, they highlight TikTok's playful culture, where "serious" political and social issues are memetically visualized and consumed and, at the same time, where contents of misinformation and hate quickly and widely spread in the form of viral memes. This, again, points us to the importance of having a "balanced and constructive approach" in TikTok studies that "embrace[s] the messiness and complexity" of TikTok cultures and the platform itself.

Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández's "Taking Humor Seriously on TikTok" extends the discussion that Literat and Kligler-Vilenchik make, and posits that TikTok's humorous and playful culture is a double-edged sword. When social debates and political issues are all mixed up in the creation, consumption, and reproduction of memetic TikTok videos, violent and brutal undertones in the humorous memetic contents are trivialized and even normalized for "fun." Given that humor and playfulness are "central to TikTok cultures," it is crucial to "take humor seriously," discussing the harmful aspects, especially for online safety and well-being, but at the same time valuing political potential of resistance.

Stefanie Duguay's suggestion of queer methodologies in her commentary "TikTok's Queer Potential: Identity, Methods, Movements" can be a meaningful and practical way to investigate the complex aspects of TikTok cultures. While Duguay's focus is more on queer users' appropriation of creative functionalities and features that are newly introduced by TikTok, the queer methodologies that she suggests can be a practical method for the broader TikTok studies to interrogate such complexity and messiness by "embrac[ing] multiplicity, misalignments, and silences" in cultural phenomena.

The case studies and suggested approaches in this collection are not "absolute." Rather, the cultures and power dynamics of social movements on TikTok continue to evolve along with technological development and sociocultural changes. We offer our collection of studies and approaches as a springboard to diversify ways to engage with TikTok scholarship. We hope you enjoy the collection that aims to encapsulate some of the dynamic landscape of TikTok's social movement cultures.

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Playful Activism: Memetic Performances of Palestinian Resistance in TikTok #Challenges

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Abstract

Palestinians have long been using social media as a tool for activism. Each platform provides unique socio-technological affordances that shape users' communicative practices as networked publics. Focusing on the video-sharing platform TikTok, which has taken a "serious turn" in recent years, this article examines how Palestinian users performed playful acts of resistance during the escalation of violence between Palestinians and Israelis in May 2021. Applying a multimodal analysis to 500 TikTok videos posted during the conflict under #gazaunderattack, we identify three memetic templates (#challenge)—(1) lip-syncing, (2) duets, and (3) point-of-view—that unfold the ways TikTok's design and its play-based affordances ignite affective streams of audiovisual content that render playful activism in times of conflict. Driven by TikTok's culture of imitation and competition, playful activism enables the participation of ordinary users in political emerging events with the help of looping meme videos composed of collaborative, dialogic, and communal socio-technical functions. Playful activism transforms users' ritualized performances into powerful political instruments on TikTok and makes democratic participation more relatable, tangible, and accessible to various audiences.

Keywords

TikTok, playful activism, affordances, memes, performance, Palestinians, #gazaunderattack

Introduction

The "TikTok intifada": This is how media described the Israel-Gaza warfare that occurred in May 2021 (Ward, 2021). The escalation of violence between Palestinians and Israelis was ignited over an Israeli court decision to evict Palestinian families from the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah. This controversial decision led to violent riots beginning on 6 May 2021 and spreading into Israel and the West Bank, eventually culminating in the Israeli military operation "Guardian of the Walls" in Gaza. The conflict resulted in 250 Palestinian and 10 Israeli casualties, and it lasted until the official ceasefire on May 20 (Kingsley, 2021).

Social media have played a central role in mediating the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Scholars distinguish between two main phases of mediatization: In the first phase, according to Wolfsfeld (1997), mass media were the only source of information until the mid-1990s, leading to curated media frames conveying the narration of the conflict. In the second phase, from the beginning of the 2000s, the rapid adoption of internet blogs and other spaces for citizen journalism and personal expression allowed evasion of state control over the dominant media narrative, thus democratizing the narrative by introducing new voices and perspectives and laying the foundations for a new kind of web-based activism (Monshipouri & Prompichai, 2018). The mediatization of the conflict has now entered the third phase, due to the presence of social media (Monshipouri & Prompichai, 2018). Acknowledging that each platform enables unique socio-technological environments, this article looks at the emergence of TikTok in the mediatization of the conflict and how it is changing and broadening contemporary digital activism practices by encouraging users to immerse in a more playful and creative narrative of resistance.

First, we examine the existing literature about Palestinian digital activism. Second, we focus on TikTok's specific affordances, disclosing how they favor the emergence of a

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novel type of activism, "playful activism," that we define as an affordance-based form of performance empowering the participation of ordinary users in emerging socio-political events through adaptable memetic templates of content creation. Third, we analyze 500 TikTok videos using a multimodal approach and unfold the platform's vernaculars of play and affect used by Palestinian users to convey their narratives. Finally, we conclude that TikTok's play-centric affordances and their distinguishable audiovisual vocabularies endorse playful activism by provoking powerful sentiment bonds that connect and allow scattered users to territorialize around a common cause.

The Rise of Digital Activism

Digital activism has been defined as "digital technologies used to expedite change in the political and social realms" (Joyce, 2010, p. 36). Shaped by the penetration of the internet, digital activism marks the beginning of a new era for social movements, providing human agents with opportunities to convey their stories, increase their projection, and transform them into global phenomena (Chen et al., 2021).

Digital activism appears to be closely entwined with social media platforms' architectural affordances, understood as the "multifaceted relational structure between an object/technology and the user that enables or constrains potential behavioral outcomes in a particular context" (Evans et al., 2017, p. 36). In particular, the access to filmmaking, editing, uploading, and streaming technologies has transformed video into a central tool for social movement activists online (Askanius, 2013).

Digital activism is not entirely subjected to human agency, being circumscribed and developed within proprietary platforms that can "affect the development and success of social movements" (Cammaerts, 2012, p. 119). Activists are forced to accept the rules of use imposed by private platforms, which define how activism circulates online (Nunes De Sousa & Cervi, 2017; Treré, 2015). For example, during the Black Lives Matter protests in the United States in 2020, Black activists' videos associated with the #BLM hashtag were downplayed by TikTok (Shead, 2020). Another example is the algorithmic censorship of feminist Instagram posts resisting the platform's nudity policy (Faust, 2017).

Within this platform-user power relation, platforms create or inhibit different openings for collective action. Accordingly, in this study, we unpack the emergence of digital activism on the video-sharing platform TikTok. We claim that conventional practices of online video activism are undergoing rapid transformation, with activists adopting and repurposing the imaginative, affective, and playful elements of TikTok's video content. However, before delving into the Palestinian multimodal memetic videos on TikTok, we first illuminate the reciprocal presence of platforms, users, and content that encapsulates the performance of Palestinian activism in the online world.

Digital Activism and the Palestinian Cause

Palestinians have used social media since internet access was enabled in the occupied territories during the second intifada (Nabulsi, 2014). Firstly, online mobility has become part of Palestinian users' alternatives to a physical lack of mobility, allowing the creation of a new "immaterial territory" (Rousselin, 2016, p. 11) of daily participation that connects geographically remote communities and reconnects Palestinian diasporas. Second, this cross-territory configuration of mediated interaction through digital platforms allows Palestinians to reach imagined collectives with whom they engage for civic and political purposes (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira, 2012), contributing to a counter-visual narration of Palestine (Mislán & Shaban, 2019).

Social media platforms have influenced Palestinian activism to such an extent that some scholars consider them the new "war zone" (Li & Prasad, 2018, p. 505) in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Adopting videos as their prominent visual grammar online, Palestinian activists have mainly used what Askanius (2013) categorizes as testimonial videos (or citizen journalism/witnessing), offering audiences worldwide a real-time window into the mundane violence and brutality to which they are routinely subjected. Posted on audiovisual platforms, these instantaneous, "caught-by-the-camera" videos convey a sense of authenticity coming from ordinary people, capitalizing on the platform's affordance for an immediate impression of events that engender an emotional reaction and enhancing solidarity.

This display of raw first-person testimonial videos has become Palestinian activists' primary communicative response to all significant military offensives. During "Operation Cast Lead," a massive military assault on the Gaza Strip in 2008, Palestinians collectively conveyed counter-narratives through Facebook and YouTube (Najjar, 2009). In 2014, during "Operation Protective Edge," tweets related to #gazaunderattack showed livestreams of Palestinians living in conditions of war, enabling real-time experience of a battlefield focusing on strong graphic content (Siapera et al., 2015).

More recently, in 2020, after the killing of a young autistic Palestinian named Eyad al-Hallaq by Israeli Police, the #JusticeForEyad campaign was organized on Instagram. Subsequently, following the US wave of protests by the #BlackLivesMatter movement after the death of George Floyd, Palestinians featured memes in their Instagram's stories showing pictures of al-Hallaq and Floyd and calling for #PalestinianLivesMatter (Mislán & Shaban, 2019). This communalized force of networked publics is not only adjusting its practices according to specific online environments, but it also adopts the cross-platform nature of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 308) as it "assemble[s] around media and platforms that invite affective attunement, support affective investment, and propagate affectively charged expression."

TikTok and Vernaculars of Playfulness

Since its international launch in 2017, TikTok has become one of the most influential video-sharing platforms worldwide, reaching one billion unique users in 2021 (Silberling, 2021). The platform's Chinese ownership and relation with the government, together with issues of content moderation, made TikTok subject to heightened scrutiny (Zeng & Kaye, 2022). For example, one report claimed that the platform disseminated state propaganda, whitewashing Beijing's abuses in Xinjiang (Perper, 2019).

Recent studies (Hautea et al., 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021) have shed light on how TikTok became the locus for activism. As Abidin (2020) explains, by mixing the "performativity of YouTube, the scrolling interface of Instagram, and the deeply weird humor usually reserved for platforms like Vine and Tumblr," TikTok's complex textures enable users to become activists, politically engaged "in a format that is entertaining, educational, and palatable among their peers" (p. 84).

TikTok is considered an "experimental audiovisual playground" (Klug, 2020, p. 6), where users choose how to shape their self-made videos using various functions. TikTok's rich set of vernaculars mobilizes users' participation in many socio-political activities, contextualized in the platform's playful and humorous cultures. For example, disabled users harness TikTok's vernacular of collaborative dance routines to resist ableism (Duval et al., 2021), and Jewish users use cynical attitude to counteract hate speech and fight religious stereotypes (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022).

Building on an interdisciplinary understanding of *play* and its relationship to the political realm, we explore how TikTok's affordances and vernaculars, enabled by the technological infrastructure of features, trends and aesthetics, allow playful activism to weave into TikTok's digital-play architecture. In exploring playful activism, we wish to comprehend how the tension between play and political participation becomes blurred as content on TikTok can be "simultaneously serious, insightful, and amusing for participants" (Tully & Ekdale, 2014, p. 69). This mix is part of the rising "serious TikTok" climate, where users playfully unpack, contextualize, and provide information on sociopolitical issues using the platform's trends and dialects (Ebbrect-Hartmann & Divon, 2022).

Play, according to Huizinga (1949/1970), encompasses various human activities which move beyond leisure and are driven by a "ludic attitude" that conveys playfulness (Zimmerman, 2008, p. 161). Play and its seemingly frivolous atmosphere have penetrated various public domains, such as education, politics, and media, while interrupting the rhythm of serious matters (Zou, 2022). In the study of social movements, play has been found to be a popular practice among activists, infusing movements with creativity, and ludic qualities that enrich civic participation (Shepard,

2012). Internet communication technologies provide a plethora of tools that allow activists to explore, experience, and experiment, "playful subversion" (Fróes & Tosca, 2018) or "playful resistance" (Huang & Liu, 2022). The affordances of social network sites extend an invitation to audiences who are conventionally hard to reach to engage in a playful acquaintance with political issues (Cervi et al., 2021). This allows the weaving of activism into unexpected formats like memes and vernaculars of parody and humor, lowering barriers to political participation and eliciting "playful citizenship" (Glas et al., 2019).

Therefore, we examine TikTok's structuring principles of playfulness, following Songer and Miyata's (2014) exploration of "playful affordances" in digital platforms, that invite four qualities of users' play experiences: play as (1) contest–challenge based, (2) seeking exploration–discovery, (3) inviting imagination–creativity, and (4) allowing the feeling of sensation–arousal. On the basis of these four qualities, we claim that playful activism manifests in TikTok's configurations of the *#challenge* practice, allowing users to flicker between modes of playful usage (Songer & Miyata, 2014).

