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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the resurgence of Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party to the Senate has dominated Australian political discourse. Specifically, her statements about Islam and Muslims have sparked discussion about the role of political speech in our democracy. In this thesis, I seek to address the question at the heart of this tension: should politicians’ fear-mongering rhetoric be defended, or does it inflict serious trauma on our societies? I do so by focusing on the nature of fear as a political emotion; its structure, its effects on individuals and democratic society, and its costs. Fear, I argue, is at the heart of our problem with fear-mongering rhetoric.

In the first section of this thesis, I contextualise this thesis as a contribution to the recent turn to ethics within liberalism, and as an extension on Martha Nussbaum’s extensive philosophical treatment of political emotions in liberal democracy. In the second section, I set up the cognitive account of political fear that I will use throughout this thesis. I demonstrate its role in perpetuating a range of phenomena incompatible with a pluralist society, including significant epistemic harms. In the third section, I turn to the effects specific to fear-mongering political rhetoric, and in the fourth, I weigh up the effects of fear against our commitment to freedom of speech.

My unique contribution to this field is to point out that fear as an emotion is at the root of why fear-mongering speech is objectionable in a liberal democracy. If we do not acknowledge the emotional root and carrying force of this kind of speech, we fail to see what is at stake in debate over fear-mongering political rhetoric: it critically compromises citizens’ capacity to engage in political discourse.
I make the following disclaimer at the outset: for much of this thesis, Senator Hanson serves as a token for politicians and political candidates who say discriminatory, fear-mongering things about Islam and Muslims. She is not alone, but she is the most visible. It is for this reason that I tend to use her as a signpost for the broader array of fear-mongering political rhetoric to take place in Australian political discourse of the last few years.

ONE – ETHICS AND EMOTIONS IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

1.1 – The Turn to Ethics

In this first chapter, I contextualise this thesis within a broader trend in political philosophy and theory known as the ‘turn to ethics’. I justify Nussbaum’s focus on the presence and nature of emotions in political life as a contribution to this field. Doing this will clarify the question at the heart of this thesis: what is the problem posed by fear-mongering political rhetoric in a liberal democracy?

The turn to ethics has many contributors, united by ‘the conviction that ethics constitutes that missing something that can help cure what ails democratic life.’ Ella Myers identifies this trend as a response to two major crises facing modern democracy: sweeping political disappointment and disengagement on the one hand, and ‘reactionary and xenophobic movements that the institutions of liberal democracy appear ill-equipped to address’ on the other. The turn to ethics – as may be assumed by its unofficial title – aims to find a way of bringing citizens of liberal democracy back to an inclusive and self-motivated participatory

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2 Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, p. 68.
politics by cultivating a motivating and stabilising democratic ethics. We are reminded that a conceptual separation of politics and ethics is artificial; ‘the phenomena that tend to travel under these names are already combined, for better or worse.’\(^3\) Liberalism is not morally “neutral”, but has a ‘definite moral content’ and ‘normative goals’ for society’s political culture.\(^4\)

A successful democratic ethos must accept and foster citizens’ genuine commitment to some fundamental normative commitments. Liberal democracy is built on values such as equal liberty, equality of opportunity, citizens’ cooperation for the common good and legitimacy through sovereignty of a democratic people. But protecting these values requires, and in turn fosters a ‘civic character’ and ‘ethical sensibility’ that will motivate and sustains citizens’ commitment to values that require daily self-sacrifice.\(^5\) Though a definitive list of these public virtues has not been agreed upon, there is a shared conviction within the turn that such virtues do exist ‘and that their cultivation is a difficult but pressing question for liberals.’\(^6\) This project is particularly difficult because encouraging virtues and dispositions comes into conflict with liberalism’s core commitment to individual liberty and preventing government overreach. The project of the ‘turn to ethics’ is thus doubly challenging. We must figure out how societies can encourage and institutionalise citizens’ commitment to a flourishing democratic ethos but do so in a way that ‘actually aids pluralisation’ and political participation, rather than inhibiting it.\(^7\)

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\(^3\) *Ibid*, p. 10.


\(^6\) Myers, *Worldly Ethics*, p. 7.

\(^7\) *Ibid*, p. 8.
For Nussbaum, the focus of cultivating a successful democratic ethos is ‘society’s political culture’ as opposed to aspects of civil society to which ethics might otherwise be applied.\(^8\) Nussbaum is drawing on Rawls’ idea of ‘political liberalism’ but combines it with the kind of ‘civic religion’ advocated by Rabindranath Tagore that aims at cultivating an open and compassionate political culture in which citizens can flourish. Nussbaum advocates a democratic ethos that applies the normative commitments of liberalism to state institutions and matters of political culture such as laws, institutions, ceremonies, public spaces and civic culture, education and public policy.\(^9\) On this account, a healthy democracy is nurtured and sustained by encouraging citizens’ inclusive and joint commitment to matters of shared political concern. This is the democratic ethos I advocate and assume as background to the remainder of this thesis. Later in this thesis, I argue that discriminatory, fear-mongering speech is corrosive to such an ethos.

1.2 – Nussbaum’s Turn; Emotions and Liberalism

In this section, I consider Nussbaum’s contribution to the turn to ethics: a thick discussion of the relation between emotions and a flourishing liberal politics. By doing this, I will be able to demonstrate that fear, and its cultivation by elected officials, it objectionable because of the damage fear does to citizens’ ability to engage in that worldly ethics. By the end of this section, we should have an idea of the scope of the problem at hand.

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\(^8\) Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, p. 16.

