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### What's in a hashtag? Vulnerability as a transformative disposition within social media

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## What's in a hashtag? Vulnerability as a transformative disposition within social media

### Abstract

This article focuses on the disposition of vulnerability as expressed within social media using hashtags. It argues that individuals use and facilitate emotion within social media narratives to frame and contextualise normative expectations of the legal system; and that these stories collectively create one narrative of transformative vulnerability. In particular, the author argues that in times of crisis, vulnerability is constituted and maintained through the prism of fear perpetuated in social media narratives. Yet, at the same time, these narratives also contain within them the blueprints for hope - through narratives of solidarity and unity - resistance to fear is transformed into hope. Although fear and vulnerability are powerful dispositions that can be manipulated, hope is equally commanding and offers significant transformative potential, and this is no more evident than in the moment of a crisis. Using a case study of Twitter responses to a 2017 London terror event, this article will interrogate expectations of law and justice that are mediated through the complex interaction of fear and hope.

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## Articles

### What's in a hashtag? Vulnerability as a transformative disposition within social media

Cassandra Sharp\*

*This article focuses on the disposition of vulnerability as expressed within social media using hashtags. It argues that individuals use and facilitate emotion within social media narratives to frame and contextualise normative expectations of the legal system; and that these stories collectively create one narrative of transformative vulnerability. In particular, the author argues that in times of crisis, vulnerability is constituted and maintained through the prism of fear perpetuated in social media narratives. Yet, at the same time, these narratives also contain within them the blueprints for hope — through narratives of solidarity and unity — resistance to fear is transformed into hope. Although fear and vulnerability are powerful dispositions that can be manipulated, hope is equally commanding and offers significant transformative potential, and this is no more evident than in the moment of a crisis. Using a case study of Twitter responses to a 2017 London terror event, this article will interrogate expectations of law and justice that are mediated through the complex interaction of fear and hope.*

#### Introduction

It's like the water never settles. I don't want to live in fear of what happens and what could happen. #PrayForLondon<sup>1</sup>

Social media platforms are immensely popular and because they are part of everyday interactions,<sup>2</sup> they have become spaces where proliferating voices contribute to public debate about law and justice. Social media is yet another location where representations of law are 'determined, images softened or distorted, and power granted or denied',<sup>3</sup> and where public comment about law has the potential to threaten law's legitimacy and efficacy.<sup>4</sup> Emerging

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1 Posted on Twitter. In order to maintain some level of anonymity (see further explanation in Part 1B of this article), extracted posts will be hereafter referenced by a code corresponding to the data set on file with the author. That is, each tweet is allocated a number and is paired with an 'L' for London. The one quoted above is thus coded: Tweet L493.

2 Widespread use of social media has opened up possibilities for new modes of civic engagement as members of society 'interact with news, politics, crime, and other important social issues in meaningful ways': Michelle Rose and Richard Fox, 'Public Engagement with the Criminal Justice System in the Age of Social Media' (2014) 4 *Oñati Socio-Legal Series* 771, 778 <<http://opo.iisj.net/index.php/osls/article/view/325>>.

3 Brett Hutchins and Libby Lester, 'Environmental protest and tap-dancing with the media in the information age' (2006) 28 *Media, Culture and Society* 433, 438.

4 'Public comment about law has the potential to "temporarily destabilise or optimally disrupt the smooth functioning of capital and government"': Brett Hutchins and Libby Lester,

research now demonstrates the diverse ways in which law can be (de)legitimised through the narratives of social media as individuals openly share personal responses to particularly provocative events.<sup>5</sup> In our contemporary globalised world, social media activity surrounding times of traumatic crisis events, such as terrorist attacks (perceived or real), reflects substantial public apprehension and critique about the impact of terrorism on everyday lives and the legitimacy of law during such crises. During these times, fear-inducing questions about individual and national security proliferate social media discussions, and often interwoven through such comments is an emotional critique of legality and justice that belie communal insecurity and apprehension.<sup>6</sup>

Drawing conceptually upon a cultural legal studies framework that recognises law at the heart of everyday life, this article uses social media analysis to draw attention to the affective and cognitive impact of terrorism on subtle perceptions of legality in the everyday public consciousness. It is part of a multifaceted project that problematises a dichotomous legal imaginary in relation to harm/safety, order/disorder, and fear/hope, and the complicated ways in which terror events are responded to in the iterative narratives of social media. One aspect of this project is a trilogy of Twitter case studies. The first was an analysis of the tweets surrounding the Sydney Siege, an Australian hostage crisis that took place in a Lindt Café in 2014. As a hostage crisis event, the author argued that it provoked a storied critique of legality and justice through the emotional experience and expression of fear.<sup>7</sup> The second case study demonstrated the use of emotion on Twitter to legitimise a just worldview based on tweets following two European terror events (Paris 2015 and Brussels 2016). This analysis showed that individuals implicitly respond to terror events by reinforcing a 'just worldview', while simultaneously using the emotional responses as a stimulus for and vehicle of the maintenance of retributive desire. In addition, the analysis demonstrated that by articulating their emotional response to the events as they happened, a collective westernised narrative of vulnerability was produced.<sup>8</sup>

This article represents the third case study and applies the same methodology to a subsequent terror event: a London terrorist attack on 22 March 2017 (which took place exactly 1 year following the terrorist attacks at Brussels Airport). The London attack took place in the vicinity of the Palace of Westminster in London. The attacker, 52-year-old Khalid Masood, drove a car into pedestrians on the pavement along the south side of Westminster

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'Politics, Power and Online Protest in an Age of Environmental Conflict' in Simon Cottle and Libby Lester (eds), *Transnational Protests and the Media* (Peter Lang, 2011) 159, 161.

5 Frances Shaw et al, 'Sharing news, making sense, saying thanks: Patterns of talk on Twitter during the Queensland floods' (2013) 40 *Australian Journal of Communication* 23; Cassandra Sharp, '#fear&loathing in Sydney: Law, Justice and the Experience of Fear in a Hashtag World' (2018) 30 *Law and Literature* 29.

6 Sharp, '#fear&loathing in Sydney', above n 5.

7 Ibid 30. In particular, the analysis demonstrated that as individuals responded emotively to the Sydney Siege, the emerging narrative corroborated a 'just' worldview whereby (i) the protection of innocence was favoured as one key goal of justice; and (ii) the legitimacy of the law and its ability to cope with threatening crisis events were questioned.