Corresponding to the contest–challenge affordance, social media challenges are play-based collaborative tasks governed by a set of performative rules in which users are encouraged to co-opt a competitive creative mission initiated by random users (Klug, 2020). This requires users to dialogue with trending videos featuring mimetic elements (text, movement, and sound) that then circulate as viral performances. Given their potential to travel outside the individual's social boundaries into the public discourse, challenges are highly politicized on TikTok and used to raise awareness, spread ideologies, and "externalize personal political opinion via an audiovisual act" (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020, p. 264).

Corresponding with the exploration–discovery affordance, the search for challenges on TikTok is enabled by adding hashtags to the caption of any video, not only affording individuals the ability to connect to an audience (Eriksson Krutrök, 2021) but also becoming "vehicles for exploring playful interaction" (Pearce & Pardo, 2009, p. 75) and inviting publics to gather around specific issues. Moreover, hashtags themselves can be seen as play tools for virality, with users experimenting with different combinations as part of their desire to be "algorithmically recognizable" (Gillespie, 2014).

Memetic Templates for Affective Creation

For the imagination-creativity affordance, social media challenges offer templates for content creation. Templates are audiovisual repertoires composed of the platform's "unique combination of styles, grammars, and logics" (Gibbs et al., 2015, p. 257) that afford an accessible, expressible, and relatable framework within which ordinary users can create.

Although templates on TikTok grant users creative autonomy, they are also circumscribed (Kaye et al., 2021), shaped, and compromised by the platform's recommendation system (Leaver et al., 2020). We recognized three challenge templates on TikTok's curated content feed (the "for you" page) that are driven by popular trends, features, and aesthetics: (1) lip-syncing, (2) Duet, and (3) point-of-view (POV).

In a lip-syncing challenge, users are summoned to play with potentially infinite music databases organized around audio templates that are available in the "use this sound" feature (Abidin & Kaye, 2021). Users frequently draw upon particular song lyrics, short music excerpts, or informal colloquial expressions, remixing and repurposing while adding "their personal storyline and/or visual narrative" (Zeng & Abidin, 2021, p. 12).

In a Duet challenge, users react (or "reply") to an original video by juxtaposing videos side-by-side where they can be viewed in tandem and replicating the Duet for comparison or adding commentary as a compliment or critique. The Duet on TikTok can be a playful tool for political engagement because it is centered on the democratic ideals of dialogue while igniting an online public debate among users with communalized purposes (Medina-Serrano et al., 2020).

In a POV challenge, users implement the cinematic aesthetic of point-of-view by impersonating others to vehiculate their perspective on a specific issue. This form of observation establishes a dialogic setting in which the performing user becomes the subject of the viewer's POV. On TikTok, users harness the POV challenges' performative dimensions in novel ways, transforming them into political spectacles to raise awareness about and visibility for victims of controversial issues, such as gender and race.

In this context of imagination–creativity, challenge templates on TikTok become memes. As digital units "loaded on various vehicles: images, texts, artifacts or rituals" (Shifman, 2014, p. 366), memes are the outputs of user-generated content that are reproduced by imitation and spread rapidly, often with creative variations. TikTok challenge templates are complex multimodal memes configured by layers of video, text, and sound. Challenges inhabit the platform's force of mimesis as the common feature of what Zulli and Zulli (2022, p. 7) identify as "imitation publics," referring to the "collection of people whose digital connectivity is constituted through the shared ritual of content imitation."

Corresponding to the sensation-arousal affordance, as part of the play on TikTok, challenge templates invite users to perform emotionality as a generator of their virality. Users' mediatization of emotions can be seen as an affective practice, described by Smith et al. (2018, p. 13) as "human activity where emotions are the specific and principal focus of the practice." We use this lens to examine how TikTok is designed to modulate and amplify affect, elicited through users' doings, or, put differently, how users recruit and mobilize their visual and discursive sentiments and feelings to do work for social, cultural, and political goals.

Affective practice is also influenced by the agency of non-human forces, such as the architecture of social media platforms (Warfield, 2018). On TikTok, challenge templates become a novel practice for materializing affect on two interconnected levels; the first is the structural level. TikTok's challenges are actively promoted by the recommendation system and therefore are algorithmically programmed for virality (Klug, 2020). They reinforce users' affective attachments as they enable them to align with prevailing trends and offer the prospect of exposure in exchange. This dynamics catalysts users to contribute to TikTok's culture of challenges, which manifests in forceful streams of memetic videos that accumulate affective power with each new loop, reiteration, and dissemination (Ahmed, 2004). The second level is the users' body. Affect is engendered by the platform's vernacular of body performativity, in which users enlist their bodies to create successful meme-based challenge videos that will be credited with algorithmic attention. Meaning, users' mediatized bodies "become both the medium of the meme and its message" (Shifman, 2012, p. 200) as they re-enact the actions of others, allowing their bodies to drive affective resonance through digital spaces and create collective action across topics (Papacharissi, 2015).

Thus, while affect is created in the node between bodies and technology (Paasonen, 2015), as a practice, it flashes TikTok challenges with various modalities, including *platformative* elements (sound, image, text, filter effects, duration, loop, etc.), and *performative* elements (hand gestures, body postures, facial expressions, etc.). These modalities serve as ways for users to build affective spaces within a community that can negotiate identity (Jaramillo-Dent et al., 2022) and affiliate with a unique storytelling environment that sparks feelings of belonging (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022).

Method

Data Collection

Acknowledging that hashtags are valuable frameworks for understanding memetic media (Highfield & Leaver, 2015), we focused on the trending hashtag #gazaunderattack (535.1 million views), previously used on Twitter by Palestinian users (Siapera et al., 2015). To gain familiarity with the hashtag, we applied the walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018), scrolling through TikTok's hashtag page to delve "into how apps frame users' self-expression, relationships and interactions" (p. 897). The hashtag page served as a repository of users' audiovisual engagements throughout the Israeli–Palestinian conflict of May 2021. Aiming to explore the platform's affordances at multiple levels, the walkthrough method allowed us to create "a step-by-step observation and documentation" of users' use of "screens, features, and flows of activity," examining the "technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences" (Light et al., 2018, p. 882).

Following this method, we focused on the platform's human and nonhuman actors, learning their symbiotics, seeking to understand how TikTok's #challenge templates afford user participation in the Palestinian conflict and how users were leveraging different features, practices, and styles to playfully engage with conflict-related content. Accordingly, we manually scrolled through the #gazaunderattack page, looking at videos uploaded from May 1, 2021 (5 days before the Sheik Jarrah riots) to May 30, 2021 (10 days after the ceasefire), creating a repository of 2,000 videos in an external file classified by video ID, date of posting, duration, background music, captioned hashtags, types of features used, comments, views, shares, and likes.

Data Sampling

To build our analysis corpus, we adopted a purposive sampling technique (Sandelowski, 1995), allowing us to "deliberately look for information-rich cases that capture analytically important variations in the target phenomenon" (p. 81). We included videos that had more than 1,000 likes and more than 150 shares, signaling that the video was indeed of interest to users. Moreover, for study convenience, we selected videos that were either in English or decipherable by us, and removed any identifiable users' details in our screengrab images due to the topic's vulnerability (Franzke et al., 2020).

Recognizing that TikTok videos convey ambivalent content, "leaving the viewers to derive meaning from their own knowledge" (Hautea et al., 2021, p. 2), we each first assessed prominent descriptive characteristics of the data set, identifying and distinguishing repetitive patterns of multimodal content using the similar vernacular of features, practices, and aesthetics that sparked a memetic reaction (or meme challenge). Then, we compared their content after prolonged discussion, and agreed on the identification of three recurrent challenge videos composing a sample of 500 unique items: (1) the "A'atuna Al Toufoule" lip-syncing challenge ($n = 200$), (2) the "Stand Up" Duet challenge ($n = 200$), and (3) the Mariam Afifi POV challenge ($n = 100$).

Data Analysis

Applying multimodal content analysis (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2020), we focused on layers of spoken and written language, still and moving images, sound, gesture, body posture, movement, and so on. Our analysis framework is inspired by Shifman's (2014) idea of memes as interconnected micro-units of knowledge that illuminate macro-narratives of social groups, Zeng and Abidin's (2021) considerations of TikTok's "meme categorization," and Songer and Miyata's (2014) "playful affordances." Within this theoretical grid, we analyzed our videos according to three content levels, ranging from descriptive to interpretative: (1) memetic form, (2) communication function, and (3) affective practice.

The memetic form is the first descriptive level at which we analyzed the templates of content and style, through which memes are delivered in each video, according to three aspects: audio feature, visual feature, and performance feature. We paid attention to the user's unique uses of multifaceted modes of communication integrated into the creation of imitated challenge videos, such as the technical (in-app editing techniques), creative (inventive uses of the medium), and temporal (brevity, looping, or repetition of content) modes. Communicative function refers to the explicit purpose that each challenge video conveys. Within this level, we also scrutinized the metalinguistic (integration of emoticons or emojis), hypertextual (usage of hashtags or intertextual references), and creative (inventive uses of the medium) modes. Finally, to interpret the affective practice (Smith et al., 2018), we focused on the various platformative and performative elements of doing affect on TikTok, intended as platforms and users' visible ways of eliciting emotions, sensations, and sentiments among dispersed masses of users.

Findings

"A'atuna Al Toufoule": Performing Activism Through Lip-Syncing and Makeup

The first challenge we identified was a lip-sync challenge to the song "A'atuna Al Toufoule" ("Give Us the Childhood"), a hit song from the 1980s by Palestinian–Lebanese child singer Remi Bendali, re-popularized on YouTube by Sabyan Gambus, an Islamic Indonesian teen music group. On TikTok, this template was first used by an Indonesian who lip-synced the song while recording herself in a close-up shot demonstrating a makeup routine. The video portrays the Indonesian user's face as a canvas for the recontextualization of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. After applying her foundation and concealer, quick edits show the user covered with bruises while the "Palestinian Lives Matter" slogan is written in "blood" on the user's forehead, and the Palestinian flag is drawn with makeup on her cheek (see Figure 1a). Toward the end of the video, using the platform's effects, her eye turns transparent and displays videos of Palestinian people protesting, against a background of the user's semi-transparent figure.

This video generated a memetic flux in which other users harnessed this challenge as their template in various ways. Unpacking this meme form, we identified three main performative variations, all characterized by the same lip-syncing and music: (1) users (mainly female) imitated and reproduced similar music, visual, and performative elements as in the initial video; (2) users kept the same video performance but (re)interpreted the makeup routine using more sophisticated body art techniques, such as substituting bruises with scars or bullet holes and adding theatrical elements like costumes designed to amplify the narrative of victimization; and (3) users kept the same performance but expressed a more

Figure 1. Variations of the A'atuna Al Toufoule challenge.

diverse range of performative gestures conveyed through distinctive facial expressions while replacing bruises with political visualizations or symbols of the conflict (like stones, maps, and flags), and using images from past wars. In addition, the users painted hashtagged slogans like #stoptheoccupation and #tragedy on their faces.

From the communicative function perspective, the genre of makeup tutorials used in this challenge pivoted from entertainment to the political. Users' faces became physical templates for politically charged artistic creations, allowing the performance of Palestinian resistance. In online culture, makeup tutorials invite users to creatively experiment, meditate, and play with self-representation using audiovisual components. On TikTok, makeup tutorials frequently become activist acts (Abidin, 2020), where "bodies become both the vehicle for action and the action itself: medium and message" (Calkins, 2014, p. 2). In the case of Muslim female users, body art and makeup are often used as practices of protest. A prominent example occurred in 2019 when 17-year-old human rights activist Feroza Aziz used TikTok to call out violence against Uyghur Muslims in China in a makeup routine that went viral ("TikTok Apologises," 2019).

Examined within the affective practice, lip-syncing is a performative act rooted in drag culture (Kaminski & Taylor, 2008) in which the musical intensity, together with lip-sync techniques to maximize mouth-to-music matching, has become a popular genre on TikTok. Accompanied by users' hand gestures, lip-syncing is a "codified way of expressing affect" (Rettberg, 2017, p. 1) where the lips, the lyrics, and the music orchestrate a particular energy, mood, or movement for users to affect each other by playing along. The lip-syncing templates on TikTok share qualities of spreadability and legibility and become powerful memetic media (Abidin & Kaye, 2021), allowing users of this challenge to (re)tell the story of Palestinian suffering using a song interpreted by a children's choir (and thus infusing it with pathos). This song has become a symbol of the melancholic, war-scarred childhood with which most Palestinians identify.