\(^9\) Ibid, pp. 16-19.
The significance of political emotions has been left largely unexplored in the tradition of liberal philosophy. Post-Rousseau, liberal philosophy’s silence on the role of emotions arose in part from the liberal concern ‘that proscribing any particular type of emotional cultivation might easily involve limits on free speech and other steps incompatible with liberal ideas of freedom and equality.’ Further, emotional moral theories suffer challenges of particularism and inconsistency. Moral sentimentalists such as Adam Smith and David Hume highlighted the importance of emotional competence – in particular, our empathetic capacities – to the success of pluralist societies. Yet they also recognised that moral theories grounded in our emotional capacities struggle with consistent and broad deployment. Our emotional capacity to treat each other well needs structural support if it is to aid our political and social lives. The astute reader will note that this tension in the history of liberalism broadly mirrors the problems faced by liberal democracies today: too disengaged on the one hand, and on the other so proscriptive we become polarised. But in the face of this theoretical and real-world dilemma, liberal political philosophy has remained largely silent on the matter of emotions.

Nussbaum frames *Political Emotions* as a work to fill the space left by Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls identified the need for a ‘reasonable moral psychology’ that might secure citizens’ endorsement of political liberalism, but did not flesh out such an account himself. In *Political Emotions*, Nussbaum aims to show ‘how a decent society [can] do more for stability and

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11 Note that sentimentalists referred to ‘sympathy’ and the ‘sympathetic imagination’ to refer (roughly) to what we mean by ‘empathy’ today.

12 Smith asks us to imagine that ‘the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake.’ Even a ‘man of humanity in Europe’ would struggle to be moved by the event, Smith claims. ‘If he was to lose his little finger tomorrow; he would not sleep tonight’ but ‘he will snore with the more profound security over the ruin of a hundred millions of his bretheren.’ Adam Smith, [1759], *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1976), p. 136.

motivation than Locke and Kant did, without becoming illiberal and dictatorial in the manner of Rousseau."\(^\text{14}\) To begin with, liberalism must accept and advocate its own normative commitments. ‘Liberalism has always stood for something’, Nussbaum asserts, ‘and has always asked people to endorse something: the equal worth of persons, and their liberty.’\(^\text{15}\) All political principles and efforts ‘need emotional support to ensure their stability over time, and all decent societies need to guard against division and hierarchy’ by encouraging love for a common project outside ourselves: the nation and its welfare — for all.\(^\text{16}\)

How do we encourage citizens’ genuine commitment to liberal democratic values while accepting the fact of pluralism? I reiterate Nussbaum’s claim that political philosophy and practice must pay due attention to the role played by political emotions in the stability and health of liberal democracy. We are emotional creatures, and this aspect of our psychology does not turn off at the ballot box, so to speak.\(^\text{17}\) Political emotions take the nation, its culture, values and welfare as their eudaimonic object of concern. Emotions are therefore crucial to a democratic ethos that seeks to cultivate and sustain citizens’ personal and joint investment in the nation and what is deemed to be good for it. That ethos can either be helped by benevolent political emotions, or hindered by baleful ones.

Political emotions of the right sort — compassion, love, joy — help motivate and secure citizens’ participation in ‘worthy projects that require effort and sacrifice’ such as the

\(^{14}\) Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, p. 5.


\(^{16}\) Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, pp. 2-3.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, p.9.
environment, the inclusion of marginalised groups, foreign aid and social distribution. Healthy, open-minded emotional investment in the nation and its goals can facilitate citizens’ genuine and stable interest in a collaborative, flourishing ethos of liberal democratic politics. Such an ethos is cultivated by designing ‘institutions that represent the insights of a valuable type of emotion’, such as compassion and love, and educating citizens in those dispositions.\textsuperscript{18} Citizens should be encouraged to form an emotional commitment to the values and virtues of liberalism as well as to a compassionate and open reading of the nation’s unique laws and institutions, geography, historical personalities, events and common goals. Decent political emotions can inspire citizens’ political engagement and sustain their commitment to a democratic ethos over time.

On the other hand, political emotions are bad for liberal democracy when they undermine the values of liberty and equality and citizens’ commitment to political cooperation. All societies ‘have to grapple with the history or current reality of group subordination’ and so must move to quell the emotions at the root of these problems: disgust, shame, and fear. These emotions are considered corrosive because of their exclusionary, narrowing natures and their propensity for sowing division and inequality.\textsuperscript{19} In this thesis, I focus on the role of fear in Australia as a contemporary liberal democracy.

Fear narrows our circle of concern. When we fear for our nation based upon discriminatory beliefs about another group of people, our concern is no longer equal, nor is it extended toward the good of the nation. In the throes of self-protective fear, we can forget others’ freedoms and our emotional commitment to the wellbeing of the nation and its political

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 20.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 322.
culture.\textsuperscript{20} For this reason, a liberal democracy looking to encourage an ethos of commitment to worldly things needs to think about ‘limiting and properly directing fear, for once it gets going, the good of others is all too likely to fade into the background.’\textsuperscript{21}

In this section, I have contextualised Nussbaum’s work on political emotions within the turn to ethics. Harnessing political emotions can secure citizens’ stable but genuine attachment to the kind of democratic ethos that focuses on the nation’s wellbeing and political culture for the good of all. Some emotions — the narrowing, exclusionary, short-sighted ones like fear — are intolerable in liberal democracy: they are hindrances to that project of collaborative care for our nation and ethos. As Nussbaum points out: ‘Ceding the terrain of emotion-shaping to anti-liberal forces gives them a huge advantage in the people’s hearts.’\textsuperscript{22} In Section 4, I argue that ceding of the emotional terrain to anti-liberal forces is what happens when a type of rhetoric — discriminatory, fear-mongering political speech — is accepted as legitimate political discourse in a liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{23}

**TWO – POLITICAL FEAR, ISLAMOPHOBIA, DISCRIMINATION**

In this chapter I establish and motivate a cognitive account of emotions and translate this into an account of political fear. This will begin the task of clarifying why fear it is problematic in a liberal democracy. When I refer to ‘fear’ throughout this thesis, I mean a political fear predicated on prejudicial beliefs about a group of people, such as that of my test case: political fear of Islam and Muslims in Australia. In this chapter, I will analyse the belief and

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid p. 322.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid p. 2.