8 Cassandra Sharp, '#Vulnerability — Expectations of Justice through Accounts of Terror on Twitter' (2018) 2 *Journal of Oxford Centre for Socio-Legal Studies* 1.

Bridge, injuring more than 50 people, four of whom were fatally wounded. After the car crashed into the perimeter fence of the Palace grounds, Masood then fled the scene and ran into New Palace Yard where he fatally stabbed an unarmed police officer. Masood was then shot by police and died at the scene. In response to this event, individuals used the #Westminster hashtag and the #prayforlondon hashtag (among others) as mechanisms for emotively responding to the events, narrativising a shared connection over a tragic event. The focal point of this article is the deployment of emotion within Twitter narratives to frame and contextualise a transformative disposition of vulnerability. In particular, it is argued that Twitter narratives surrounding a 2017 London terrorist event are illustrative of a movement away from fear and into a resistant form of hope.

By specifically analysing the Twitter narratives related to this event, the article will explore the affective impact of social media interaction on everyday meaning-making about law and security, and further demonstrate that the emotional responses to these events contribute to the transformation and contagion of resistance. Along these lines, the first section of the article will discuss the context of this research within a cultural legal studies framework and explain the methodological justification for using Twitter as a textual medium within this framework; and the second section will use the key narrative of vulnerability to demonstrate a Twitter narrative that transforms expressions of fear into hope.

## I Cultural legal studies and Twitter

Conceptually, this project sits within the field of cultural legal studies, which is concerned with 'the popular cultural formations through which law is encountered, shaped and conceived' and is a field which deploys diverse methods in order to 'transform or animate questions of law and justice'.<sup>9</sup> Cultural legal studies scholars advocate the interpretive fluidity of making meaning within public legal imagination, and contends that individuals are active producers of legal meaning from within a specific cultural context. As a complex site of encounter between contemporary culture and law, social media provides access to informally constituted legal practices and ideas. Rather than being concerned with the effects of various media on individuals, this research recognises that legal meaning is constituted in, transformed by and propagated through informal loci of law, and focuses on the use individuals make of social media. For this reason, the article goes beyond the mere examination of social media texts, and acknowledges that individuals are producers of meaning who use social media to not only construct that meaning, but also to participate in the (re)construction of legal knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Recent scholarship surrounding Twitter usage has pointed to the importance of studying 'more everyday user practices, in order to document more fully the lived experience of using the platform' and that the communication of

9 Cassandra Sharp and Marett Leiboff (eds), *Cultural Legal Studies: Law's Popular Cultures and the Metamorphosis of Law* (Routledge, 2015).

10 Cassandra Sharp, 'Finding Stories of Justice in the Art of Conversation: Ethnography in Cultural Legal Studies' in Cassandra Sharp and Marett Leiboff (eds), *Cultural Legal Studies: Law's Popular Cultures and the Metamorphosis of Law* (Routledge, 2015) 50.

Twitter (while often misunderstood and/or dismissed) is ‘indeed deeply meaningful (if highly phatic and ephemeral)’.<sup>11</sup> As such, this article stands in contrast to the established quantitative sentiment analysis tradition that measures emotional responses in social media on a statistical scale. It does so by favouring in-depth qualitative methodologies that interrogate the expression and use of emotions through comments in the digital sphere. The research presented in this article sits alongside an emerging subset of social science research that ‘explores communal sense-making processes and the social space of crisis communication’.<sup>12</sup> Scholars such as Burgess, Bruns and Hjorth have undertaken some instructive research concerning emerging methods within the digital media sphere and particularly the impact of public ‘collective response’ to events on Twitter.<sup>13</sup> Following their lead, but with specific application to law, this project seeks to analyse the complex and interconnected emotions of hope and vulnerability as dispositions created by expectations surrounding the law’s protection.

### A Twitter as persuasive storyteller

Twitter is a micro-blogging platform that at the time of writing, boasts approximately 326 million users.<sup>14</sup> As a completely public medium, it allows users to post messages constrained to 280 characters across multiple devices, and allows them to follow any globally public account without the requirement for that account’s user to follow them back. In this sense Twitter can be viewed as a highly public and social environment, that functions not ‘as a towns commons where people who know each other and belong to the same community discuss life (news, politics, children), but rather as a massive and largely anonymous schoolyard, where social capital is expressed in numbers of followers, likes and retweets’.<sup>15</sup> This dynamic perspective sees users ‘twittering’ like birds to engage with other voices in responding to key events and issues. In turn this development of ‘online sociality’<sup>16</sup> stimulates a participatory medium of expressing personal evaluation to a large number of individuals.<sup>17</sup>

Such engagement is facilitated further by the utilisation of the hashtag symbol (#).<sup>18</sup> When combined with a keyword, this typographical convention facilitates the categorisation of tweets so that a user can identify

11 Axel Bruns and Katrin Weller, ‘Twitter as a first draft of the present — and the challenges of preserving it for the future’ in Wolfgang Nejdl et al (eds), *Proceedings of the 8th ACM Conference on Web Science* (Association for Computing Machinery, 2016) 183, 184.

12 Shaw et al, above n 5, 25.

13 See, eg, Axel Bruns and Yuxian Eugene Liang, ‘Tools and methods for capturing Twitter data during natural disasters’ (2012) 17(4) *First Monday* 1; Katrin Weller et al (eds), *Twitter and Society* (Peter Lang, 2014) 89; and Michele Zappavigna, ‘Ambient affiliation: A linguistic perspective on Twitter’ (2013) 13 *New Media and Society* 788, 800.

14 Statistics sourced from: *Twitter by the Numbers: Stats, Demographics & Fun Facts* (26 October 2018) Omnicore <[www.omnicoreagency.com/twitter-statistics/](http://www.omnicoreagency.com/twitter-statistics/)>.

15 Sara Polak, ‘Posting the presidency: Cartoon politics in a social media landscape’ (2018) 22 *Media and Arts Law Review* 403, 408.