Lip-syncing and makeup performances are an affordance-dependent evolution of Palestinian testimonial videos, which according to Askanius (2013) are meant to bear witness to injustices. Prior to TikTok, the display of bloodcurdling images of Israeli attacks (bomb explosions, dead bodies, etc.) was Palestinians' most conspicuous audiovisual language online, enabling audiences to witness and generate empathy for Palestinians' suffering (Siapera et al., 2015). In TikTok's playful templates, the Palestinians' adversity takes on a (self-)performative form. Users supersede crude, real-life images with metaphorical representations of what the Israeli oppression "does" to their bodies. Some substitute images of injured or dead bodies with paintings of bruises on their faces, signaling the violence enforced on the Palestinians (see Figure 1b). Instead of using explicit images of the intifada fighters (i.e., stone throwers), some users gesture toward the existence of those fighters while holding stones in their hands, thus symbolically embodying their videos with resistance (see Figure 1c). The same is true for waving the Palestinian flag, showing pieces of wire fence, or wearing the *keffiyeh* (see Figure 1c). All are theatrical ways in which "artifacts of performance create the context" (Boyd & Heer, 2006, p. 4) in which users harness various symbols of war to promote an accessible and desirable reading of the conflict.

With their playful use of TikTok's editing features (quick cuts, effects, and sound), users gradually reveal and express their Palestinian identity in this challenge. Their plain faces, to which they keep adding layers of makeup, evolve, with each body movement being synchronized with the music's beat and editing cut (see Figure 1d). This choreography not only showcases their artistic choices (i.e., drawn Palestinian flags) but also serves as the foundation for the challenge's structure of feelings (Papacharissi, 2016) as it fosters affective bonds among peers that lead to the proliferation of imitated and circulated versions of those videos.

Following the challenge's template, in the second half of the videos, Palestinians' life under Israeli authority is displayed with the help of TikTok's transparency effect. Users

Figure 2. Duets and triplets reacting to the IDF soldier's video.

transform their right eye into a "projector" and screen a curated spectacle of their lived experiences amidst the chaos of war (see Figure 1e). Used as an affective practice for activists to convey their resistance (Gonzalez, 2022), the users' gaze in this moment of projection matches the viewers' and facilitates a confrontational relationship with the Israeli authorities, being their presented enemy.

As users "tak[e] control over their own stories and identities" (Gonzalez, 2022, p. 260), they saturate their videos with political imagery that is considered inflammatory (e.g., violent Palestinian arrests or terror attack scenes) while interchangeably playing between the roles of victim, witness, and perpetrator. This challenge's replicability and mutability demonstrate TikTok's culture of participatory and memetic performance, leading users to work as a communal force in which their "social identities are drawn together in common pursuit and through their performative roles" (Petrovic, 2022, p. 2).

"Stand Up": Musical Duets as an Affective Activism Dialogue

The second identified challenge was a Duet meme challenge in response to the video of an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldier in which she lip-syncs the song "Stand Up" (see Figure 2a), accumulating 7.3 million views as of October 2021. "Stand Up" is the lead single from the soundtrack of the movie *Harriet*, depicting the life of US abolitionist and political activist Harriet Tubman, and it is considered an anthem for freedom and human rights. The IDF soldier posted a video of herself lip-syncing this specific extract from the song:

And I don't mind if I lose any blood on the way to salvation

And I'll fight with the strength that I got until I die

That's when I'm gonna stand up

Take my people with me

Together we are going

To a brand new home.

In response, Moe Zein, a Palestinian–Lebanese singer famous for his parodies and mashups of popular songs, responded with a Duet, receiving 24.3 million views as of October 2021. Zein posted a close-up of himself singing along to the same song but changing the lyrics to "Yes please stand up / Take your people with you / Leave the children happy away from all the tragedies," asking Israel to leave the occupied territories. On the same screen, a window showing videos of Palestinian tragedies (e.g., bombs, airstrikes, and suffering people) appears on the right side (see Figure 2b). Zein's reply video generated a trend in which other users created Duets with the IDF soldier, where they sang Zein's version of the song and/or added their own lyrics.

Unpacking this meme form, we identified two main variations, characterized by the same feature of sound and genre of Duet but using different derivatives in visuals and performance. In the first variation, users recorded themselves in close-up shots singing beside the IDF soldier using Zein's version of the song in Duets or "Triplets," including both the IDF soldier and Zein himself along with the user. The performative value of the videos lies in the theatrical expressions of the users' reactions. In the second variation, users also displayed political symbols (e.g., *keffiyeh*, Palestinian flag) while incorporating graphic images (e.g., children dying, people crying). In this case, the performative value lies in the users' *attrezzo* (e.g., symbols of Palestinian identity) and the display of suffering.

From the perspective of communicative function, these videos can be paired with what Askanius (2013) defines as political mash-up videos, in which users merge pre-existing materials from multiple sources to construct a political argument. However, the grievance narrative that characterizes Palestinian social media communications, with the help of TikTok's Duet feature, is being translated into a parodic and satiric "answer" to the Israeli provocation presented in the original video. Parody, a dominant audiovisual dialect of

TikTok users (Divon & Ebbrecht-Hartmann, 2022), is a creative work designed to imitate and/or mock its subject by means of satiric or ironic imitation (Tryon, 2008). In this challenge, Zein and many other co-creators not only ironically unmask the contradiction of using the song "Stand Up" as an anthem of freedom to defend a state of occupation, but they also use this trend to expose atrocities and children's suffering using imagery of victimhood.

This playful form of resistance can be defined as a type of "creative insurgency" (Kraidy, 2016) since words, songs, and images can function as an alternative to actual violence (or act in tandem with actual violence) for the purpose of reaching political goals. In this sense, Zein and others' creative performances are germane to the kinds of revolutionary actions that have become popular in the Palestinian resistance legacy, such as chanting slogans, spraying graffiti, and building barricades. In addition, this challenge communicates TikTok's powerful nature of competition. By capitalizing on the platform's tendency to disseminate and expose videos associated with trending challenges (Klug, 2020), users were calling others to Duet with Zein's version using the caption section on their videos in an attempt to suppress the IDF soldier's original video. Downplaying the Israeli version and concealing it from the "algorithmic eye" (Abidin, 2020) amplified the virality of Zein's "hijacked" version of the challenge, making it more visible to random scrollers on the "For You" page.

Although users made various memetic performances of Zein's video, as a public, they communicated in one coherent voice. Following the Duet template, users took advantage of TikTok's play tools like the Green Screen feature to immerse themselves in disputed sites (e.g., the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem; see Figure 2c), or in sites of struggle (e.g., refugee camps in Gaza; see Figure 2d). Some used the image juxtaposition to resonate with the ongoing and inflammatory geographical debate with Israel by showing a map of Palestine with Jerusalem as its capital, in an attempt to make amends for historical injustice while calling to "fight back for the stolen lands" (see Figure 2e).

From the affective practice perspective, by substituting new words for the original song and by focusing on suffering and struggle, users infused their creations with an emotional resonance that echoed among distant individuals (Mühlhoff, 2015), who reacted with memetic versions. In this sense, the memefied challenge melody sparked an affective dissemination that rapidly connected disorganized crowds "discursively called into being" (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 6). Some users adapted to TikTok's multimodality of sound and supported Zein's singing with musical instruments. For example, one user played the violin while displaying popular Palestinian symbols (e.g., the *keffiyeh*), and accompanying text said, "My heart breaks for the kids" (see Figure 2f). This performative practice expressed the user's closeness to the Palestinian cause and thereby amplified the emotional

volume of victimization. The users' emotionalization became visible in their own memetic versions, showing a range of facial expressions, such as sadness or acts of crying while listening to Zein's version (see Figure 2 g).

As social media became the new "war zone" of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Li & Prasad, 2018), the various memetic creations of the Duet display the users' ability to use different affordance-based playful "weapons." Conveyed with artful tactics of resistance, users' co-performances forge alternative routes for fighting social injustice without renouncing the need to show cruel realities. Moreover, as accessible templates for activism, these playful performances have a lower participation threshold than traditional protests (Shepard, 2012). They allow users to play with multi-layered dialogic modes and to take an active role in the conflict as they express their feelings of solidarity, indignation, and anger and creatively articulate their political position.

Mariam Afifi's Smile of Resistance: POV Challenges as Co-Constructed Empathy

The third challenge that we identified is a POV challenge dedicated to Mariam Afifi, a 19-year-old Palestinian activist who became known due to a viral video of her smiling while being beaten and handcuffed by an Israeli soldier in a protest against Israeli authorities (Gill, 2021). Within a matter of hours after her detention by an Israeli soldier, Afifi's video rapidly achieved viral status, garnering widespread support from hundreds of users who demanded her immediate release from prison. These individuals not only endorsed Afifi's active participation in the protest, but also helped to amplify a potent and politically charged narrative across a range of social media platforms (see Figure 3a).

On TikTok, Palestinians and their supporters transformed her video into a challenge in which they enrolled as re-enactors of the moment of her arrest, using the POV aesthetic and applying various strategies to convey her presence. In the first variation, users wore dark red hijabs, thereby intertextually connecting to Afifi's hijab in the original footage. Using the platform's Green Screen function, users immersed themselves in a "protest" and lip-synced Afifi's words to the Israeli soldier during her arrest, trying to convince the imagined other ("the enemy") that it was their right to protest. A sudden edit cut shows the re-enacted Afifi with facial "bruises" due to the violent behavior of the unseen enemy.

In a second variation, users are shown kneeling in the position of handcuffed hostages held by the imagined enemy, wearing dark red shirts to connect with Afifi's hijab, covered with mimicked bruises, and displaying expressions of pain while being treated violently (e.g., they are thrown to the floor and the enemy steps on their necks). In a third variation, users record themselves smiling into a mirror while an overlaid caption states, "You smile when you know Allah is with you" or " (. . .) when you know justice is with you." In a

Figure 3. Variations on the Mariam Afifi POV challenge.

fourth variation, TikTok users are physically absent in the videos but convey resistance by showing slideshows of smiling Palestinian activists at various protests.

From a performative perspective, although utilizing different features, all four variations have a similar visual hook, with TikTok's aesthetic of the POV affording creative remediation of Afifi's smiling image. The users' playful role was fostered by performances of makeup, costuming, props, and scenery. This enabled viewers to observe and users to re-enact events as if they were conveyed by Afifi's eyes and voice. Afifi's video has undergone a "memetic reproduction" (Rossolatos, 2015) similar to the trajectory of the iconic image of George Floyd that became ubiquitous in #BlackLivesMatter protests. Afifi's smile also carries the visual value of "meme-worthiness" (Zimmer & Carson, 2018), motivating the intense circulation of controversial content and turning the smile into an available "cultural repertoire of vernacular video" (Burgess, 2008, p. 6).

The communicative intention of this challenge can be seen as an attempt to forefront the story of Afifi's arrest as a counter-narrative to mainstream media, dominated and described by the hegemonic Israeli narrative of Palestinian resistance as "terrorism" (Najjar, 2009). By playing the role of a victim and integrating photo testimonies that rationalize Afifi's acts and vehemently disapprove of her arrest "just for defending a girl being beaten by an officer," users provide global audiences with the chance to transcend the often restrictive framing of the conflict presented by mainstream media outlets (see Figure 3b).

By co-opting Afifi's challenge and fostering its algorithmic zenith, users carved pathways for activism to weave in and out of TikTok while amplifying marginalized voices and increasing their visibility for mass crowds. The memeification process of Afifi's smile became a political invitation for users to learn about and observe the brutality enacted against Palestinians and to acknowledge other victims of institutional violence, such as Black people in the United States. Commemorating George Floyd's tragic death by a White US police officer, some users opened their videos reenacting the iconic facedown position while a knee belonging to an unseen and threatening adversary is being pressed against

their neck, portraying a fatal scenario of suffocation (see Figure 3c).

Users were operating TikTok's features and trends to establish community building (Vizcaíno-Verdú & Abidin, 2022), showing solidarity with other users against Israeli authorities through a "digital allyship praxis" (Clark, 2019). Palestinian and non-Palestinian users linked to each other's POV videos not only to amplify the trend on the "For You" page but also to broaden the perspective of "both the allies and members of their personal communities" (Clark, 2019, p. 12) about their lives in a constant state violence, and to call them to witness the events (see Figure 3d).