\textsuperscript{23} Nussbaum analyses rhetoric in *Political Emotions*, but uses instances, rather than a style of speech. See her analysis of speeches delivered by Winston Churchill and Franklin Delano Roosevelt: Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, pp. 322-328.
behavioural profiles of political fear of Islam and why political fear is unsustainable in a liberal democracy. This will take us to a point where we can consider why, then, fear-mongering speech is objectionable.

2.1 — A Cognitive Account of Fear

My purpose in this thesis is to explore the interaction between political fear and political rhetoric in a liberal democracy, and to articulate the problem posed by fear mongering rhetoric. Many share the intuition that such a phenomenon is degrading or damaging in a way that extends beyond experiential harm; I want to articulate that further and offer a philosophical account of the damage. Before we can explore the relationship between fear and language, however, I want to deepen our account of fear as an emotion. I use Nussbaum’s Aristotelian model of cognitive emotions as a foundation for this work. Nussbaum’s model demonstrates the roles, both corrosive and nurturing, that emotions play in political society. Further, her account contains a cognitive element that illuminates the power of political rhetoric. Politicians cannot directly affect citizens’ mood states or bodily feelings. But they can, in various ways, shape what citizens believe about certain things, and those beliefs appear to be a part of what emotions themselves are.

On Nussbaum’s model, emotions take the following form: a belief or set of beliefs about an intentional object, X, induces and/or shapes an emotional response of a particular feeling


25 Nussbaum, Political Emotions, p. 322.

and psychological character toward X, where those beliefs are constitutive of that emotion’s unique profile. Fear, then, is an emotional response characterised by a belief that something destructive is about to happen, at the hands of a particular threat, against which defence will be difficult or unlikely. Like Nussbaum, I take the beliefs that underpin these reactive emotional responses to be ‘quite elastically and simply’ a matter of “seeing X as Y”. \(^{27}\)

Indignation, for example, involves seeing a negative or harmful act as unjustly done against us or something we value. \(^{28}\) Emotion-relevant beliefs, for the purposes of this thesis are ‘appraisals or evaluations of the object’ that can stand alone or as part of a broader attitudinal structure. Further, they are operative in the sense that our behaviour can be motivated by a belief without our being explicitly cognisant of the belief or its impetus. \(^{29}\)

Importantly, emotions involve appraisals that value ‘the object as significant rather than trivial’ to oneself or one’s goals. \(^{30}\) Emotions are in this way ‘eudaimonic’ insofar as they are focused on an object that is deemed in some way relevant to a valuable life. \(^{31}\) If we take these cognitive elements away from our account of emotions, we are left with little more than ‘unintelligent bodily forces’ and instinctive reactions. \(^{32}\) Beliefs and emotions are connected ‘in a very intimate way’. \(^{33}\)

Imagine, for instance, that I believe that whales are dangerous, human-eating creatures. When faced with a whale, and little means of escape, my emotion towards it will be one of

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\(^{27}\) Ibid, p. 27.

\(^{28}\) Ibid, p. 102.

\(^{29}\) Ibid, p. 28.

\(^{30}\) Ibid, p. 29.


\(^{32}\) Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*, p. 23.

\(^{33}\) Ibid, p. 27.
fear. On the other hand, imagine that I believe that whales as a species have intentionally harmed me in a way that I do not deserve: my overriding emotional response toward whales will be indignation or, anger. Fear’s unique belief profile is therefore the following:

a belief about an object, X, which involves perceiving X as a likely and significant threat to oneself or one’s circle of concern.

In sum; fear has a cognitive, eudaimonic structure that consists in an emotional reaction to a belief. When I speak of fear’s ‘belief profile’, this is the cognitive structure I speak of.

One advantage of conceiving of fear in terms of a ‘belief profile’ is that we can then explain why we often think that it can be judged by standards of reasonableness. Such judgments are generally aimed at the reasonableness of the beliefs behind the fears. One way we judge reasonableness of belief is in accordance with how significant the threat is. ‘Significant’ here denotes two things: 1) the threat is significant in scale, where scale means the scale of potential damage, and that the damage will be to something significant to me and 2) significant in likelihood. If my fear of whales were grounded in an absurd belief that the planet’s Cetaceans are plotting to take over the planet as sea levels rise, you could have cause to doubt the reasonableness of my whale-fear. This matters for our purposes because the unreasonableness of beliefs is where the ‘many potential problems’ of political fear

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35 Nussbaum, Political Emotions, pp. 320-322.

36 Reasonableness of belief and reasonableness of emotional response do not necessarily track each other, though. I may have a reasonable belief about whales (they can be aggressive) but an unreasonable fear (a phobia).
In all societies, ‘rhetoric and politics work on ideas of what is dangerous’, often ‘constructing the perception of danger’ where it does not exist.\textsuperscript{38} We can misidentify a threat, or misjudge its size, misattribute blame for the threat or ‘have a conception of our well-being that is off-kilter’, making us fear things that are not bad for us at all – ‘for example, the inclusion of new ethnic groups in our nation.’\textsuperscript{39} It is this kind of fear, unreasonable fear, that I will address in this thesis. My goal is to demonstrate why unreasonable fear grounded in prejudicial beliefs is deeply corrosive to liberal democracy.