16 José van Dijck, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Social Media* (Oxford University Press, 2013) 4.

17 Polak, above n 15, 404.

18 ‘By including a hashtag in a tweet, a Twitter user is making an active decision, and this choice connects their post to other comments around a common topic, event, or theme’: Tim

and view all the other Tweets marked with that keyword. This means that it is possible to view the development over time of various narratives that are collectively formed by the contributions of users as they create and then deploy hashtags in their responses to key events. While the 280 characters might not seem like enough characters to generate a narrative, this is what Twitter itself encourages: 'We started with a simple, but powerful idea: Let people tell their story about what's happening in the world right now.'<sup>19</sup>

Hashtagging has thus become an 'emergent activity' that 'creates the possibility of ambient affiliation ... where [individuals] affiliate with a co-present, impermanent community by bonding around evolving topics of interest'.<sup>20</sup> Hashtags therefore allow 'certain types of communities to emerge and form, including ad hoc publics, forming and responding very quickly in relation to a particular event or topical issue'.<sup>21</sup> The author has argued elsewhere that this utilisation of hashtags within tweets reflects our communal drive to narrativise the experiences of our world, and to contribute to communal response in real time as key events unfold.<sup>22</sup> Narratives 'mediate the inner subjective world and the outer, objective world, the private and public aspects of our lives',<sup>23</sup> and as such they are a useful tool for evaluating and critiquing law as deeply constituted in culture. In this article, the author takes this further by suggesting that not only is legal meaning constructed and transformed by social media narratives, but that the very act of tweeting about a crisis event can lead to emotionally transformative ideas about law. Tweets blend 'emotion with opinion, and drama with fact, reflecting deeply subjective accounts and interpretations of events'<sup>24</sup> as they unfold. As individuals comment on a particularly provocative event, they 'produce and circulate affect as a binding technique',<sup>25</sup> which inscribes themselves into the story, and over time contributes to a collective narrativised emotional response.

## B Coding vulnerability — Methodology

This article describes one portion of a qualitative account of the role of public emotion within the Twitter responses to the London Westminster terrorist attack on 22 March 2017. The methodological process for this account included: data collection using keyword searches; an in-depth exploration of

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Highfield and Tama Leaver, 'A methodology for mapping Instagram hashtags' (2015) 20 *First Monday* 1 <<https://firstmonday.org/article/view/5563/4195>>.

19 Twitter, *About Twitter* <[https://about.twitter.com/en\\_gb.html](https://about.twitter.com/en_gb.html)>.

20 Zappavigna, above n 13, 800. She argues that '[i]nterpersonally-charged tweets invite with their hashtags an ambient audience to align with their bonds': at 801.

21 Highfield and Leaver, above n 18, 9: 'These publics or communities may not persist for long periods, but can be extremely efficient and significant even if only existing for a short time.'

22 Sharp, '#fear&loathing in Sydney', above n 5, 33.

23 Julian Webb, 'Ethics for Lawyers or Ethics for Citizens? New Directions for Legal Education' (1998) 25 *Journal of Law and Society* 134, 143.

24 Zizi Papacharissi and Maria de Fatima Oliveira, 'Affective News and Networked Publics: The Rhythms of News Storytelling on #Egypt' (2012) 62 *Journal of Communication* 266, 277.

25 Emotion is carried, amplified and harnessed to connect communities or publics, and '[e]very little tweet or comment, ... accrues a tiny affective nugget': Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Polity Press, 2010) 95. This is what helps to make legal meaning visible and then contestable.

content involving a mix of Aristotelian rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis. These will be discussed briefly in turn.

### Data collection

Following the London attack, the hashtags #wearenotafraid, #londonattacks, and #westminster were used by individuals to actively deal with and share their emotional responses to this crisis event. The hashtag #prayforlondon also trended in the wake of both the Paris and Belgium examples from the previous years. To access the data contained within these hashtags, the research team<sup>26</sup> utilised Twitter's publicly available search user interface ('UI') which enables the tailoring of advanced search functions to specific date ranges and hashtags. By tracking and capturing topical hashtagged tweets, it is possible to identify and collate a 'data set of the most visible tweets relating to the event in question, since it is the purpose of topical hashtags to aid the visibility and discoverability of Twitter messages'.<sup>27</sup> Constraining the time stamp to within the first 48 hours of this event, the data set was established by applying search criteria that focused on keywords such as: law or justice or fear. By further eliminating tweets that merely contained links, or other superfluous aspects, the data set for in-depth analysis was reduced to 607 tweets. It is important to acknowledge that 'no retrieval methods guarantee a comprehensive capture of Twitter data'<sup>28</sup> yet, as Highfield et al argue 'such research, nonetheless, remains valid and important ... especially where research focuses on identifying broad patterns in Twitter activity from a large data set'.<sup>29</sup>

It is also important to note that in the hyper-developing world of technology and social media research, there is often debate surrounding the ethics of privacy, consent and risk of harm for Twitter users.<sup>30</sup> As such, researchers have started to develop ethical frameworks for engaging in social media analysis,<sup>31</sup> and this project has adopted two particular positions proffered by Townsend and Wallace: (i) that informed consent from Twitter users is not necessary where specific hashtags have been utilised in order for their tweets

26 The research team was comprised of myself and a research assistant who was funded by a small seed grant from the Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts at the University of Wollongong. Absent significant funding for substantial data scraping, this was a modest research project in the style of a pilot study.

27 Tim Highfield, Stephen Harrington and Axel Bruns, 'Twitter as a Technology for Audiencing and Fandom: The #Eurovision phenomenon' (2013) 16 *Information, Communication and Society* 315, 321.

28 Ibid 322.

29 Ibid.

30 For an overview of this debate and associated concerns, see Matthew L Williams, Pete Burnap and Luke Sloan 'Towards an Ethical Framework for Publishing Twitter Data in Social Research: Taking into Account Users' Views, Online Context and Algorithmic Estimation' (2017) 51 *Sociology* 1149.

31 The most recent research indicates that 'while it is not possible to take a fixed position in relation to research on Twitter as different projects will have different aims and study different phenomena' an ethical perspective can nevertheless be adopted: Wasim Ahmed, Peter A Bath and Gianluca Demartini, 'Using Twitter as a Data Source: An Overview of Ethical, Legal, and Methodological Challenges' in Kandy Woodfield (ed), *The Ethics of Online Research* (Emerald Publishing, 2017–18) vol 2, 79, 96.



to be publicly visible to a broader audience;<sup>32</sup> and yet (ii) it is nevertheless important to refrain from publishing individual usernames with the quoted tweets.<sup>33</sup>

### Aristotelian and critical discourse analysis

To explore the transformative potential of articulated emotional reflections, this data set was then independently coded by the research team according to categories established from a mixture of critical content analysis and Aristotelian rhetorical analysis.<sup>34</sup> Aristotle taught that emotion is central to rhetoric and that a true understanding of the world is unattainable without reference to emotions, and so it was useful to track the deployment of Aristotle's pathos as an expression of the experience of fear and vulnerability.<sup>35</sup>