Afifi's POV challenge promoted a preferred reading of the conflict, in which the Palestinians face discrimination by the Israeli forces in spaces of free protest, with no enacted violence ("she was just sitting there"). The images that circulated of Afifi's smile and of many other Palestinian protesters who were captured with a smile while being arrested (see Figure 3e) preserve the typical dichotomies of oppressed and oppressor that move beyond the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Viewers can identify a familiar power dynamic (that uses force) while watching Afifi's arrest, and they might identify her meme-smile as "defying the normative scripts of the colonial relationship" (Bhungalia, 2020, p. 400), in which one should not smile in the face of military power.

Regarding affective practice, users became fully immersed in an imaginative role-play that required the use of theatrical practices, such as customs, location, the use of artifacts, and exaggerated body and facial gestures to evoke intense emotions. For example, users wore red hijabs and similarly colored dresses, and attempted to recreate the subtle nuances of her facial expressions, to constitute an authentic (self-)performance while trying to merge themselves with the memefied character of Afifi (see Figure 3f). This playful performance embodies a dialogic infrastructure with the character of the victim because it holds the potential to provide an empathetic view of the suffering of others, even without being the primary source of information about the conflict.

The re-enactments, by fostering feelings of compassion toward the human costs of the conflict, can be seen as

affective practices because they result in waves of not only co-constructed grief but also co-constructed empathy (Eriksson Krutrök, 2021). Users emit their emotional desire by identifying with Afifi through texts, emojis, hashtags, and other pictorial icons that act as "symbols of solidarity" (Döveling et al., 2018, p. 5; see Figure 3g). Hence the arousal of empathy is derived from the ability of the POV challenge to serve as a multimodal "witnessing text," positioning the users and the viewers to "bear witness to others' lives" on and through TikTok (Frosh, 2006, p. 274).

The POV challenge is an open-ended activity that involves imagination and creativity and leaves room for questioning the rigidity of the real world (Huizinga, 1949/1970). Users are encouraged to position themselves as Afifi while creatively renegotiating and imaginatively re-enacting her experiences. In their recollections, users are liberated to play with their "civic imagination" (Jenkins et al., 2016), finding alternatives to their socio-political hardships like the act of smiling instead of being overcome by fear, the possibility to crop out the authority figure from their memes, and even setting Afifi free.

Discussion

Our exploration of the #gazaunderattack on TikTok aligns with previous studies and confirms that although the platform might seem like a "messy and unorganized" environment (Vijay & Gekker, 2021), its affordances make it suited for playful activism. We have shown how the emergence of TikTok in the mediatization of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is changing common practices of video activism by encouraging playful participation and potentially transforming users into political performers. TikTok's entertainment attitude (Kaye et al., 2021) is interwoven in users' creations, as they tackle "hard" topics while appropriating the platform's vernaculars of playfulness that make activism relatable, tangible, and accessible to broader audiences.

Playful activism is contextualized in the culture of TikTok's #challenges. Users co-opt challenges as open-access, self-learned templates of creation that enable them not only to join trending conversations but also to creatively express and "disseminate political arguments and ideologies" (Hakoköngäs et al., 2020, p. 2). TikTok's challenges help normalize the idea that political engagement can be an everyday activity or even a play (Zhao & Abidin, 2021), allowing ordinary users novel forms of dialogue around emerging current events by harnessing memetic templates as their political instruments. Both the potential for virality and the sense of playfulness brought about by the amateur environment of challenges (Cervi & Marín Lladó, 2021) lower the barriers to entry into activism and expand the repertoire of what it means to be politically involved. However, TikTok's challenges can give rise to the propagation of inflammatory practices of memetic violence beyond the confines of the platform, particularly during times of conflict (Divon, 2022).

Playful activism is fostered by the nature of competition and performance inhabited in TikTok's challenges. As users strive for their visibility on the "For You" page, they utilize the challenges' memetic qualities that "set the tone for conversations and bring into words people's affective sentiments" in exchange for greater algorithmic exposure and engagement (MacDonald, 2021, p. 7). If previous forms of video activism allowed Palestinians to create "bonds of sentiment" (Papacharissi, 2016, p. 308) by showing online the daily cruelty of the conflict, then TikTok's unique combination of affordances has helped users to propel affective content into visibility through playful practices of activism.

TikTok is playful and affective by design. Its performative (e.g., aesthetics, attitudes, body and facial expressions) and platformative (e.g., audiovisual features, loops, mimesis) layers of content creation are effective binding techniques for expressing, sharing, and disseminating intensity of emotions through "purposeful play" (Hartley, 2010). Therefore, granting that affective processes suffuse online social engagement (Papacharissi, 2015), playful activism can trigger emotional responses, elicit feelings of community, and mobilize affective publics for playful participation.

Since our study's goal was to explore production practices themselves, this article was unable to go into an in-depth examination of how users perceive these practices. When multimodal content becomes viral and ignites a memetic reaction, it is no longer necessarily affiliated with its original users or their values. Thus, it can potentially remove the context of the actions from a social-media-driven movement (Yoon, 2016). Accordingly, and acknowledging that TikTok's imitation dynamic inherently mixes production and reception (Cervi, 2021), further research should investigate the reception aspects (e.g., comments, reactions) of playful activism's ability to mobilize collective action and its effectiveness in the pursuit of socio-political goals.

Authors' Note

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#StopAsianHate on TikTok: Asian/ American Women's Space-Making for Spearheading Counter-Narratives and Forming an Ad Hoc Asian Community

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Abstract

TikTok, one of the fastest growing entertainment platforms, is also a burgeoning space for hosting political expressions and movements. In this study, we examine how Asian/American women creatively occupy the #StopAsianHate hashtag on TikTok to counter anti-Asian racism and form pan-Asian solidarity. We analyze their participation in the #StopAsianHate hashtag as anti-racist space-making practices, which we define as the act of carving out discursive spaces to spread counter-narratives to anti-Asian racism and claiming space through their agentive, visual presence. Drawing upon Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA) as our method, we analyze 130 #StopAsianHate TikTok videos by Asian/American women and examine how their anti-racist space-making practices draw upon the features and cultures of TikTok. We illustrate how Asian/ American women extend the discussion on anti-Asian racism to include their gendered and raced experiences, and challenge racism in affective and evocative ways. We conclude by discussing how their space-making practices foster an ad hoc community for Asian/Americans across differences amid rising anti-Asian hate crimes.

Keywords

#StopAsianHate, TikTok, ad hoc community, space-making, anti-Asian racism

Introduction

When news of COVID-19 first broke out in East Asia in late-2019 and was later declared a global pandemic, people of East Asian ethnicities around the world became targets of hate and violence (Abidin & Zeng, 2021). In the United States, increasing anti-Asian sentiments were epitomized in the Atlanta shooting case wherein a White man, who was a self-reported sex addict, killed six Asian women in three saunas on 16 March 2021. This case expanded the discussion on Asian hate crimes to include Asian fetishization, sexism, and gendered racism on social media. On TikTok, Asian content creators and their allies have used the platform to speak out against the rise of Asian hate crimes in the United States and other Western European countries by producing videos with several hashtags including #ProtectAsianLives, #AsianLivesMatter (adopted from #BlackLivesMatter), and #StopAsianHate. Among them, the #StopAsianHate hashtag, with more than 2 billion views as of November 2022, serves as a locus where Asian women address their experience of everyday racism and violence as gendered-and-raced beings, referring to the

history of Asian racialization and fetishization in the United States. By taking seriously the political engagement of Asian women on TikTok's #StopAsianHate hashtag, this study examines how Asian women creatively occupy and transform the #StopAsianHate hashtag into a productive space for confronting anti-Asian racism and forming pan-Asian solidarity.

In this study, we focus on the TikTok videos produced by Asian and Asian American women creators who discuss racism through specific incidents that occurred in the United States, such as the Atlanta Shootings on 16 March 2021 and a series of anti-Asian violence in New York City in 2021. While the #StopAsianHate movement took place across many Western countries, this study examines the US case as

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the movement was particularly intensified after a series of anti-Asian hate crimes in the country. As Asian American studies scholar Erika Lee (2007) argues, White supremacy around the world has been pivoted around the US race system where various racial categories and definitions (i.e., Asian, Black, Latinx) have been formulated in relation to the US history and policies around immigration and chattel slavery. In light of this, we focus on US-specific cases in relation to the US race system, not to reduce Asian/Americans' experience into *the* universal Asian experience but to represent the fabric of Asian experience in the West, which resonates with various communities of Asians across regions, cultures, and histories.

In this study, we use the term "Asian/American" with a slash in between when referring to Asian women on TikTok, following Korean American scholar Laura Hyun Yi Kang (2002) who uses the slash to illuminate how Asian and Asian American women are frequently conflated, despite their differences as "the continental (Asian), the national (American), and the racial ethnic (Asian American)" (p. 2), in the US political, cultural, and media landscape. Our use of the term Asian/American is a strategic choice to highlight the inseparable relationship between Asian women and Asian American women in the US race system and to illuminate how the two have been conflated more so in the racialization of COVID-19 as an Asian disease. Indeed, many Asian TikTokers interchangeably use the terms, "Asian" and "Asian American," regardless of the differences between the terms, to critique how Asians in the United States have become targets of hate crimes in the pandemic.

In our use of the term "Asian/American," we do not limit the concept only to East Asian ethnicities but consider it as an umbrella concept that includes various Asian ethnicities and nationalities. However, we note that many parts of our data, findings, and analysis revolve around the stories of racism and sexism experienced by people of East Asian ethnicities, who were the main targets of anti-Asian racism exacerbated by the pandemic. This acknowledgment is crucial in Asian American studies, especially when researching cases like the #StopAsianHate movement, because public and scholarly discussions on anti-Asian racism have focused extensively on East Asian peoples' experiences (China, Japan, South Korea), overlooking the ways in which anti-Asian racism impacts Asian American groups of other ethnicities differently. For this reason, while Asian/American women of non-East Asian backgrounds (e.g., South Asians, Southeast Asians) partake in the movement in solidarity, they often feel marginalized within Asian American Pacific Islander space (Jagoo, 2022). Thus, when using the term Asian/American, we are mindful of the heterogeneity of the ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, histories, and experiences of Asian Americans of Asian descent, which is usually dismissed and lumped into a monolithic racial identity by the US race ideology (Yamamoto, 1999).

Historical Overview of Anti-Asian Racism and Asian Women's Racialization in the United States

In the United States, Asians have been racialized in two primary ways: made hyper visible as the "perpetual foreigner" or invisible as the "model minority" (Yamamoto, 1999). This contradictory positioning of Asians is a result of the White and Black race paradigm in the United States, which subjects Asian Americans to racial markings of non-difference or difference, based on the needs of the dominant race ideology of the United States (Yamamoto, 1999). The perpetual foreigner stereotype dates to when the fear of the "yellow peril" was at its height in the late-1800s, in which the increasing presence of Chinese laborers in California led to the infamous Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 (Lee, 2007). The model minority stereotype of Asians is equally pernicious. In response to the US political needs to cultivate an image of a racial democracy in the 1950s, the United States revised its immigration policies, eliminating race as a barrier to immigration and began cultivating the image of the model minority Asians to assist the US public's acceptance of these immigration laws (Simpson, 1998). Despite their fraught history with racism in the United States, the model minority stereotype has made it difficult for Asians to articulate their experience with racism as they have been historically framed as "honorary whites" (Zhang, 2010) or superhuman figures impervious to pain (Nakamura, 2015).

Caught in the racial binary, Asian women have been stereotyped as either "dangerous dragon ladies" or "obedient, hypersexualized dolls" (Zhang, 2010, p. 20). The former stereotype was made prominent through a series of immigration laws in the United States, such as the 1875 Page Act enacted to contain the entry of Chinese women into the United States for prostitution and other series of immigration laws, such as the 1945 War Brides Act, which accepted only the immigration of European spouses of American soldiers, limiting the entry of Asian brides from East Asian countries who were deemed as "better prostitutes than wives" (Doolan, 2019, para 9). In US popular media, this imagined threat of Asian sexuality was controlled by representing Asian women as submissive, sexual objects. Against the backdrop of American military presence in Japan, novels and movies popularized the romance between the docile Japanese woman and the American soldier who rescues her from the oppressive, patriarchal Japanese society (Yamamoto, 1999). In these movies, racial tension arising from interracial mixing became resolved by either the death of the Asian woman or her convenient disappearance, rendering her body easily disposable (Simpson, 1998). As Asian American scholars note, these harmful representations have historically conflated Asian and Asian American women (Kang, 2002; Shimizu, 2007), and continue to do so, which Shimizu (2007) describes as the "violent

homogenization of Asian American women" (p. 14) whose differences are obscured by hypersexualization.