So far I have said that fear has a cognitive element, or a ‘belief profile’, and that this makes it an apt candidate for social judgements of reasonableness. This note about reasonableness raises another aspect of our emotions crucial to my argument: their \textit{behavioural} profiles. As Nussbaum points out, ‘fear is an unusually primitive emotion’, closely related to humans’ intuitive fright response.\textsuperscript{40} As we will see, the behavioural tendencies of fear — particularly avoidance and aggression — are damaging to democracy, so exploring its relation to primitive fright here is important. Sometimes we react to fear with avoidance behaviours. For example, I might paddle away as quickly as possible when I see a whale. Fear can lead us to non-avoidant types of behaviour, too. If my fear is laced with paranoia, I might find out everything I can about whales. Alternatively, I might lash out in violent self-defence. Fear’s behavioural profile ‘involves deeply implanted evolutionary tendencies’ aimed at protecting that which is threatened.\textsuperscript{41} An important aspect of these behaviours is that they, too, can be

\textsuperscript{37} Nussbaum, \textit{Political Emotions}, p. 322.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid}, p. 320. Nussbaum points to research by Joseph LeDoux that shows that this relationship exists but remains physiologically unclear.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Ibid}, p. 321.
judged more or less reasonable depending on the proportionality of a behavioural response to a threat.

I have presented an account of fear as grounded in more or less reasonable beliefs about threat and harm, and which has the tendency to produce a range of behaviours aimed at self-protection. Building from this account of fear, we can begin to see what political fear looks like. Fearing for one’s nation involves determining that the nation is important to one’s self and goals qua citizen; it becomes, as Nussbaum would put it, a part of our ‘circle of concern’.42 It also involves the perception of an intentional object as a likely and significant threat to the nation. I adopt Nussbaum’s definition of political emotions as emotions that take ‘the nation, the nation’s goals, its institutions and leaders, its geography, and one’s fellow citizens seen as fellow inhabitants of a common public space’ as their subject of eudaimonic concern.43

So far my discussion of fear has been largely in the abstract. In order to demonstrate the interest in investigating political emotions, let me give a real example that shows how fear can be a political emotion. This example prompts my thesis that the problem with fear-mongering political speech, in philosophical terms, is that it intolerably damages citizens’ discursive capacities and communities.

2.2 — Political fear and ‘Islamophobia’

The central case of this thesis is political fear of Islam and Muslims in Australia. The fear I have in mind is based on the belief that Islam is a danger to ‘the nation’. Such fear reveals

42 *Ibid*, p. 11, pp. 244-245, pp. 262-266.
certain things the agent believes, things that position Australia as something valued, and Islam as something threatening it. In this section I will compare how the political fear of Islam and Muslims in Australia corresponds to the conceptual account of fear already outlined. For clarity, I present ‘every day’ fear and political fear of Islam in the following schema:

Fear is the perception of an intentional object, X, as a likely and significant threat to oneself or one’s circle of concern, based on and defined by certain beliefs about X.

Fear of Islam and its adherents as a political emotion is the perception of Islam (or of individuals perceived to be Muslims), as a likely and significant threat to one’s nation or oneself qua citizen, based on and defined by certain beliefs about Islam.44

This fear is often labelled ‘Islamophobia’, variously defined as the ‘intense dislike or fear of Islam, esp. as a political force; hostility or prejudice towards Muslims’ and ‘hostile feelings, discrimination, exclusion, fear, suspicion or anxiety directed towards Islam or Muslims.’45 Importantly, this schema shows us that fear of Islam involves believing certain things about one’s nation just as much as believing certain things about the other. This is central to my argument about the nature of political fear as perception of a threat to one’s nation — often, Islamophobia is unreasonable because it involves a misapprehension of the thing being threatened. But first, let us canvass Islamophobia’s other-oriented beliefs.

44 This thesis only addresses fear of Islam as a political fear. A personal phobia of Islam for reasons not related to the nation or one’s actions as a citizen is not considered here.

First, ‘Islamophobia’ is a fear of Islam and Muslims. This is arguably because Muslims are the physical instantiation of the threat. It might also simply be a fear of anyone who can subscribe to a ‘threatening’ belief system. Second, the reference to fear of Islam ‘as a political force’ identifies the fact that Islam is often perceived to be a political threat. Islamophobia is by definition a political fear. Third, I would contend that insofar as Islamophobia is grounded in unreasonable, prejudicial beliefs, it is an unreasonable fear. Of course, this may not satisfy some, particularly those who subscribe to Islamophobic beliefs. They will disagree with me that their beliefs are unreasonable, and perhaps try to explain to me why. That may be the case, but I have had to bracket such debate and take it as given that the kinds of fears I talk about in this thesis are unreasonable — they are not grounded in accurate or fact-based appraisals of threat, or the thing being threatened. Throughout the rest of this thesis, when I use the term ‘Islamophobia’, I use it as shorthand for ‘political fear of Islam’ in the sense I have now defined it: the perception of a threat to one’s nation or oneself qua citizen where the object of that fear is Islam or Muslims as intentional objects.

Islamophobia is not a coordinated school of thought, and ‘what do Australians believe about Islam?’ is mostly an empirical question. For this thesis, I have chosen beliefs expressed by the kind of speaker I am interested in in this thesis: an elected or campaigning politician. I do this for two reasons. One is that the positional and epistemic authority that these speakers possess elevates the impact of their speech, and therefore its motivating emotion on societies. Another reason I choose to canvass fear-mongering by politicians is that it has arguably been the zeitgeist of western liberal democracies in 2016.