Recognising that there is a complex relationship between emotion and legal judgment, pathos was used as an interpretive category to acknowledge the distinct persuasive appeal often used to communicate everyday meaning. Pathos petitions the audience's sense of communal identity through the deployment of emotion in language, and so coding categories were applied that exposed the variances in the use of pathos contained in the 584 tweets. This involved: coding against statements that expressed an appraisal of threat, danger or vulnerability; coding those statements that belied uncertainty around coping; and coding those expressions that attributed blame through anger.<sup>36</sup>

Critical discourse analysis is a tool that demonstrates the role of language within the constitution and governance of cultures.<sup>37</sup> This additional methodological step involves identifying how social media actively contributes to the formation of critical legal discourses and how these shift around particular moments in time. In this research the process involved identifying a number of aspects of language that could be recognised in the data (eg, rhetorical devices/linguistic elements) to isolate socially shared understandings and explore the ways different groups of individuals actively interpret, challenge, construct and embody legal meaning.

32 Leanne Townsend and Claire Wallace, *Social Media Research: A Guide to Ethics* (2016) University of Aberdeen <[www.dotrural.ac.uk/socialmediaresearchethics.pdf](http://www.dotrural.ac.uk/socialmediaresearchethics.pdf)>.

33 This was further guided by the scaffolded ethical framework of Townsend and Wallace, *ibid* 8.

34 The Aristotelian method has been used by several scholars to understand the nature and impact of online network discourse during election campaigns: See Tal Samuel-Azran, Moran Yarchi and Gadi Wolfsfeld, 'Aristotelian rhetoric and Facebook success in Israel's 2013 election campaign' (2015) 39 *Online Information Review* 149; J Bronstein, 'Like me! Analyzing the 2012 presidential candidates' Facebook pages' (2013) 37 *Online Information Review* 173; and Kristin English, Kaye D Sweetser and Monica Ancu, 'Youtube-ification of Political Talk: An Examination of Persuasion Appeals in Viral Video' (2011) 55 *American Behavioral Scientist* 733.

35 The Aristotelian discourse analysis method thus acknowledges that speakers can use three distinct and powerful appeals of persuasion: logos, ethos and pathos. Logos utilises logic-based appeals. Ethos, emphasises the speaker's credibility and trustworthiness, and pathos appeals to the audience's emotions. Samuel-Azran, Yarchi and Wolfsfeld, *ibid* n 34, 10.

36 Some tweets contained more than one appraisal element, but the tweet was coded by primary element.

37 Chris Barker and Dariusz Galasinski, *Cultural Studies and Discourse Analysis: A Dialogue on Language and Identity* (SAGE, 2001) 29.

The combination of these methodological tools was designed to facilitate immersion in the social setting of trending Twitter hashtags occurring during an occasion of heightened threat; and to interrogate subtle concepts of law as expressed within comments made in response to these occasions. The analysis in Section II demonstrates that by expressing their emotional response to this event as it happened, members of the public collectively produced a narrative of vulnerability and skepticism about law that then produced resistance, which in turn gave way to hope.

## II Tweeting vulnerability — The analysis

### A Fear of the inevitable possibility

I pray for all those people out there living in fear, since nowadays we can barely live another way [crying emoji face] ...<sup>38</sup>

Contemporary society does seem to perpetually exist in a state of anticipation and dread about terrorism and related activities. As Aly and Green have argued, communities are easily preconditioned to a Hobbesian proliferation of fear in times of crisis, where an ‘objective fact of a distant danger [can be] transformed in the minds of the public into a ... sense of dread of an unknown and yet-to-be-experienced collective harm’.<sup>39</sup> This is illustrated by the quoted tweet above where the seemingly regular occurrence of terrorism transforms possibility into an inevitability.

Such resignation about the status of living in contemporary culture where terrorism is perceived as an inevitable possibility easily contributes to a narrative of fear, doubt and uncertainty within vulnerable publics in the moment of crisis, and it impliedly operationalises an underlying expectation for the law to function in a way that protects citizens from harm. Indeed, following the pattern of what Killias<sup>40</sup> has identified as the three dimensions of vulnerability — that there is serious exposure to risk, that we have a loss of control and the consequences are serious — the following examples demonstrate the personal and plural nature of requiring and expecting collective safety and protection in this world:

The world is such a scary place to live in we shouldn’t have to live in fear its not right something needs to change.<sup>41</sup>  
(serious exposure to risk)

This world is completely out of control, no humanity in anyone anymore everyone is so selfish<sup>42</sup>  
(loss of control)

World is falling apart! Something has to be done.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Tweet L350.

<sup>39</sup> Anne Aly and Lelia Green, ‘Fear, Anxiety and the State of Terror’ (2010) 33 *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 268, 269.

<sup>40</sup> Martin Killias, ‘Vulnerability: Towards a Better Understanding of a Key Variable in the Genesis of Fear of Crime’ (1990) 5(2) *Violence and Victims* 97.

<sup>41</sup> Tweet L10.

<sup>42</sup> Tweet L586.

<sup>43</sup> Tweet L62.

The world is a terrible place. No day without fear.<sup>44</sup>  
(consequences are serious)

This is also illustrative of what Kamenka contends about the ideology of justice expectations, which he argues ‘rests on the tension or contradiction between what is and what at least some men think ought to be’.<sup>45</sup> In this sense, tweets such as those extracted above, serve as a presupposition of criticism regarding the impact of injustice (this case through terrorism) on the existing reality, ‘allegedly in light of ... an ideal end state’.<sup>46</sup>

Yet, the expression of this perceived vulnerability is not unexpected because ‘when shocked, scared, horrified, or appalled by an event we search for evidence that others have similar reactions so that our response is validated’.<sup>47</sup> The movement to fear in circumstances of crisis is a natural outworking of our human vulnerability. Fineman explains vulnerability as a fundamental outworking of our embodiment ‘which carries with it the imminent or ever-present possibility of harm, misfortune or injury’.<sup>48</sup> This vulnerability cannot be eliminated or transcended, merely mitigated in various ways throughout life, and while on the one hand it is conceptualised as universal, vulnerability must also be understood as ‘particular, varied and unique on an individual level’.<sup>49</sup>

Observing the occurrence of multiple terror attacks across Europe in recent years therefore positions individuals and communities to be particularly apprehensive about the form and content of potential localised attacks in the present and future. This is illustrated by the following tweets:

It felt unreal when it happened in other countries, *now* it’s happened in mine, I understand the worry, heartbreak and fear [broken heart emoji]<sup>50</sup>

It sickens me that no matter where you are in this world *now*, it is necessary to fear for your safety. Push peace people<sup>51</sup>

Same claustrophobic feeling, same fear and same realization — There is no safe place in this world *anymore*<sup>52</sup>

You don’t truly understand the fear until it really hits home<sup>53</sup>

It is argued that when we fear terrorism we imagine our worlds as fragile and ourselves as vulnerable to harm, and so, in those moments our ‘fantasy of

44 Tweet L257.

45 Eugene Kamenka, ‘What is Justice?’ in Brian Barry et al (eds), *Justice: Ideas and Ideologies* (Edward Arnold London, 1979) 1.