In the contemporary media landscape, through various modes of online and offline activism, Asian/American women have advanced counter-narratives against the monolithic understanding of the sexually charged Asian female body by approaching it as a complex site where gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality intersect (Kuo et al., 2020). We approach Asian/American women's participation in the #StopAsianHate movement as a continuation of Asian/American women's efforts to intervene in the history of sexism and racism against Asian/Americans.

Social Media Hashtag: Affective Racial Counterpublics and Space-Making

Racial justice activism occurs on social media platforms through the formation of racial counterpublics. For instance, Asian American activists have used Twitter hashtags including #NotYourAsianSideKick and #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen to form racialized and feminist of color counterpublics (Kuo, 2018a). Counterpublics refer to the discursive space "where members of subordinated groups invent and circulate counter discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). By disseminating counter discourses to the public, counterpublics seek to challenge hegemonic discourses and empower the voices of the marginalized (Squires, 2002). Hashtagging is one of the most frequently used features in social media activism, which is used to construct counter-narratives, provide strategic guidepost for the course of the movement (Losh, 2014), and serve as nodes for marginalized individuals to connect with similar others, feel intimacy, and affectively mobilize publics by narrating and developing their stories (Kuo, 2018b). As Kuo (2018b) writes, 'hashtags function as a discursive form that links together streams of information that allows people to 'feel their way' into politics" (p. 44).

Notably, connective social media affordances and features, such as hashtags, facilitate the circulation and mobilization of affect and emotions, activating fragmented publics into connected movements (Papacharissi, 2015) and forging "the feelings of community" (Dean, 2010, p. 22). For example, in the case of Arab Spring movements where a series of democracy uprisings was spread mostly via Twitter across the Arab world in 2010, Twitter's connective and expressive affordances helped users spread news and mobilize publics by blending fact with their interpretations and emotions (Papacharissi, 2015). Similarly, racial minorities' social media hashtagging practices can be understood as a practice for building communities, in which scattered individuals gather, engage with each other, and develop their affective stories and connections.

According to feminist scholarship on the politics of affect, affect is not nonconscious and prepersonal, but is embodied, contextualized, and always linked to the social (Ahmed, 2004). For instance, how racialized and gendered subjects feel about society, such as their anger toward disempowering social structures, indicate how society is structured and operates along gender and racial lines (Åhäll, 2018). On social media, affect is shared and circulated in response to social issues, in which people are brought together and mobilized toward movements like #MeToo (Sundén & Paasonen, 2019). Affect is thus "productive emotion" (Lopez, 2014, p. 425), which mobilizes people to find and create spaces, such as online counterpublics, to express their experiences of injustice creatively with others.

However, it is difficult for marginalized people like Asian/American women to find safe places, especially in public, to share their stories and emotions with others (Kern, 2021). Feminist geographers highlight how marginalized communities strive to create spaces of disruption to subvert oppressive structures and create ruptures in "normative" spaces through their visibility that challenge society's expectations of how women, ethnic minorities, and queer people should act in White-centered spaces (Fincher & Panelli, 2001; Kern, 2021). For example, Women With A Vision (WWAV), a Black Feminist social justice collective, has transformed the front porches of their homes as safe spaces for Black women and community members to convene (McTighe & Haywood, 2018). By critiquing normative spaces and envisioning equitable spaces, marginalized communities continuously conduct space-making practices that are processual, ongoing, and aspirational (Kern, 2021).

In this study, we propose to extend feminist geographers' idea of space-making to Asian/American women's participation in the #StopAsianHate hashtag. Similar to how feminist geographers conceptualize feminist space-making as the act of occupying and intervening in normative spaces, we look at how Asian/American women discursively and materially take up and form space on TikTok. Feminist scholarship on digital activism describes feminist activists' political engagement on platforms as the act of occupying and creating "a shared political home in digital space" (Kuo et al., 2020, p. 8) by being together online. By applying the notion of space-making to Asian/American women's participation in the #StopAsianHate hashtag on TikTok, we illuminate the dynamic and processual act of being and moving in digital space together. We specifically look at how Asian/American women carve out discursive spaces by cultivating, spreading, and building on counter-narratives and physically claim the space with their presence and cultivation of solidarity on the platform, decentering whiteness and White supremacy on social media. Asian/American TikTokers do not merely use the space provided by the platform but make spaces across the networked landscape, expanding the reach of their counter discourses and scope of representation for Asian/American women beyond the narratives of hypersexualized objects and the quiet Americans (Lopez, 2014).

TikTok

In this study, we look at how Asian/American TikTok creators' space-making practices are shaped by the vernacular cultures and features of TikTok. Despite its relatively short history, TikTok has expanded the tenor of political engagement online (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). TikTok's technological features, including its virality-centered mechanism (e.g., algorithmically generated "For You Page") and playful and creative functions (e.g., meme templates, audiovisual effects), lowers the barrier for young people to join social movements and casually discuss social (in)justice (Abidin, 2021). In particular, communicative forms on TikTok, such as comedic, documentary, explanatory, communal, and interactive content, present politics of everyday communicative environments (Schellewald, 2021). Hautea et al. (2021) further note that hashtagged TikTok videos contribute to the construction of affective publics through the usage of audio memes and interactive features like duet and stitch features.

TikTok's audio function allows users to include the same background audio template (e.g., trendy music, their own dialogues, recordings of vocal messages of other users), which helps users engage with others auditorily in the form of audio memes (Abidin, 2021). TikTok's unique features, duet and stitch, also enable users to directly respond and react to other creators. The duet feature lets a user's video play next to another creator's video and the stitch feature allows a user to build a video on another user's video by clipping and integrating up to 5 s of the original video into their own. Through these creative features, TikTok allows users to quickly respond to "viral" content (Abidin, 2021), which strengthens their association with other TikTok contents and creators (Hautea et al., 2021). Focusing on the interactive social movements afforded by TikTok's various technological features, we pay attention to how Asian/American women's #StopAsianHate hashtagging practices shape anti-racism movements together with the platform's technical specificities and cultures.

Method

To explore Asian/American women's participation in the #StopAsianHate hashtag, we address the following research questions: (1) What do Asian/American women talk about through the #StopAsianHate hashtag? (2) How do they develop and share their stories by drawing upon the various features of TikTok? (3) Finally, how do they form solidarity with other Asian/American TikTokers to challenge anti-Asian racism?

From September to November 2021, we observed the #StopAsianHate hashtag on TikTok and collected 130 videos from the Top Video tab. Among the numerous #StopAsianHate TikTok videos uploaded by global users, we manually collected videos by Asian/American women who specifically used the #StopAsianHate hashtag to discuss racism in the context of the United States and verbally (e.g., talking about their racial and ethnic identity in their videos) or textually (e.g., hashtags or TikTok profiles indicating their ethnicity) identified themselves as Asian. We stopped our data collection after we began to see similar patterns across the data set and reached data saturation. Our data set consists of 130 videos published between mid-February 2021 and early-November 2021, each ranging from 900 to 4.7 million views. Most videos under the hashtag were uploaded during March 2021 at the height of the racially motivated crimes against Asian populations in the United States and the Atlanta Shooting on 16 March 2021. At the time of writing, videos continued to be uploaded, with Asian/American women TikTokers extending the #StopAsianHate conversation to violence enacted upon Asian populations beyond the pandemic, including Asian fetishization, Asian cultural appropriation, and microaggression.

Our methodology is grounded in Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis (CTDA), a multimodal analytic technique which approaches online discourse as technoculturally mediated by the artifact and the cultural perspectives of the user (Brock, 2018). CTDA approaches both online discourse and platform as texts, encouraging researchers to pay attention to the "technocultural mediation of discursive actions" (Brock, 2018, p. 1019). As Brock (2018) writes, CTDA "is not only critical of the content that people deploy as they use ICTs to write themselves into being but also of the ways that the medium hails them into being as users" (p. 1025). Accordingly, we attend to how the technological features of TikTok (e.g., duets, meme templates, hashtags) shape the narrative of Asian/American women TikTokers, how the interactive structure unique to the platform cultivates affective connections among Asian/Americans, and how the subject positions and lived experiences of the users shape their usage of TikTok.

Informed by CTDA, we developed our coding scheme to reflect the discursive, material, and symbolic aspects of peoples' usage of technological artifacts. We each engaged in inductive reading of the first 25 videos to come up with patterns across the videos. After comparing our initial codes, we came up with the following categories to analyze discourse characteristics of the TikTok videos: *Topic* (type of anti-Asian racism discussed: for example, Physical violence, Asian fetishization, Racial microaggression), *Context* of anti-Asian racism discussed (e.g., COVID-19, Atlanta Shooting, everyday racism), and *Message Characteristics* (e.g., The genre, audience target, and tone of the content). Based on the codes we developed, we read our data set horizontally, which is the exploration of patterns, themes, and discourses that are manifest across different data, and focused on what counter-narratives emerge, how they are spread across different TikTok videos, and how they evoke a shared sense of belonging and community within the hashtagged discursive space.

Then, we read our data vertically, which is the close examination of individual data, by carefully looking at each

TikTok video to see its unique feature: how TikTokers narrate their stories and further contribute to shaping the shared counter-narratives, how they interact with their followers and audiences, and what types of TikTok features they use. In this reading, we closely examined the Asian/American TikTok creators and their followers' use of TikTok features. Drawing upon Zeng and Abidin's (2021) analytical construct "meme form," the "content style through which memes are delivered in each video" (p. 5), we analyzed the audio feature, visual feature, and performing feature of each TikTok video. By doing so, we were able to see how the specific platform vernaculars of TikTok (e.g., acting skits, lip syncing, stitch and duets) were being utilized by Asian/American women in their anti-Asian racism resistance. Through horizontal and vertical reading of our data, we explain how individual Asian/American TikTok creators, their followers, and the broader Asian/American culture interact and develop their counterpublic narratives and construct their own space and connections under the #StopAsianHate hashtag.

Following the ethical stance of feminist media scholars who have studied the counterpublics of marginalized groups (Clark-Parsons & Lingel, 2020), we anonymized the TikTok handles of the Asian/American women in our study and do not provide visual examples of the data. Social media users often lack agency over how their publicly made social media data are being utilized (Clark-Parsons & Lingel, 2020). While the TikTok creators made their videos public, we did not receive their consent to have their posts published in academic research. As Moravec (2017) aptly writes on feminist research ethics on digital archives, "their (feminist activists) presence in archives is not necessarily indicative of the creators' desire to be widely accessed" (p. 198). We became more vigilant about using and publicizing their data after finding out that some of the posts in our data had been deleted since our initial data collection in November 2021, which may indicate the TikTokers' desire to not have their content remain visible. In addition, considering the fact that Asian women are frequent targets of racialized and gendered harassment online (Nakamura, 2015), we felt responsible for protecting the Asian/American TikTokers in the study from any potential harm when this research becomes public. Thus, while we acknowledge the important and unique function that visual elements of TikTok contents carry in social movements on TikTok, we decided not to provide any screenshots of their videos. Instead, we provide detailed explanations of the characteristics and interactive features of their TikTok videos to the best of our ability to deliver the nuance of visual messages in the original contents.

#StopAsianHate as a Discursive Space

In this section, we examine how the #StopAsianHate hashtag functions as a discursive space to challenge anti-Asian racism. We first provide an overview of the dominant themes of anti-Asian racism shared by Asian/American women. We then discuss how the #StopAsianHate hashtag serves as a discursive space. Finally, we illustrate how Asian/American women enrich and expand #StopAsianHate discursive space through hashtagging practices on TikTok.

Through their #StopAsianHate videos, Asian/American women diversify the discussion of anti-Asian racism into three main themes: (1) physical hate crimes, (2) Asian fetishization, and (3) racial microaggression. First, Asian/American TikTok creators highlight the gravity of physical violence committed against East Asians in the United States since the onset of the pandemic. Discussion of Asian hate crimes includes COVID-19-related hate crimes specifically targeting the Asian elderly population and the Atlanta shooting case. These videos contextualize the analysis of hate crimes in the historical, political, and cultural representations of Asians as the yellow peril in the United States that have been used to legitimize racialized violence. In the videos dedicated to the Atlanta shooting, Asian/American women introduce the gendered dimension of racialized violence and attribute the murder of six Asian women to US history of hypersexualizing Asian women. Extending the conversation beyond the Atlanta Shooting, Asian/American TikTok creators also illustrate how the historical legacy of Asian women's hypersexualization is experienced in their everyday life. Examples include videos about #AsianFishing (practices of White people trying to pass as Asians through makeup or photoshopping, often called "East Asian baiting," and practiced through the adoption of a "fox eye" appearance) and #YellowFever. Finally, a considerable number of videos under the #StopAsianHate hashtag discuss TikTok creators' experiences of sexism and racial microaggressions. These videos mainly challenge stereotypes about Asian women (e.g., Asian women are exotic, submissive, and hypersexual) and problematize White Americans' unconscious denial of Asians as full-fledged citizens in the United States (e.g., Asian Americans being asked "where are you from?").