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46 Limited empirical data on beliefs about Australian identity and Islam exists. I refer to it where relevant.

47 I began writing on this topic in July 2015, so its particulars have changed with ongoing developments.
In Australia, Senator Pauline Hanson has dominated political discourse around this issue. On a policy page dedicated to Islam, One Nation’s website declares that ‘Islam does not believe in democracy, freedom of speech, freedom of the press or freedom or assembly’, and that ‘its religious aspect is fraud; it is rather a totalitarian political system…masquerading as a religion’.48 At the time of writing, her comments on Islam culminated with her call for a halt on Muslim immigration to Australia until a Royal Commission into whether Islam is a religion has been conducted.49

In neither number nor position on the political spectrum are these beliefs “fringe” or “outliers” in Australian political life. One Nation received more votes for the senate at the 2016 federal election than there are Muslims in Australia.50 49% of people polled agreed with Senator Hanson’s call for restricted Muslim migration and 48% believed that, given terrorist attacks overseas, there should be a national debate on Muslim migration.51 One much-circulated article in 2016 expressed the fear that Muslim migration would be connected with increased homophobia and misogyny.52 Demonstrating that Islamophobia is a broad church, Senators Jacqui Lambie and the publicly homophobic Cory Bernardi share Islamophobic


49 This claim was most directly made in her maiden speech to the Senate, but reiterated to press. Commonwealth of Australia, Senate. "First Speech." 78; 14 September, 2016; Rachel Eddie, ‘We speak for the silent majority’: Pauline Hanson wants vote on banning Muslim immigration’, Daily Mail (22 September 2016).

50 Australian Electoral Commission, ‘First preferences by Senate group’ (2016).

51 Essential Media Communications [EMC], ‘Ban on Muslim Immigration’ (21 September 2016); EMC, ‘Statements About Pauline Hanson’ (21 September 2016). The polling is dated now, but in 2011 57% of people polled said they had ‘concerns’ about the number of Muslims in Australia. EMC, ‘Concern About Muslims (Pre-information)’ (28 February 2011).

52 Josh Manuatu, ‘Kruger is Right – Muslim Immigration Should Be Carefully Considered’, The Spectator (23 July 2016).
beliefs, including this concern about Islam’s treatment of women.\textsuperscript{53} Both describe Muslim women’s religious headscarves as a ‘shroud of oppression’, ‘not right’ in Australia, a device Muslim men use to control Muslim women and a ‘security issue’.\textsuperscript{54}

Further, fear of Islam is not exclusive to anti-Establishment politicians. It has been voiced by members of elected government. At a Reclaim Australia rally in 2015, Liberal member for Dawson, George Christensen, declared his belief that Australian values and ‘the Australian culture and the Australian lifestyle that we love’ are under threat from ‘those who hate us for who we are and what we stand for’.\textsuperscript{55} Finally, former Prime Minister, Tony Abbott has made statements that engage with this fear. In response to terrorist attacks in France, Abbott stated that there is a ‘massive problem within Islam’ and that ‘I feel it’s very hard to reconcile what’s in the Koran with a modern, secular, pluralist democracy [sic].’\textsuperscript{56}

I want to draw attention to two features of these examples, and what they tell us about the nature of political fear of Islam in Australia. I make these themes transparent so that we have a firm grasp of the problem before analysing why these beliefs and their propagation through political rhetoric are corrosive in a functioning liberal democracy.

\textsuperscript{53} Pun intended.

\textsuperscript{54} Latika Bourke, ‘Stupid and ignorant’: Cory Bernardi's comments linking terrorism raids with a push to ban burqa slammed’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} (18 September 2014); Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ‘PUP senator Jacqui Lambie says she would not let burka wearers into her office; backs calls for ban’, \textit{Australian Broadcasting Corporation}, (20 September 2014); Australian Broadcasting Corporation, ‘Senator Jacqui Lambie struggled to explain Sharia Law’, \textit{YouTube}, (20 September 2014).

\textsuperscript{55} Christensen, ‘Reclaim Australia Address’.

\textsuperscript{56} Dan Conifer, Tony Abbott calls for ‘religious revolution’ inside Islam, defends controversial 2014 budget measures as ‘justifiable and right’, \textit{Australian Broadcasting Corporation}, (9 December 2015); Lisa Cox, “‘You don't migrate to this country unless you want to join our team”: Tony Abbott renews push on national security laws’, \textit{Sydney Morning Herald} (18 August 2014).
First, these examples demonstrate two themes within Islamophobic beliefs in Australia: that Islam poses a safety threat, and that it is incompatible with Australia’s political culture. The former fear is based on peoples’ belief that the presence of Islam and Muslims in a country has a close or even necessary connection with terrorist attacks. The latter school of belief perceives Islam as a political threat to values like equality and secularism. This seems to be connected to the idea that Islam has a value system so foreign that Muslims ‘do not integrate into Australian society’. Islam is perceived as dangerous, archaic and ‘unAustralian’ to the point of being an existential threat.

Second, these examples reveal something about what fearful citizens believe about Australia. Earlier I said that my schema of Islamophobia as political fear revealed that the relevant belief is often oriented towards the nation itself, just as much as the ‘invasive other’. The cases above illuminate this: the speakers' Islamophobia appears motivated the belief that there is an Australian way of life, set of values and identity to which Islam poses a threat. Objections to the hijab, for example, are often made on the grounds that Australia is defined by its commitment to modern democratic values of freedom and equality. To believe that the hijab is a threat to Australian values suggests that one believes that Australia is strongly dedicated to equality for women and strict non-violence towards them. Finally, the idea that ‘they don’t integrate into our society’ suggests that Muslims are not already a part of our national identity.