46 Ibid.

47 Amelia Tait, ‘Tweeting terror: what social media reveals about how we respond to tragedy’, *New Statesman* (online), 27 March 2017 <[www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/internet/2017/03/tweeting-terror-what-social-media-reveals-about-how-we-respond-tragedy](http://www.newstatesman.com/science-tech/internet/2017/03/tweeting-terror-what-social-media-reveals-about-how-we-respond-tragedy)>.

48 Martha Albertson Fineman, ‘Equality, autonomy, and the vulnerable subject in law and politics’ in Martha Albertson Fineman and Anna Grear, *Vulnerability: Reflections on a new ethical foundation for law and politics* (Ashgate Publishing, 2013) 20; see also Kate Brown, Kathryn Ecclestone and Nick Emmel, ‘The Many Faces of Vulnerability’ (2017) 16 *Social Policy and Society* 497.

49 Fineman, above n 48, 21.

50 Tweet L499 (emphasis added).

51 Tweet L240 (emphasis added).

52 Tweet L168 (emphasis added).

53 Tweet L80.

invulnerability'<sup>54</sup> is punctured, and the personal sense of safety and security we seemed to once enjoy becomes threatened. Note the referential comparison between the present and the past in the language of the tweets above. By using adverbs such as 'now', 'nowadays' and 'anymore', individuals yearn for a time when apparently the (western) world was much safer. The implication is that not only have we now become acutely aware of our vulnerability, but accordingly we have also become aware (and subsequently critical) of the complex network of relationships on which we depend.

## B Relational precariousness and justice

In Judith Butler's work concerning grievable lives, she 'posits as a marker of humanity a common property — a vulnerability, or a "precarious life" always at risk of violence, and thus a basis for a right to protection'.<sup>55</sup> As Butler asserts, all lives are precarious and 'can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed'.<sup>56</sup> The precarious life therefore involves 'living socially, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure [and] dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all'.<sup>57</sup> Our vulnerability in these moments of crisis or disaster therefore prompts not only the concession that we are open to harm and violent destruction, but also the awareness that our liveability is contingent on relational dependencies.<sup>58</sup>

The Twitter narratives evident in response to the London terrorist attack exemplifies this contingency — that lived vulnerability in the world depends entirely on the relational process of differentiated and politically constituted subjectification.<sup>59</sup> In times of crisis, comments often reflect such dependence through demands that law provide societal protection from harm:

Too many sick and demented individuals in this world, people *should* be able to lead a normal life without fear<sup>60</sup>

54 Martha C Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford University Press, 1990) 22, 31. Nussbaum argues that most of the time, we do not think about death nor fear it, and so we 'are carried along by a fantasy of invulnerability. People or events that puncture that fantasy are likely then to be particularly feared': at 31.

55 Fiona Jenkins, 'A Sensate Critique: Vulnerability and the Image in Judith Butler's Frames of War' (2013) 42 *SubStance* 105, 111.

56 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Verso, 2009) 25.

57 Ibid 14.

58 Of course, this feeling of vulnerability, or precariousness that the author has only touched on here is different to precarity. Both Fineman and Butler recognise that vulnerability should also be understood as particular, as experienced uniquely by differently positioned actors. In her work concerning grievable lives, Butler makes clear that precariousness and precarity while connected are differentiated aspects of vulnerability, with precarity denoting a politically induced condition referring to specific populations groups in the world that are held within the 'the condition of being exposed to extraordinary structured vulnerability and thus, existing in constant state of confrontation with mortality.' Casey Ryan Kelly, 'It Follows: Precarity, Thanatopolitics, and the Ambient Horror Film' (2017) 34 *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 238. This 'steady sense of precarity' is prevalent in many other parts of the world and has been present there for a long time.

59 Brown, Ecclestone and Emmel, above n 48, 12.

60 Tweet L424 (emphasis added).

We *shouldn't* have to live in a world of fear, we *shouldn't* have a feeling of not being safe [broken heart emoji]<sup>61</sup>

The framing of vulnerability in this way affirms taken-for-granted assumptions that we live in a world where the ultimate goal of law is to protect that which is always at risk of violence; and to prevent the invasion of terror and crime in our society. Yet, the idea that freedoms can be expunged and security demolished at the whim of an individual or religious group can be especially fear-inducing. In the tweets above, the use of the normative 'should' belies an expectation of societal protection from harm or the threat of harm. For example:

Why *should* we be in fear? Why *should* we be restricted to where we can go? Why is London in danger? This is sick<sup>62</sup>

Each instance of terrorism enlivens provocation of complex yet familiar debates surrounding protectionism, identity, trust and the capacity of law to regulate society positively and beneficially. The result of such provocation is that our assumptions concerning our security, safety and protection become fractured, obscured and we demand that law fulfil its objective, at times even, whatever the cost. The following tweet is one such articulated reaction:

Forget tolerance and increase the rule of law<sup>63</sup>

The cumulative impact of this reinforced narrative of society's vulnerability is that possibilities of restrictions on liberty, insufficient protection from harm, and insecurities about daily living become visualised, and then imagined. In the midst of an attack, the cracks of vulnerability are exposed and the desire and demand for law's protection becomes acute. It is argued that the more these stories of emotional reactions are repeated, the easier it is for individuals to be swept up in imagining that their everyday lives are continually under threat.