By addressing their experiences and challenging anti-Asian racism through these various themes, the #StopAsianHate hashtag functions as an "indexing system" (Kuo, 2018b) where invisible information about violence against Asian bodies are shared, archived, and made visible. As such, the #StopAsianHate hashtag serves as a discursive space where Asian/American women can deposit and form counter-narratives to anti-Asian racism and share their feelings and experiences with other Asian/American women occupying the discursive space. When public space is constructed in favor of White masculinity and minorities are continuously pushed to marginal spaces, virtual space can function as an alternative space for the oppressed to talk about their *own* experiences (Cavalcante, 2019) and feel safety within the boundary of the hashtag (Dixon, 2014). While the #StopAsianHate discursive space can be entered by racist and sexist publics, the hashtag represents Asian/American women's reclaiming of space by making their presence and discourse more visible to online publics.

Table 1. Dominant Themes and Types of Hashtags.

Themes	Number of videos	Narrative extension hashtags	Exposure extension hashtags
Physical violence (COVID-19 & Atlanta shooting)	59	#ProtectAsianWomen, #GrowingUpAsian, #AsianFishing, #AsianBaiting, #EastAsianBaiting, #FoxEyeTrend, #AsianFetishes, #FetishArentCool, #StopFetishizingAsians, #WeebShit, #KpopStans #KpopFans, #AnimeFans, #YellowFever, #rp #CultureAppropriation #Microagressions, #AsianAmerican, #AsianAmericanProblems	#fyp, #fyu, #LearnOnTikTok, #MakeThisViral, #ForYou, #fyp, #fyu, #LetsTalkAboutIt #viral_video_tiktok
Asian fetishization	35		
Asian identity and microaggression	36		

As philosopher Lefebvre (1974/1998) famously put, space as a social product mediates social relations through which people develop a sense of identity and define themselves within society (p. 26). Neighborhoods like Chinatown in New York City in the United States provide physical space for ethnic diasporas where the minority community members cultivate social networks through ordinary daily conversations, exchange and maintain cultural values and norms of the community, and organize political action (Wong, 2019). In the context of accelerated digitalization during the pandemic where peoples' mobility is restricted and their daily lives are forcefully integrated into the digital space (Nagel, 2020), such ethnic spaces are newly built into the digital space through racial minorities' digital media-making practices and media artifacts (Kuo et al., 2020). Thus, the trending #StopAsianHate hashtag on TikTok becomes a political site for Asian/American women to gather and virtually march to express their anger and frustration against the growing Asian hate and advocate for racial justice.

In cultivating and expanding the #StopAsianHate shape, Asian/American women engage in various hashtagging practices. TikTok is unique for its virality-seeking cultures, with users' engagement centered around the "For You Page" that picks up posts with "high engagements"—measured with views, comments, and shares—and displays them to other users' main page based on the users' previous digital footprints (Abidin, 2021). As being picked up by the For You Page allows users to gain views, TikTok creators utilize various forms of trending hashtags, memes, and filters to increase their contents' visibility. To increase the reach of their #StopAsianHate videos, Asian/American women use the #StopAsianHashtag alongside two types of hashtags: the popular hashtags designed to attract views like #fyp (the abbreviation of For You Page)—which we call *exposure extension hashtags*; and racial discourse hashtags, which we call *narrative extension hashtags* (Table 1). These narrative extension hashtags function as subject identifiers, in addition to networking the #StopAsianHate content to various video pages of hashtagged contents on TikTok, which users can enter by clicking on the hashtags. For instance, Asian/American women use #ProtectAsianWomen, #AsianFetishization, and #YellowFever, to connect the #StopAsianHate videos to other contents that deal with the gendered-and-raced experiences of Asian/American women.

Additionally, by utilizing these extension hashtag features, some Asian/American TikTokers attempted to expand the East Asian-centered focus of the #StopAsianHate movement and discourse and critiqued colorism within the Asian American community. For instance, a mixed-race Asian/American (@ms***) linked the #StopAsianHate hashtag to other identifiers such as #mixedrace and #mixedraceAsian and did a duet with another Asian/American TikToker (@ma***) who posted a video about the Asian American community shaming mixed-race Asians for not being Asian enough. In the duet, the mixed Asian/American TikToker nods in response to the original TikToker @ma***'s critique and expresses how mixed-race Asians often feel excluded in conversations about anti-Aisan racism and experiences of being Asian on TikTok. There were also other similar videos that critiqued the #StopAsianHate movement with hashtags such as #AsianAmericanCommunityProblems, for narrowing the focus of anti-Asian racism to hate crimes mainly targeted at East Asian and neglecting the experiences of other ethnic groups, such as South Asians who were subjected to heightened racialized surveillance and discrimination post 9/11. By highlighting the exclusion of mixed-race Asian Americans and Asian Americans of other ethnicities within the Asian American community through the #StopAsianHate hashtag, the TikTokers diversify the counter-narratives under the hashtag, providing various entry points for people to enter into the discursive space.

Affectively Talking Back Through Hashtags

In this section, we examine how the platform vernacular of TikTok—the visuals, performances, and affective storytelling (Zeng & Abidin, 2021)—shape Asian/American creators' presence in the #StopAsianHate discursive space. In our corpus of data, we noticed how Asian/American women "talked back" (hooks, 1986) to anti-Asian racism through the display and vocalization of anger, frustration, and sadness. Referring

to how Black women are subjected to racialized and gendered scrutiny when they act and talk, bell hooks (1986) writes how the act of talking back is a way of speaking as an equal to authority figures and demonstrating their "movement from object to subject—the liberated voice" (p. 128). Similarly, Asian/American women talk back to racism and take space as visible subjects, rather than remaining as hypervisible, docile, and apolitical objects.

We describe the talking back by Asian/American TikTokers as affective, which is supported and intensified by the interactive features of TikTok. In many #StopAsianHate TikTok videos, Asian/American women's critique of anti-Asian racism is displayed with an amalgam of visible signs of feelings (e.g., tears, laughs) and invisible cues (e.g., tones, attitudes) that convey affective registers around the topics they discuss. In the following paragraphs, we illustrate Asian/American TikTok creators' affective dimensions in their critique of anti-Asian racism: (1) they claim authority over racial discourse in narrative videos charged with anger and sadness and (2) creatively channel their emotions through humoristic videos. By doing so, Asian/American women TikTokers counter stereotypes of Asian people as apolitical, alien-like, and unemotional (Lopez, 2014).

Evoking the Viewers' Feelings and Claiming Authorship

One of the most prominent ways in which Asian/American women address anti-Asian racism is by expressing anger, frustration, and sadness through explanatory and narrative formats. In many videos, Asian/American women TikTokers directly stare into the camera against a virtual background or the backdrop of their rooms. Through a conversational format without edits, Asian/American women TikTok creators channel their feelings to the viewers, whom they address as the general public, non-Asian allies, Asian allies, or bystanders. Their tones vary, from softer tones used to address their allies (e.g., "Please engage with this video if you think Asian fetishization is an increasing issue" @lin***, 2021) and to solemn tones when talking to bystanders of anti-Asian racism (e.g., "If we say you are a racist, you are a racist" @ok***, 2021). Some Asian/American women address the viewers more vehemently, such as by cursing at bystanders of racism (e.g., "If you care about Asian lives, listen the fk [sic] up" @vi***, 2021). Asian/American women address viewers through these different emotional appeals, expressing their feelings of anger and sadness through their solemn tone, facial expressions, and hand gestures. For example, in her clip, @ko***(2021) points a knife she was using to cut fruits to the viewers, stares into the screen stony-faced, and expresses her anger and determination to fight against racism. Through these affective acts of addressing the viewers, Asian/American women draw viewers into their feelings of sadness and anger and further captivate them by affectively talking back to hegemonic beliefs about Asians and Asian

women that stereotype them as docile and timid yet at the same time hypersexual and exotic.

Other narrative videos mimic the style of investigative journalism reports, with the videos displaying different historical sources, news clips, and statistics of anti-Asian hate crimes against the backdrop of the TikTokers. Asian American perspectives on American politics are largely exempt in the mainstream American public discourse, and Asian/American activists have long tried to remedy this by claiming authorship over political discourse that pertains to them through blogging, zines, and other forms of public expression of their thoughts and feelings (Lopez, 2014). On TikTok, Asian/American women also engage in this political performative act by expressing their anger in response to the mainstream news media's coverage of the Atlanta Shooting as not racially motivated. Their anger functions as "productive emotion" (Lopez, 2014) which calls people into the issue, leads to dynamic conversation and interaction, and creates space for Asian/American's authorship over anti-racist discourse. One of the common formats of these journalistic contents would be the TikToker taking the role of a journalist, narrating directly into the camera, and critiquing the mainstream news media coverage of the Atlanta shooting by connecting the murder to US history of hypersexualizing Asian women (e.g., @ei***, 2021). In these videos, Asian/American women replace the mainstream apolitical narrative of the shooting to their intersectional analysis of the murder of six Asian women (e.g., @vl***, 2021). The feelings of disgust, frustration, and anger they feel toward the mainstream racial discourse are shared with their viewers who provide their support and engage in collective feelings for justice.

Laughing at the Racists and Making Feelings Felt

The #StopAsianHate hashtag, while driven by anger against anti-Asian racism, is also energized by laughter, humor, and satire, which can "provide a breathing" space for activists to energize and mobilize action (Sundén & Paasonen, 2019, p. 8). On TikTok where media contents circulate virally in the form of memes (Abidin, 2021), sharing and producing short clips for laughter can create ruptures in hegemonic systems by encouraging others to join the counterpublic in a playful manner. The affective potential of humor and satire in mobilizing resistance to racism is observed in Asian/American women's resistance to anti-Asian racism. Asian/American women occupy the hashtag by partaking in and creating trendy TikTok meme templates to address anti-Asian racism. Skits are the most common types of playful content, often employed to act out the TikTokers' experience with gendered racial microaggressions. For example, in a skit, an Asian/American TikToker @im***(2021) performs as a racist by adding a ghastly facial filter on her face and says "ching chong." Then she acts as herself, holding tightly onto the wrist of the hand she is holding her scissors, trying extremely hard to stop herself from attacking the racist.

Audio memes and dances are also frequently used to bolster users' affective statements. In the context of the #StopAsianHate movement, the meme templates enable TikTokers to channel their affective reaction to injustice through personalized narratives. The audio meme "magic bomb dance," which is a trending sound on TikTok accompanied by dance moves to the sound of the beat, has been used to answer "Things I have been asked as an Asian Woman." In one of the videos which generated a flurry of angry comments, TikToker @za*** (2021) who identifies herself as ethnically Chinese responded to the questions "Is your (cat emoji) sideways?" which is a question that asks whether she has a sideway pussy. Sideway pussy is the dehumanizing stereotype of Chinese women and other East Asian women as having vertical vaginas due to their work as prostitutes during the 19th century in the California goldmines (Tso, n.d.). @za*** responds with a firm "no," looking frustrated, but unwavered.

The humor and satire of the #StopAsianHate TikTok videos show what Pham (2011, p. 17) calls "radical politics of sentimentality" among Asian/American women, where they challenge feeling structures that have historically positioned Asian/American women as victims and given White people the feeling of satisfaction to act as their saviors. These feelings are shared through the replication and sharing of memes, with satire and humor becoming a leading sensibility in which Asian/American women can channel and make sense of the historical and everyday subjugation of Asian women. As these comedic videos represent, Asian/American women are not left helplessly dealing with feelings of harm.