These themes point to something more generalised about what people believe Australia as a “nation” to be. In A New Religious Intolerance, Nussbaum comments that Australia is among a series of liberal democracies characterised by political, rather than ethnic or cultural self-

57 EMC, ‘Reasons for Supporting Ban’.

identities. Australia’s identity, Nussbaum claims, is positively and openly shaped around our history of immigration and ‘shared goals and ideals, thus in a way that does not require homogeneity.’ On this, Nussbaum is mistaken. For much of its existence since British colonisation, Australia’s politicians very specifically cultivated national identity in racial and religious terms. Various iterations of the White Australia policy sought to ensure that Australia was a white, largely Christian nation by erasing Australia’s indigenous population, while also ensuring that those who entered the country were white, able-bodied and Christian. Various non-white minorities have in turn been the object of this cultural and political anxiety.

Islam is widely perceived as a threat to Australian culture and way of life. For some, this is because Australia is a nation ‘founded on Judaeo-Christian values’ with which Islam is incompatible. But all who oppose more open immigration policies do so because they conceive of ‘the nation’ in ethnic or racial terms. But these attitudes are conceived in cultural terms, where ‘culture’ seems to be varyingly defined in political, social and religious terms. This point about Australia’s history of self-identification along cultural and ethnic lines will later become crucial to my argument that, as a nation not conceived along political lines, Australia has a weak point for discriminatory, fear-mongering rhetoric to do harm.


EMC, ‘Ban on Muslim Immigration’; EMC, ‘Reasons for Supporting Ban’.

I said that in this section that I would provide an overview of the landscape of Islamophobia in Australia. We can see that political fear of Islam appears to stem from the belief that Islam is at best “unenlightened”, at worst a threat to Australian values, identity, and physical security. But what is it about this political fear that makes it problematic for a pluralist liberal democracy?

2.3 – The Belief Profile of Political Fear

My ultimate argument is that this kind of political fear is deeply problematic for liberal democracy and its stability because it is a narrowing and exclusionary emotion that corrupts citizens’ capacity to engage in communicative and cooperative democracy. Having established the nature of political fear and grounded this investigation in a real-world example, I now want to defend my starting contention that this sort of fear and its background beliefs are discriminatory. Once established, I will be able to more clearly show why fear is an unsustainable emotion in a liberal democracy: its impact on citizens and their communicative capacities precludes cooperative democratic participation.

Here I use the term ‘discrimination’ in the sense of prejudicial discrimination: negative differential attitudes towards or treatment of an individual, group or class on the basis of their group-based identity, whether that identity is real or perceived. The political fear of Islam and Muslims that I have so far canvassed is prejudicially discriminatory in two ways.

64 On this definition, perceiving a Sikh man to be Muslim and treating him negatively on the basis of that belief is discriminatory on two levels. On one, the man is being treated in a negatively based on his perceived group identity. On a second, mis-categorising the Sikh man as Muslim might itself be labelled discriminatory. Ironically enough, this is because someone makes an error of ‘discrimination’ in its other sense: distinguishing between different stimuli. Thinking that all Muslims wear cloth on their heads is a prejudiced and indiscriminate (in the latter sense) assumption about some ‘foreign-looking’ people, and is thereby prejudicially discriminatory.
First, it is grounded in a variety of discriminatory beliefs. Second, these beliefs lend themselves to discrimination in practice.

The beliefs I canvassed in section 2.2 exist on a spectrum of undue prejudice. Fear of Islam on the basis of perceived treatment of women is a fear based on prejudicial discrimination, for example. Though women are granted legal freedom and equality in Australia, there are clear inconsistencies in the objection to the burqa. Given that one woman a week in Australia dies at the hands of a male known to them, it is at best inconsistent to claim that Australia has a robust commitment to the non-oppression of women to which the hijab poses a threat. Further, as Nussbaum points out, it is hypocritical to consider the hijab oppressive and not object to other norms of female dress in Western cultures. To assume that Muslim women wear a head or face covering because a male forced them to, or out of beliefs that the female form is shameful, is to a) ignore the same facts about many non-Muslim women’s clothing choices and b) believe that something which is true of an oppressed subset of a group is inherent to the practice. The fear of Islam’s effect on Australia’s political culture for fear of inherent misogyny prejudicially discriminates against Islam.

Islamophobia is also discriminatory when one’s beliefs ascribe negative characteristics to individuals or a group based on negative stereotypes. All Muslims are simply not terrorists, and Islam is not inherently a violent religion. On the very unreasonable end, this fear is grounded in the belief that Islam is not a religion, but a front for a political ideology aimed at

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66 Nussbaum, The New Religious Intolerance, pp.125-132. Nussbaum mentions high heels, but perhaps a better example is the G-string, which is hard to defend on the basis of its artistic aesthetic. The G-string was invented by a man to maximally sexualise women in a public arena and now serves no purpose other than to reduce “panty lines”, presumably either because seeing the outline of women’s underwear or the contours of their fat deposits is unsightly or shameful. Ariel Levy, Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture, p. 142.
‘taking over’ Western nations. Proponents of this belief point to violence and oppression in other areas of the world, such as the Middle East, as evidence that Islam is anti-democratic. Others support this notion with invalid claims that the Qur’an prohibits democratic participation.67 Fear of a religion and its adherents based on stigmatisation extrapolated from subsets of a group is a discriminatory fear.