### C Referential vulnerability and fear for the future

Acknowledging that fear is connected to a recognised openness to attack and a perceived lack of control,<sup>64</sup> this research deployed referential vulnerability as a category representing a particular performative evaluation where the individual expresses a disruption to their familiar worldview and subsequently relates it to their personal bodily experience. These emotive tweets were performative in the sense that they created anxiety and discomfort in the safety with which western law has historically provided for the everyday. Certainly it would seem that terrorist events like these draw 'attention to the politics of bodily vulnerability'<sup>65</sup> by focusing on the concept of legal dependency for everyday societal protection, whereby the simplest of everyday activities

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61 Tweet L568 (emphasis added).

62 Tweet L548 (emphasis added).

63 Tweet L171.

64 Aristotle explained that 'fear is connected both to a perceived lack of control and, at least centrally, to the body and our views concerning its survival and health': Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Book II, ch 5, 1383a.

65 Kelly, above n 58, 237.

become tainted with fear.<sup>66</sup> Tweets were coded for referential vulnerability in this project when statements suggested that in their everyday lives, users might be unable to protect themselves,<sup>67</sup> simply because it seemed impossible to pre-empt, prepare or prevent such random and unpredictable attacks. In London, unassuming activities like walking down the street and laughing were identified as being threatened:

Please do not let fear, terror, hate prevent you from #walking, my fellow #pedestrians<sup>68</sup>

We all want to love, laugh and live without fear [praying hands emoji] [arrow through the heart emoji x2]<sup>69</sup>

And now we live in Fear from walking down our own pavements and walkways....what now? Barriers on every stretch of road?<sup>70</sup>

To not anymore feel safe every time I leave my house for the fear of terrorism is truly sickening [sad face emoji] [sobbing emoji] [praying hands emoji]<sup>71</sup>

The collective need to express concerns about safety in everyday life, stems first from the internalised but shared desire as vulnerable subjects to avoid harm as much as humanly possible; and second from the expectation that it is the function of law to satisfy this desire. Apart from legitimising this desire as a social practice, social media platforms enable and proliferate the shared social desire to live safely in a world without fear. The personal and emotive nature of these tweets reflects a ‘drama of instantaneity’<sup>72</sup> that is easily picked up and repeated throughout the Twitter narrative. This reproduction and endorsement of tweets surrounding everyday vulnerabilities contributes to a narrative that does not ‘engage the reader cognitively, but primarily emotionally ... [and with] increasing affective input’.<sup>73</sup>

Ahmed has argued that vulnerability involves a ‘particular kind of bodily relation to the world, in which openness itself is read as a site of potential danger’,<sup>74</sup> and so emotive appeals concerning feelings of susceptibility also become quite effective when they are connected to a vivid awareness of the proximity of danger and harm not only to our own bodies, but also to the bodies of those we love:

66 This is similar to the articulated vulnerability in everyday life that the author has previously argued was evident in tweets surrounding the hostage situation of the Sydney Siege (where the banality of getting a morning coffee was now being corrupted by the experience of fear), Sharp, ‘#fear&loathing in Sydney’, above n 5, 37; and to everyday activities in Paris (like sport, going to the theatre and eating out) were tainted with vulnerability through fear: Sharp, ‘#Vulnerability’, above n 8.

67 Krista De Castella and Craig McGarty, ‘Two Leaders, Two Wars: A Psychological Analysis of Fear and Anger Content in Political Rhetoric about Terrorism’ (2011) 11 *Analyses of Social Issues and Policy* 186.

68 Tweet L223.

69 Tweet L198. This was a frequent refrain that was found in eight other tweets in the data set.

70 Tweet L287.

71 Tweet L71.

72 Papachrissi and Oliveira, above n 24, 277.

73 Ibid 278.

74 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004) 69.

Fear is a form of heightened attentiveness — but of a self-focused indeed solipsistic kind. It reduces to a kind of vivid awareness of one's own body, and perhaps, at best, of a narrow circle of people and things closely connected to the body.<sup>75</sup>

In this research, one indicative context for such awareness was identified in a referential concern for the children (present and future) of this world. As the event unfolded the Twitter narratives turned to descriptions of how the experience and impact of this event would impact the lived experience of future generations. Take for example these indicative comments:

I really fear bringing up my girls in a world like this [sad face emoji] its everywhere.<sup>76</sup>

[crying emoji] I fear for children what there [sic] future hold ... thoughts for all those involved!<sup>77</sup>

Scary world we live in ... I fear for our kids I really do [sad face emoji] [broken heart emoji] [praying hands emoji] [british flag emoji]<sup>78</sup>

These comments are symptomatic of the way this present vulnerability mushrooms into a threat to the future. The use of emojis to pictorially express the spontaneous emotional responses further amplifies the significance of the threat. Ahmed argues that emotions are 'spaces in which bodies and worlds meet and leak into each other', and that 'the body shrinks back from the world in the desire to avoid the object of fear'.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, this bodily shrinking back from fear is evident in several individual Twitter user comments. Note in those extracted below how they referentially express this shadow of futurity through a trepidation about the choice to physically bring children into a world while ongoing terrorist threats are an imagined possibility:

Those poor people. I really fear for my unborn child's life [sad face emoji] [praying hands emoji]<sup>80</sup>

I fear for my future children and grandchildren ... I worry about the kind of world they will be living in<sup>81</sup>

Thoughts are with the victims ... wtf is the world coming too [sic]. We live in fear for our children's future [crying face emoji]<sup>82</sup>

Social media provides a 'uniquely powerful platform for ordinary people to register their abhorrence at terrorism'<sup>83</sup> and to do so as part of a normal human 'mechanism called social processing'.<sup>84</sup> Certainly, the above responses demonstrate the spontaneous commenting that occurs on Twitter, where individuals humanise and personalise their responses with pathos that is

75 Martha Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (University Press, 2012) 28–9.

76 Tweet L497.

77 Tweet L11.

78 Tweet L490.

79 Ahmed, above n 74, 69.

80 Tweet 423.

81 Tweet L605.

82 Tweet L607.

83 Jessica McGreal, *Terrorism: The social media aftermath* (23 March 2017) Raconteur <<http://rcnt.eu/qb3wd>>.

84 Tait, above n 47.



characterised by the combination of emotive appeals and emojis. Having illustrated this however, the author also wanted to complicate the reading of these tweets as vulnerable — and instead to argue that they are at once vulnerable *and* resistant, and are consequently illustrative of the counter-presence of hope in the Twitter narrative. The remainder of the article will therefore demonstrate the deployment of the hashtag to produce a nuanced juxtaposition of the production and circulation of vulnerability through terrorist actions concomitantly with the concept of resistance.