#StopAsianHate as an Ad Hoc Community for Pan-Asian Solidarity

The #StopAsianHate hashtag brings together the stories of Asian/American women and facilitates a sense of community among Asian/American creators and viewers. As Saraswati (2021) writes in her book on feminist activism on social media, hashtags "function as a mode of curating and imagining one's community," encouraging participants to be present "with" and "for" others (p. 160). Through their participation in the #StopAsianHate discursive space, Asian/American women TikTokers and their supporters stand "with" and "for" Asian/American women by validating their experiences of racism, sexism, and oppression. The validated feelings and narratives under the hashtag offer Asian/American women a chance to engage with similar Others across physical, ethnic, and national boundaries within the virtual TikTok space. For example, in @on***'s #StopAsianHate video, the TikToker teaches her baby to say "I love you" in different Asian languages using language cards. The video states,

> In support of Asians here and all over the world who are being targeted, we're gonna learn how to say "I love you" in some of their native languages. [. . .] In Chinese, we say "Wo ai ni" (我爱你). In Korean we say, "Salangae" (사랑해). In Filipino, "Mahal kita" [. . .] And together we say, let's stop Asian Hate.[1]

To this video, more than 7691 comments were posted wherein people from various Asian backgrounds expressed their support to other Asians against the rise of anti-Asian hate, by checking up on each other and saying "I love you." Through interactive features of sharing, likes, and comments, the TikToker and her followers were building pan-Asian solidarity under the broader concept of "Asian-ness," based on their shared history, culture, and experience of racism, rather than on specific racial features of Asians (Kibria, 1997). In this manner, when Asian/American women occupy the hashtagged space on TikTok and claim it as their own spatial property, the space becomes an Asian community where individuals build their social networks and mobilize collective action against Asian hate, standing together in solidarity with each other.

The social networks of Asian/American women expand through TikTok's infrastructure and communicative affordances. Asian/American TikTokers continue to build and strengthen their relations with their followers in the community by making interactive conversations with them. In our data corpus, many TikTokers do not just broadcast their experiences, but also ask for others, including their followers and audiences, to share their experiences and thoughts about racism. For example, in her video of calling out a White woman's violence against 6-year-old Asian children in a shopping mall, an Asian/American TikToker encourages her followers to share their opinions and speak out their voices against anti-Asian racism:

> Do you guys see this Cuckoo? [. . .] [she] punches a 6-year-old Asian kid in the neck. [. . .] Mall security lets her go. What?! What?! What are your thoughts? Post your comments. (@gir***, 2021)

Through TikTok's communicative affordances, Asian/American TikTokers and their audiences facilitate their "cultural conversation" about anti-Asian racism, which is exclusively understood among members with shared histories and knowledge of their subcultures (Clark, 2015). The conversation exchanges not only remind TikTokers and their followers of their Asian identity but also cultivate what Sundén and Passonen (2019) call "affective homophily—a love of feeling the same" (p. 8). In virality-centered TikTok environment, the sense of homophily quickly spreads as "viral warmth" (Sundén & Paasonen, 2019) among the community members within the TikTok space, aided by TikTok's creative, communicative, and interactive affordances.

For example, the day after the Atlanta shootings, Sam Hyun, a famous TikTok creator, posted a video of him saying the victim's names and saying "Enough is enough. Hate is a virus. Stop Asian Hate" (@samueljhyun, 2021). This video instantly became viral and was re-made into more than 2,700 videos as many TikTokers created duets with the original video and posted TikTok contents using Sam Hyun's narration as an audio meme template. For instance, @wha***, who specializes in makeup and beauty genre, writes "STOP

ASIAN HATE (all letters capitalized)" in black and red ink below her eyes and across her nose to the audio template of Sam Hyun's "Enough is enough" narration. As such, through TikTok's creative features like duets and voice over, people not only spread the counter-narrative messages but also creatively engage with others, in which interconnections between scattered individuals are forged within the community. The movement and community also quickly scale up in TikTok's mimetic culture accordingly (Sadler, 2022).

The #StopAsianHate space for Asian/American women, however, is neither fixed nor permanent, and so is the pan-Asian community in the space. When social media hashtags serve as community spaces, public communication within the hashtag communities form an "ad hoc public"; people voluntarily organize and participate in the collective hashtag activities based on their interest, and temporarily gather for a certain goal (Bruns & Burgess, 2015). Here, we would like to expand on Bruns' and Burgess' conceptualization of social media hashtags as ad hoc publics and further argue that hashtagging activism is a space-making practice that helps people build "ad hoc communities." The community-building of ad hoc publics through social media hashtags occurs on an ad hoc basis, in which a sense of community is virtual and temporary, felt through interactive participation of members whose membership is not clearly defined.

By watching, responding to, and posting comments to the TikTok videos and messages deposited to the #StopAsianHate hashtag, Asian/American TikTok users with different Asian backgrounds feel a sense of alikeness and connectivity, through which their membership is casually reminded and exercised. At the same time, the community is neither permanent nor fixed, as the sense of belongingness is temporal and only active through such interconnective features of TikTok. While counter-narratives of anti-Asian under the #StopAsianHate hashtag instantly reinforces the sense of identity and belonging, affect may not linger for a long time and instead vanish within a few minutes due to the seamless streaming of different videos suggested by the TikTok algorithms. Since people's engagement with others in the hashtag space is not persistent but one-time only in many cases, the community may easily shrink and become inactive if people stop posting any more videos to the hashtag.

Furthermore, when the community is created and functions on an ad hoc basis in response to popular trends in the virtual space, the formation of counterpublics may be weakened. When a certain aesthetic style goes viral, repeatedly recreated, and consumed as a meme template of the counter-narrative message, the creation of similar contents may dilute the affective solidarity conveyed through the original message, but instead feed into the viral trends of "fun" (Sadler, 2022). The popularly trending #StopAsianHate can be used as a placeholder for virality for microcelebrities on TikTok (see Abidin, 2021), which may engender the decontextualization and depoliticization of long-standing Asian American politics. Indeed, we noticed some videos hashtagged under #StopAsianHate were not related to the anti-racism movement, but were random posts tagged to generate views and likes. These contents reveal that not everyone participates in the movement with the same commitment, intention, and emotional intensity.

Conclusion

As we were finalizing our study, we were furious, disheartened, and devastated to hear of the continued violence committed against Asian/American women in the United States. On 15 January 2022, Michelle Go, a 40-year-old Chinese American woman, was shoved onto the subway tracks by a stranger in NYC. Less than a month after, on 13 February 2022, Korean American Christina Yuna Lee was murdered by a stranger who followed her into her house. These crimes, which have specifically targeted women of East Asian descent, have not been labeled as racially motivated hate crimes (Reilly & Studley, 2022). However, crimes committed against Asian women cannot be separated from deeply entrenched racism in the United States, which regards Asian women's bodies as submissive, weak, and easily disposable. How we talk about racism and racially motivated violence matters. In our study, Asian/American TikTok creators spoke with their lived experiences, bodies, and emotions to tell the world that anti-Asian hate crimes are not random occurrences but are reflective of systems designed in place to uphold White supremacy and subjugate the lives of Asian/Americans.

Through their anti-racist space-making practices on TikTok, Asian/American women create an ad hoc community for other Asian/American women, their followers, and users, to make sense of anti-Asian racism. In this community space, Asian/American women bolster each other's raced-and-gendered experiences by drawing upon the communicative features of the platform that enable them to interact, network, and show support. Also significantly, they mobilize affect toward racial solidarity of differences, rather than a singular identity, as Asian/American women are attentive to the histories of how their differences have been constructed to be seen as monolithic. Yet, the ad hoc community, which is subjected to the flow of virality on TikTok, makes it difficult for Asian/American women to develop ongoing and meaningful interactions with others and making tangible outcomes from the hashtag movement.

While Asian/American women's participation in the #StopAsianHate movement does not immediately translate into the subversion of deeply rooted racism in the United States and the broader global society, we argue that they propel us to resist racism and feel our way into their worlds. Our study has examined a segment of an ongoing process of Asian/American women's space-making on TikTok. The anti-racism space led by Asian/American women continues to change course as we write, as Asian/American women challenge their lived experiences of racism by archiving and

connecting their experiences to new racial discourse hashtags and new contents. Their space-making online may seem transient and volatile, especially as their practices are structured by TikTok's logics that prize visibility, virality, attention, and entertainment, which may not always benefit the goals of activists and their ways of communicating about racism. However, here we would like to emphasize that their spatial practice carries immense symbolic power; Asian/American women enter and claim digital spaces by disrupting dominant race narratives and making visible their underrepresented perspectives, narratives, and lived experiences. Change can be slow and gradual, but it cannot be stopped as long as we continue to resist racist ways of seeing and living.

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Note

1. @on*** is Canadian. However, we present her as an exceptional case of our "Asian/American women TikTokers" here because her #StopAsianHate TikTok video and her identity as a (North) American provide a space where many Asian/American TikTok users forge a sense of community, despite their differences.

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Author Biographies

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Jin Lee studies meanings and practices of intimacies in social media pop cultures with a particular focus on the Asia Pacific region. She is a Research Fellow of Internet Studies at Curtin University, Australia.

TikTok as a Key Platform for Youth Political Expression: Reflecting on the Opportunities and Stakes Involved

Ioana Literat[1] (iD) and Neta Kligler-Vilenchik[2] (iD)

Abstract

Reflecting on 6 years of our research—which began on musical.ly and transitioned into TikTok—we argue that TikTok is a vital space to study social movements due to its centrality in youth lives and its ability to give voice to youth political expression in richly creative ways. We see the political expression happening on TikTok as a harbinger of the changing nature of this phenomenon, and a necessary impetus to broaden our understandings of activism and political expression today. At the same time, we must also consider the implications of TikTok becoming such a valuable space for youth politics and activism, in terms of the kinds of expression it affords or constrains, and the power it gives the platform. In closing, we encourage scholars to maintain a balanced and constructive approach in researching the platform, and embrace the messiness and complexity inherent in this endeavor—which mirrors the messiness and complexity of the platform itself.

Having begun our research on youth political expression on musical.ly in 2016 and then followed the platform throughout its transition to TikTok in 2018, we can vividly remember a time when we had to devote an entire methods section to explaining what this strange new platform was all about, or compose impassioned yet diplomatic responses to Reviewer 2, trying to convince them that yes, this platform is really worth researching, and no, "more mainstream platforms" like Facebook or Twitter would not be a better place to study youth online political expression. Today, the significance of TikTok as a platform for politics and activism is much more widely recognized in both academia and public discussion, and we are thrilled to be part of this special issue devoted entirely to TikTok and social movements.

Here, reflecting on a collaborative research agenda that examines the various roles of TikTok in youth political lives—for example, as a space for post-electoral discourse (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019), cross-cutting political talk (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021), and representations of protest and media critique (Literat et al., 2022)—we share some lessons learned and open questions for this burgeoning field. Specifically, we argue that TikTok is a valuable space for youth activism, enabling young people to experiment with their political voice in richly creative ways. And, given this significance, we ask: what are the implications of TikTok becoming such a valuable space for youth politics—in terms

of the kinds of expression it affords or constrains, and the power it gives the platform?

To us, the answer to the question "why study TikTok and social movements" is closely connected to TikTok's prominent youth component: youth have always been at the forefront of social movements (see, for example, McAdam, 1988), and TikTok today is a central space for youth expression (while the platform is increasingly used by older participants as well, over 80% of global TikTok content creators are under the age of 25; see Statista, 2022). TikTok enables young people to engage with the issues they are most concerned about (e.g., race relations, climate change, civil rights) and do so in their unique voice (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019, 2021). Furthermore, a significant appeal of TikTok is the way it fosters a sense of relatability among youth (Kennedy, 2020; Zeng & Abidin, 2021), which is crucial when it comes to activism too. In forming their attitudes about political topics, youth care deeply about what their peers think (Lee et al., 2012)—and a main place where their

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peers are talking about politics today, often quite passionately, is TikTok.

Certainly related to its strong youth focus, we see the political expression happening on TikTok as a harbinger of the changing nature of this phenomenon, and a necessary impetus to broaden our understandings of activism and political expression today. TikTok is a vibrant space for youth activism and political engagement because it invites young people to share their views in ways that are appealing to them, that help them connect to peers, and that are deeply anchored in their interests and their cultural lives (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021; Zeng & Abidin, 2021). "Circumscribing" or guiding creativity (Kaye et al., 2021), it enables users to self-express easily and richly, including around political topics: conveying their experience with racism through an interpretative dance, using the latest audio meme to discredit a biased media report, and creating a duet to express solidarity around trans rights. In other words, the same things that make TikTok so fun for young people to goof out on also make it a vibrant space for politics and activism. What is more, by enabling youth to deliberately connect to an assumed like-minded audience through the use of shared symbolic resources, TikTok encourages a form of political expression that is quintessentially *collective* (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019)—a vital element for the success of social movements.