It goes without saying that prejudicial discrimination is antithetical to a pluralist liberal society. Discrimination distances, excludes and subordinates its victims, creating hierarchical societies in which mistreatment is legitimised and institutionalised.68 Discrimination advocates inequality that is antithetical to the basis of liberal democracy, and precludes citizens’ cooperation for common democratic ends. It involves a failure of eudaimonic attitude that makes it difficult for citizens to see their fate in or alongside the fate of Muslim Australians.69 Because discrimination and fear are both grounded in exclusion, they feed on each other. when citizens fail to overcome difference and distance, and separation and discrimination take hold, fear of the Other is self-perpetuating.70

So far I have provided an account of political fear of Islam, its common belief-profiles, and shown those beliefs to be discriminatory. I now turn to considering the behavioural profile of political fear of Islam in order to provide a fuller picture of the damage done by fear in a


68 Nussbaum, Political Emotions, p. 122.

69 Ibid, pp. 121-123.

70 Ibid, p. 338.
liberal democracy. This will take us one step closer to appreciating why fear-mongering political rhetoric is objectionable.

2.4 – The Behavioural Profile of Political Fear

Political fear is especially problematic given its potential range of associated behaviours that undermine a democratic ethos committed to basic liberal values, such as the equality and freedoms of fellow citizens. In this section, we will return to the behavioural profile of fear outlined in section 2.1 to illuminate the connection between unreasonable fear of minorities and discrimination. I find specific interest in the threat posed to pluralist democracies by fear’s relation to epistemic injustice. These connections will begin to demonstrate why fear-mongering rhetoric is antithetical to the project of cultivating a functioning democratic ethos.

Recall the behavioural profile of fear outlined in 2.1. Fear’s behaviours range from avoidance to paralysis and aggressive self-defence. Just as we saw with fear of whales, unless citizens are very good at tempering their discriminatory beliefs, fear of Islam will likely manifest as discriminatory behaviours towards Islam and Muslims. At a societal level, fear’s behaviours take the form of laws, institutions and social practices that target a group or class of people for negative differential treatment. These can include exclusionary immigration policies, the banning of religious practices such as wearing the burqa, and prejudicial profiling of a group. The call for a royal commission into whether Islam is a religion is an extreme example of this.71 On an individual level, fear of a group can present in a wide range of behaviours. We can imagine, for example, someone who becomes physically frozen when she serves a woman

71 One Nation, ‘Policies; Islam’.
wearing a hijab at her place of work because of her background fear of and hostility toward Islam. The ‘paralysing self-focus’ leads to a ‘narrowness in the way we construct our circle of concern’. This in turn can result in errors of compassion and therefore social and institutional marginalisation of the feared minority.

Aggressive fear-based behaviours are even more destructive to social cohesion and a democratic ethos. Just as someone’s fright might induce them to lash out at the dark shadow in the ocean, fear can and often does induce people to violent behavioural responses. Hateful and violent speech and actions directly undermine minorities’ freedom and equality and creates a public space in which their equal status as citizens is doubted. Groups such as the United Patriots Front and Reclaim Australia speak to their social media followers in combative, ‘us vs. them’ language, warning Australians to ‘steel yourselves and prepare, unite under the flag of your Nation’ against Muslims. Incidents of outright violence, aggression and verbal abuse toward Muslims are not uncommon in Australia.

There is a further range of fear-based behaviours that I want to argue are particularly problematic for a functioning liberal democracy. They are the behaviours that Miranda Fricker and José Medina have called epistemic vices and injustices. I will proceed to argue through the rest of this thesis that citizens’ free, equal and meaningful political discourse is

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73 Ibid, p. 265.


quelled by the epistemic vices and injustices of political fear and its rhetoric. This is an aspect of fear’s problematic nature that Nussbaum has not addressed. This contribution extends her work into the realm of epistemic injustice and resistance, while also combining it with contemporary speech act theory where helpful and appropriate.

We can get an even deeper understanding of fear if we acknowledge that its discriminatory behaviours are sustained and reinforced by poor epistemic practices. Epistemic vices ‘are deep and serious flaws in epistemic character that limit the subject’s learning capacities and contributions to the pursuit of knowledge.’ Fricker and Medina point out that often, these failings reflect and reinforce other forms of discrimination, drawing on existing imbalances of authority and stigmatising heuristics. I contend that this is true of and crucial to discriminatory fear of Islam and Muslims. Political fear thus results in several politically relevant epistemic behaviours. Medina speaks of epistemic vices he calls object-level and meta-level blindness about Others. These can come about in a variety of ways; laziness, lack of exposure to the group one is blind to, or prejudicial refusal to learn about that group. I think when it comes to fear’s epistemic vices, the latter cause is most likely. Let me provide examples of Islamophobic beliefs to explain object- and meta-level blindness more fully.

An example of object-level blindness caused by fear of Islam would be the perception that all Muslim women wear a headscarf because a male relative forced them to; it is ignorance about a detail pertaining to Muslims. Meta-level blindness, however, is displayed in data that says the majority of non-Muslim Australians grossly misestimate the number of Muslims in...
Australia.\textsuperscript{80} They are almost entirely blind to the groups around them.\textsuperscript{81} When Islamophobic beliefs take the form of such blindness, the epistemic failing can be diagnosed as a symptom of fear’s harms upon the fearful agent \textit{qua} knower.