### III Resistance and hope through vulnerability

Today's events make me nervous to return home, but alas we can't live our lives in fear. We must remain strong.<sup>85</sup>

While the Twitter narrative reflected in many ways an existing rhetoric of fear that traded on emotional expectations of law and justice, so much of the Twitter conversation also showed a defiant determination to resist the temptation of fear and encourage others to hope through unity. Events like terror attacks seem to bring into sharp focus the precarious nature of human existence and social media provides an intoxicating combination of visual and conversational elements that tap into contemporary collective notions of how to approach the future. While acknowledging that vulnerability can never be wholly transcended or eradicated this last section of the article thus describes the manner in which these antonymic characteristics of 'vulnerable' and 'resistant' may collude to engender a hopeful form of resilience.

#### A Resistant vulnerability

As already argued, Butler and Fineman suggest that we all have a common vulnerability — we all have bodies that leak, bleed and spill, but Hagelin, creating another typology of vulnerability argues that 'resistant vulnerability' operates to sever links between vulnerability and powerlessness or victimhood that should be pitied and/or protected.<sup>86</sup> She argues that:

Recognizing resistant vulnerability and the demands it places on our perception opens this conversation to possibilities for identification with the injured body beyond masochism, and bodies that master pain instead of being made helpless by it. This gives us a way to react to the suffering body beyond pity.<sup>87</sup>

The Twitter narratives surrounding the London terror attack demonstrate the pairing of the expression of vulnerability through fear with 'the counterintuitive frisson of resistance'.<sup>88</sup> This was particularly evident through the mechanism of 'othering'.<sup>89</sup> Research conducted after 9/11 has shown that 'in times of heightened fear and anxiety ... identity with one's own group (people we perceive to be like ourselves) [is] increased ... [as] we hold tightly

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<sup>85</sup> Tweet L145.

<sup>86</sup> Sarah Hagelin, *Reel Vulnerability: Power, Pain, and Gender in Contemporary American Film and Television* (Rutgers University Press, 2013) 10.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid 14.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Othering was undoubtedly used in these terror responses to deepen religious and racial divides across the world. Eg, Pauline Hanson, the leader of Australia's One Nation party,



to familiar/default scenarios'.<sup>90</sup> One such default scenario is to cultivate a narrative whereby the 'other' becomes fear itself, and this was evident in one particular story arc that developed within the Twitter narrative under two connected trends: the hashtag 'WeAreNotAfraid' and the 'WEARElondONERs' slogan.

The first trend (#WeAreNotAfraid) saw many Twitter users sharing a London Transport underground logo that had been modified to bear the slogan 'We Are Not Afraid' to demonstrate their defiance against fear and terror. This was a symbol that had been circulated in pamphlet form following the London tube bombings in 2005. After 2017's Westminster attack, the image was recirculated digitally through social media as a means for encouraging others to not let the attack add fuel to the fire of racism and/or discrimination. For example:

Attack us, you make us stronger. [British flag emoji]

Try to divide us we become closer. [British flag emoji]

Try to make us fear you, we laugh. [British flag emoji]

#WeAreNotAfraid [British flag emoji]<sup>91</sup>

This particular hashtag and the photoshopped Tube sign, was also often used by individuals to retweet the UK Parliament confirmation that both the House of Commons and the House of Lords would sit the next day at their normal times. For example, the Conservative party MP Will Quince retweeted the announcement with the hashtag and this comment: 'After a tragic day in Westminster, our democracy continues tomorrow. Terrorism will never defeat us'.<sup>92</sup> Another Twitter user reiterated this resolve by adding the comment: 'Democracy Must not and will not yield to fear or intimidation'.<sup>93</sup>

By taking the familiar logo of the London Underground (a location of previous terror activity in the city) and assigning to it a positive and declarative slogan, this tweet invited the emotional building of community around resistance. By retweeting the adapted logo with the corresponding hashtag, individuals joined together to declare their defiance against fear, and the resulting emotional narrative was persuasive in stirring hearts away from fear and toward resistance. One Twitter user stated it like this: 'Standing united with my fellow Londoners. Even though we are shocked and saddened by yesterday's events, we stand strong'<sup>94</sup> thus illustrating how social media

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even launched a personal hashtag, #Pray4MuslimBan. The social media campaign aims to push her policy for a Muslim immigration ban in Australia. However, that is not an argument pursued in this article.

90 Sue Veres Royal, 'Fear, Rhetoric, and the "Other"' (2011) 4 *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts (Field Notes from the September 11 Moment)* 406, 408.

91 Tweet L201.

92 Tweet L608 (retweeted) a UK Parliament tweet: 'We can confirm that both the House of Commons and the House of Lords will sit tomorrow at their normal times': (@UKParliament), (22 March 2017, 11.23 am) Twitter <<https://twitter.com/UKParliament/status/844615484838498304>>.

93 Ibid.

94 Tweet L597.

provides ‘people a platform to come together and show solidarity in the face of adversity’.<sup>95</sup>

To join in resisting fear is to actively become unified against a common enemy, and of course the repetition of certain images and phrases that position fear as the ‘other’ also works to encourage others to join the fight against it. Take for example the second unifying trend — the repetition of the statement WEARElondONers — which was deployed to show the world that the city was standing together against terrorism. By capitalising specific letters to highlight a unifying statement (‘we are one’) within the slogan, each tweet identifies with an attitude of resilience. This conscious identification as a Londoner in solidarity with fellow citizens, is an emotional appeal that demonstrates a unified investment in their city, as evident in these examples:

Stand together against this evilness that is terrorism.<sup>96</sup>

We will NOT be divided. We are #StrongerTogether and #WeAreNotAfraid<sup>97</sup>

Similar to the solidarity represented by #jesuischarlie following the Paris attacks, or #illridewithyou in response to the Sydney Siege in Australia, where the hashtags actively sought to change the tone of conversation, both WeAreNotAfraid and WEARElondONers were deployed as a way of re-inscribing the London community against fear. As Kirwan explains ‘much of the behaviour we see on social media in the aftermath of an attack can be explained by [a] desire for solidarity’,<sup>98</sup> and these tweets are an example of how the emotive expression of fear can perpetuate the use of othering as a way to promote solidarity and invoke resistance. Notice in the following two tweets, the repetitive use of the second person pronoun *you* to directly address the perpetrators of terrorism as distinct from the unified community of aggrieved Londoners (*us* and *we*):

*You* will not break us, only bring *us* closer together.<sup>99</sup>

*You* will not break *us*, *we* will not be divided, *we* will stand stronger and closer. Hope is stronger than fear<sup>100</sup>

The cultivation of the ‘us v them’ mentality then, provides the ‘means by which inclusion and exclusion takes place’.<sup>101</sup> When the ‘other’ becomes fear itself, it is arguable that the greatest utility of vulnerability actually lies in its radical relationality. We are vulnerable because we depend on others (including the law) to protect *us* from *them*. Correspondingly then, it is unity — the human ability to rally together against a common enemy, to deploy legal mechanisms, and to pursue justice outcomes — that demands and provokes a form of resistance, which then turns to hope. The argument proffered in this article does not therefore end with simply illustrating the

<sup>95</sup> McGreal, above n 83.