By giving voice to youth political expression in such vivid, often unusual, ways, TikTok is a departure from dominant ideals of political expression. As Michael Schudson's (1998) historical work shows, today's dominant expectations of the "good citizen" pose the "private, rational 'informed citizen'" as "the most cherished ideal" (p. 6). In this view, political expression should be serious. It should be focused on facts and rationality. And it should be detached and objective. In contrast, much of the political expression we find on TikTok is humoristic or cynical, colorful, often over-the-top, and infused with popular culture references. It is deeply emotional, ranging from roaring laughter to rolling tears. And it is often profoundly personal, framing political issues through young people's personal experience and worldviews. In other words, it is anything *but* serious, detached, and rational. However, that does not make it any less meaningful. A key argument underlying our work—and that is also at the core of our forthcoming book—is the idea that studying political expression on TikTok seriously should mean putting aside our normative expectations for what political expression *should* look like and focusing instead on the messages being conveyed.

In doing so, we must also aim to understand how TikTok uniquely shapes political expression. Much current scholarship on social media and politics treats "social media" as if it were a unitary phenomenon when, in fact, differences between social media platforms crucially shape their political dynamics (Bode & Vraga, 2018). We should strive for a better understanding of how different platforms enable, as well as constrain, certain forms of political expression—and that involves paying close attention to the interaction between a platform's affordances, norms, and contents (see also Kligler-Vilenchik et al., 2020; Renninger, 2015; Stromer-Galley et al., 2015). Understanding this interaction is particularly important in the case of TikTok, as an under-researched but increasingly significant platform for political expression. Of course, a methodological issue that somewhat complicates this endeavor is the fact that there isn't one TikTok, but rather many different subcultures (e.g., political TikTok, BeautyTok, BookTok, DeepTok). This means that research on TikTok—at least of the qualitative kind—is necessarily context-dependent, as the user's experience of TikTok varies across these different corners, and is also shaped significantly by the platform's infamously opaque recommendation algorithm (Schellewald, 2021) and visibility moderation practices (Zeng & Kaye, 2022).

Looking ahead, we urge scholars studying TikTok to maintain a balanced and constructive approach in researching the platform, and embrace the messiness and complexity inherent in this endeavor—which mirrors the messiness and complexity of the platform itself. Thinking back to 2016, one thing that facilitated our TikTok/musical.ly research was that we got there early, when the platform was smaller and political talk on it was somewhat more niche. The reputation that TikTok has now acquired is both good news and bad for those researching it: it facilitates research because there is considerably more interest in the platform, but its strong public image can also hamper research or make its findings harder to convey.

Embracing balance and complexity also means grappling with both sides of the coin. Yes, political expression on TikTok can be productive in all the ways we argue here, but it also brings up vital concerns, from misinformation (Kelly, 2021; Literat et al., 2021) to polarization (Kubin & von Sikorski, 2021; Vijay & Gekker, 2021). Importantly, considering both the potential benefits and risks of political expression on TikTok requires thought about how to regulate it as a space open for democratic debate. At a moment of much concern around the role of social media in politics, TikTok has largely stayed under the radar in this regard (Douek, 2021). Scholars studying the platform have an important opportunity to help inform policies that are well grounded in research and are deeply attuned to the specifics of TikTok as a cultural space.

Finally, another way in which we must maintain a balanced and constructive approach to TikTok—particularly important when studying youth and social movements—is to avoid glorifying what we find. Yes, TikTok is a vital space for youth activism, but there is also a danger in idealizing activism as seen on TikTok (the temptation to conclude that "youth will save us" and "the kids are alright"). What we found in our research over the past 6 years is that the kids are not (always) alright. They are often hurting, traumatized by recent events, and increasingly divided. Alongside activism and fearlessness, we also see heartbreak, fear, and behaviors that concern us (. . . sometimes the researcher hat slips off just a little, making way for our mom hat or our educator hat). Studying youth political expression on TikTok, we see

resilience alongside vulnerability, in line with the ethos of Gen Z itself. Be it through research, public advocacy, or policy work, it is our responsibility to help harness that power and support young people as citizens, including on TikTok.

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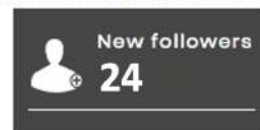
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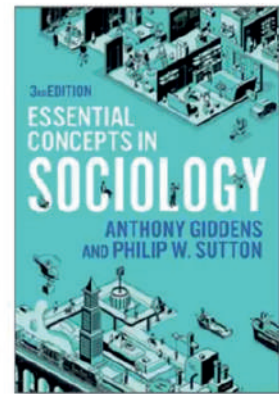
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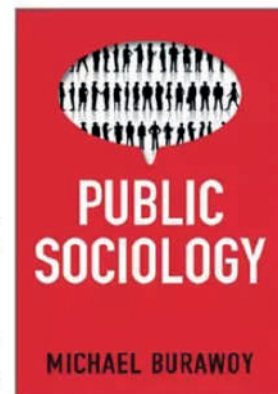
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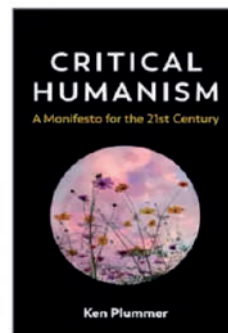
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"The way in which Ali Meghji threads together the different decolonial arguments and elaborates on his own decolonial sociology program makes this more than just an introductory book. It is also a contribution to further the decolonial conversation. [...] It ought to be read by all sociologists." José Itzigsohn, *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*

This book explores why, and how, sociology needs to be decolonized. It analyses how sociology was integral in reproducing the colonial order, as dominant sociologists constructed theories either assuming or proving the supposed barbarity and backwardness of colonized people. Ali Meghji reveals how colonialism continues to shape the discipline today, dominating both social theory and the practice of sociology, how exporting the Eurocentric sociological canon erased social theories from the Global South, and how sociologists continue to ignore the relevance of coloniality in their work.
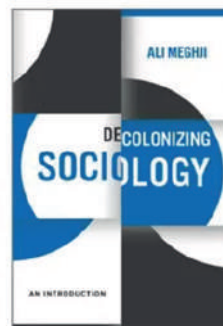
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Carlo Bordoni argues that we are on the threshold of 'post-society,' a condition in which social distancing becomes the norm, real social relations diminish in favour of those mediated by technology, existential loneliness becomes widespread and we find ourselves voluntarily submitting to new forms of surveillance and control in the hope of increasing our security.

The Logic of Compressed Modernity

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Chang Kyung-Sup provides a systematic account of 'compressed modernity,' using it to analyse the extreme social changes, complexities, and imbalances found in South Korea and other East Asian societies, propelled into modernity, not over centuries as in the classical cases of Western societies, but over decades. Theirs is a compressed modernity which displays very different traits, as analysed in this highly original account.
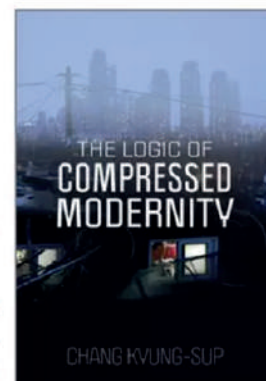
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After Lockdown
A Metamorphosis

BRUNO LATOUR

Late of Sciences Po

Translated by Julie Rose

After the harrowing experience of the pandemic and lockdown, states and individuals have been searching for ways to exit the crisis. But learning to live in lockdown might be an opportunity to seize: a dress-rehearsal for climate mutation, an opportunity to understand at last where we – inhabitants of the earth – live, what kind of place 'earth' is and what kind of freedom is possible – a freedom differently situated and differently understood.
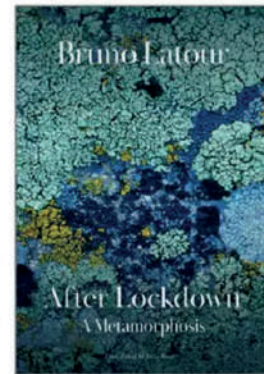
Algorithmic Intimacy

The Digital Revolution in Personal Relationships

ANTHONY ELLIOTT

University of South Australia

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"Anthony Elliott offers intriguing insights into how the algorithms embedded in digital technologies contribute to people's closest relationships. Elliott's lucid writing and expansive focus help the reader make sense of a rapidly evolving landscape of digitized love, sex and friendship." Deborah Lupton, UNSW Sydney
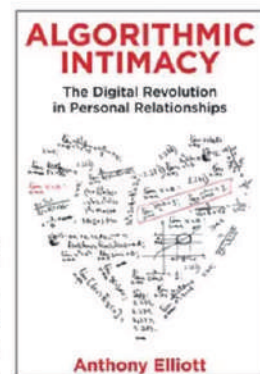
Recent Publications, Book Recommendations, Call for Papers, and News from Members of RC48

Machine Habitus
Toward a Sociology of Algorithms

MASSIMO AIROLDI

EM Lyon

"One of the first books that uses sociological theory to make sense of machine-learning algorithms. Hence, for anyone interested in understanding algorithms and their growing role in our societies, this book is essential reading." Simon Egbert, Universität Bielefeld

We commonly think of society as made of and by humans, but with the proliferation of machine learning and AI technologies, this is clearly no longer the case. Billions of automated systems tacitly contribute to the social construction of reality by drawing algorithmic distinctions between the visible and the invisible, the relevant and the irrelevant, the likely and the unlikely – on and beyond platforms.

Drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, this book develops an original sociology of algorithms as social agents, actively participating in social life. Through a wide range of examples, Massimo Airoldi shows how society shapes algorithmic code, and how this culture in the code guides the practical behaviour of the code in the culture, shaping society in turn.

The Culture of Democracy
A Sociological Approach to Civil Society

Bin Xu

Against the bleak backdrop of pressing issues in today's world, civil societies remain vibrant, animated by people's belief that they should and can solve such issues and build a better society. Their imagination of a good society, their understanding of their engagement, and the ways they choose to act constitute the cultural aspect of civil society.

Central to this cultural aspect of civil society is the "culture of democracy," including normative values, individual interpretations, and interaction norms pertaining to features of a democratic society, such as civility, independence, and solidarity. The culture of democracy varies in different contexts and faces challenges, but it shapes civic actions, alters political and social processes, and thus is the soul of modern civil societies.

The Culture of Democracy provides the first systematic survey of the cultural sociology of civil society and offers a committed global perspective. It shows that, as everyone is eager to have their voice heard, cultural sociology can serve as an "art of listening," a thoroughly empirical approach that takes ideas, meanings, and opinions seriously, for people to contemplate significant theoretical and public issues.

"A refreshingly beyond-Western viewpoint on civil society in its cultural contexts. [… A] key insight of the book is interwoven throughout and crystallizes in the conclusion. This is the point that cultural sociology is the 'art of listening'."
Voluntas, journal of the International Society for Third-Sector Research

"Bin Xu has written a fine work, subtle, clearly written, and analytically precise, and with great outreach to the wide scope of contemporary discussion. Xu demonstrates why cultural sociology is necessary if we are to understand not only democracy but its enemies."
Jeffrey C. Alexander, Yale University

"Bin Xu has written the book I've been waiting for. Ranging across sociologies and their kin, using empirical cases of civil societies both within democracies and struggling against authoritarianisms, and invoking a theoretical sophistication that is respectful of variety but focused on driving culture's significance home, he elaborates both the scholarly sense and public consequence of civil society's mobilization. I know what my students will be reading next."
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Grassroots is seeking submissions for Research Summaries, a future new section in our newsletter to address and showcase topics and research developments of relevance to all RC48 members. The main purpose of this new section is to present the work of students and early career researchers regarding social movements topics, and provide information about the latest research activities in our field.

Website analytics show that Research Summaries are widely viewed on the Internet. While potential authors can submit contributions for summaries at any time of the year to the editorial team of Grassroots, we would appreciate it if you can send us your piece in line with the two main editorial review cycles for the year: 15 June and 15 November.

Contributions should:

1. Be approximately between 1,000 to 1,500 words (not including references);

2. Be double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point Times New Roman font;

3. Provide operational definitions of essential concepts and terminology;

4. State the question of the research and explain why it is important, describing also the methods in a few paragraphs, and explaining the results focusing on why they are significant for our field;

5. If appropriate, include a list of recommended resources that are practitioner/activist oriented.

Please send your contributions to our editors **Kaan Agartan** (kagartan@framingham.edu) or **Camilo Tamayo Gomez** (c.a.tamayogomez@hud.ac.uk)

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ISA RC48 Social Movements, Collective Action and Social Change

Desing by: Juan Pablo Valderrama Ortiz Colombia