<sup>96</sup> Tweet L589.

<sup>97</sup> Tweet L590.

<sup>98</sup> Tait, above n 47.

<sup>99</sup> Tweet L594.

<sup>100</sup> Tweet L60.

<sup>101</sup> Nick Lynn and Susan Lea, “‘A Phantom Menace and the New Apartheid’: The Social Construction of Asylum-Seekers” (2003) 24 *Discourse Society* 425, 427.

refraction of terrorism through the prism of resistant vulnerability — it also illustrates the counter-presence of hope in the Twitter narrative through these hashtags.

## B Hope

#Terror and evil will never win, resiliency and hope will always prevail.<sup>102</sup>

Vulnerability is an enabling human condition that makes it possible to relate, to love and to suffer, and so it is also a condition of potential — hope can enter in. Hope involves ‘the belief that one can find pathways to desired goals, and ... the motivation to use those pathways to reach life goals’.<sup>103</sup> Hope is grounded in the context of living and is motivated towards positive growth and psychological resilience. Thus, hope is a practice. Individuals ‘do’ hope. As has been shown through the Twitter analysis, it is the significant relational events and moments that provoke resistance. Whereas ‘fear tends to induce a profound caution [and] inclines the subject toward risk aversion’,<sup>104</sup> hope ‘moves with eagerness toward an anticipated future. It is associated with a resourceful, improvisational attitude toward new possibilities’.<sup>105</sup> For example, two Twitter users speak about the possibility of hope in this way:

Seeing civilians immediately helping one another in the #LondonAttacks tells me all hope for this weary world is not lost.<sup>106</sup>

Its been a tough day but tomorrow brings new hope [crying emoji][broken heart emoji] We’ll never allow them to succeed in ruling by fear, NEVER!<sup>107</sup>

The relationality of vulnerability enabled these users to move towards hope, and it seemed to be driven by a strong communal desire to fight terrorism together. The collocation of ‘standing together’ and ‘hope signaling strength’ was a repetitive refrain as evidenced by these similar tweets:

Hope is stronger than fear. When we stand together, we are much stronger than those who incite fear.<sup>108</sup>

Hope is stronger than fear. #WeStandTogether against forces of hate, division and terror.<sup>109</sup>

As Nelson argues, individuals are willing to share content online that produces emotion, because when ‘we bring intensities into consciousness, we then have the rhetorical opportunity (affective capacity) to make an argument, to try to

102 Tweet L601.

103 Cheryl Wright, Helen Dunbar-Krige and Gert van der Westhuizen, ‘Reconceptualising Hope Within the Context of Vulnerability in South Africa’ (2015) 25 *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 454, 454.

104 Kathryn Abrams and Hila Keren, ‘Law in the cultivation of hope’ (2007) 95 *California Law Review* 319, 326.

105 Ibid.

106 Tweet L598.

107 Tweet L603.

108 Tweet L358. This was repeated 15 times in the data set.

109 Tweet L599.

effect change'.<sup>110</sup> The recurrence and contagion of statements such as '[h]ope is stronger than fear' have significant influence because 'it is not the content itself that is viral or contagious but the affects and emotions the content produces'.<sup>111</sup> Shortly after the London Westminster attack and in response to the contagion of the resistant hashtags, several media outlets argued that social media can actually provide 'people across the world an authentic platform to air their grievances, share compassion and spread love in the aftermath of terror'.<sup>112</sup> In the same vein, this research demonstrates that Twitter provides an avenue through which fear and vulnerability can be transformed into hope. The Twitter trends of WeAreNotAfraid and WEARElondONers serve as a practical illustration of emotional jurisprudence at work. Through articulated emotional appeals about solidarity and the historical resilience of Londoners, individual Twitter users contributed to a collective groundswell of desire in relation to hope. See for example these tweets which recognise the tragedy of Westminster, yet look ahead through the hopeful prism of strength:

We Londoners have been through worse and we always come out stronger we are a family<sup>113</sup>

So sad about today's terror attack on my city #London! But I know that as Londoners we are stronger & braver than ever before<sup>114</sup>

Despite the fact that objects of fear such as terrorism will persist in this world, social media platforms like Twitter enable individuals to respond 'with messages of confidence, bonding those with similar goals and resisting the often paralyzing feeling of fear'.<sup>115</sup> Doubtless through such unifying messages, 'characterised by repetition [and] restating',<sup>116</sup> Twitter narratives have the potential to turn fear into resilience, and then into hope.

## Conclusion

Truth and justice are virtues drowning in depression and fear — where's #superman when you need him [praying hands emoji] [crying face emoji]<sup>117</sup>

When a hashtag begins to trend in response to an event or issue, it is the affect and emotion that are the 'vehicles through which tweets, images, and videos (and their corresponding messages) become widely shared'.<sup>118</sup> The analysis of the tweets in this research has shown that in the production of narrative surrounding the Westminster terror event, Twitter not only reflected anxieties surrounding law's role as protector, but also functioned as the social agent through which tweets could emotionally transform. It is through the resistant hashtags, embedded within the Twitter narratives of vulnerability, that subtle

110 Julie D Nelson, 'An Unnecessary Divorce: Integrating the Study of Affect and Emotion in New Media' (2016) *Composition Forum* 34.

111 Ibid.

112 McGreal, above n 83.

113 Tweet L595.

114 Tweet L596.

115 Nelson, above n 110.

116 Papachrissi and Oliveira, above n 24, 278.

117 Tweet L282.

118 Nelson, above n 110.

inflections of hope were accented. Although fear is a powerful force that can be manipulated by those in power to take advantage of vulnerability, hope is equally commanding and offers significant transformative potential.