They are also harms against the subject of the fear. An example of this presents itself in the discrediting of Muslim women as speakers based on the idea that they are not allowed to speak their own minds.\textsuperscript{82} This is a poor epistemic behaviour caused by fear’s self-centring effects on our cognitive practices. It is also an example of what Fricker identifies as a \textit{testimonial injustice} – the injustice perpetrated against an individual \textit{qua} knower when, because of prejudice, hearers afford a speaker less credibility than they deserve.\textsuperscript{83} I will return to the injustice of this later on, but for now we should note that this injustice reinforces the epistemic failings of fear. When our ignorance and poor epistemic practices are thus compounded, it can lead to the formation of ‘cognitive lacunae’ – capacious holes in one’s knowledge – about those one perceives to be a threat.\textsuperscript{84} Letting one’s beliefs go unchecked by authoritative sources – such as Muslims themselves – ‘results in an unavoidable, mundane accumulation of oversights, errors, biased stereotypes and distortions.’\textsuperscript{85} But it can also result in an inability to

\textsuperscript{80} EMC, ‘Concern About Muslims (Pre-information)’.

\textsuperscript{81} Medina, \textit{The Epistemology of Resistance}, p. 154.


\textsuperscript{83} Fricker, \textit{Epistemic Injustice}, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{84} Medina, \textit{The Epistemology of Resistance}, p. 101, pp. 149-154.

\textsuperscript{85} \textit{Ibid}, p. 32.
identify others’ relevance to our own lives and circle of concern. In Nussbaum’s terms, this is a failure of eudaimonic epistemic practice.

When these epistemic failings are reproduced throughout a community, fear can ‘damage the social knowledge available and harm the chances for epistemic improvement of the subject’s community.’ Such discriminatory ignorance and close-mindedness precludes the sympathetic tendencies and inclusive social values required for a functioning democratic ethos. Given fear’s cognitive nature, our epistemic practices are especially warped by prejudicial fear. In an unfortunate cycle, such fear is ‘augmented by… inward-looking exclusionary attitudes that [deny] fellowship.’ Nussbaum notes that fear is ‘very recalcitrant to learning and moral thinking,’ but does not extend this thought to an analysis of fear’s epistemic vices and injustices, such as I have done here. Understanding fear’s damaging epistemic components will shed light on why fear-mongering rhetoric is damaging to citizens’ discursive capacities.

In this section I have shown that when fear dominates our thinking, it precludes our ability to extend basic freedoms and equality to all. We should want to consider, therefore, what role the state plays in cultivating or ameliorating such fear. In the next section, I do this by turning to the role of fear-mongering political rhetoric in liberal democracy. I want to show that this

86 Ibid, p. 154-161. I also wrote on this issue in partial completion of the Bachelor of Arts (Honours) for Dr. Moira Gatens’ seminar titled ‘Reimagining Epistemology’. In that paper I developed and advocated a social connection model of epistemic responsibility to overcome structurally cultivated epistemic blindness, using the work of Iris Marion Young and the test case of the global garment manufacturing industry. It was titled ‘In the Thick of It; A Social Connection Model of Epistemic Responsibility’.

87 Medina, The Epistemology of Resistance, p. 31. This point will become especially relevant in section four where I engage with ‘freedom of speech’ principles.

88 Nussbaum, Political Emotions, p. 338.


90 Ibid, p. 338.
kind of discriminatory, fear-mongering speech leads to an array of harms and injustices against citizens, and that these harms are mediated by political fear. In other words, I want to contend that there is an intimate connection between the belief profile of political fear, and a host of speech-based phenomena that undermine the communicative environment crucial for the functioning of a liberal democracy. Specifically, I contribute to this field of political philosophy by arguing that fear-mongering rhetoric undermines citizens’ capacity to communicate equally and meaningfully in the realm of political discourse. Fear fatally undermines the project of cultivating a functioning democratic ethos.

THREE – FEAR-MONGERING SPEECH

What does fear mongering speech do? What are its effects? The answers to these questions largely turn on the authority with which politicians speak. Considering these questions reveals the important role that political leaders can play in the emotional well-being of a nation and its commitment to a functioning democratic ethos. I draw on the work of contemporary speech act theorists to identify the speech-based phenomena that distribute and perpetuate fear’s damaging properties. This will get us one step closer to seeing how rhetoric actually impedes citizens’ free speech. It silences minorities, reinforces discrimination, and compromises citizens’ ability to effectively communicate with one another.

3.1 – Speaking with Authority

By virtue of their social position as democratically elected officials, politicians in liberal democracies occupy a place of ‘positional authority’. Part of this authority is a privileged

platform from which to speak. Caroline West has demonstrated that the ability to easily and widely distribute one’s speech and have it ‘attended to and considered by others’ is essential to having one’s speech successfully do what one wants.\textsuperscript{92} Distribution is easy if not guaranteed; a politician in the modern media landscape of Twitter, 24/7 news broadcasts, and live video streaming can address their constituents at any moment.\textsuperscript{93} On top of that, we collectively grant speaking power to politicians because we appraise their speech as relevant to the success of our nation and responsible to their constituents. This is why politicians’ speech also receives significant consideration.\textsuperscript{94}

Achieving minimal consideration of one’s speech also requires being taken seriously enough to have one’s words count for something. Fricker points out that as hearers, we make ‘spontaneous credibility judgements’ all the time that determine the authority we afford speakers.\textsuperscript{95} I contend that even where we don’t attribute a high amount of credibility to a politician we disagree with, reaching political office confers enough credibility on the politician to have their speech count in the public discursive environment – the ‘national conversation’.\textsuperscript{96} This is because all democratically elected politicians derive a measure of credibility from having a threshold number of citizens vote for them. George Brandis (and others) have appealed to this credibility to defend Senator Hanson’s right to say discriminatory and fear-mongering things. She is perceived as credible by virtue of having

\begin{footnotes}
\item[92] Caroline West, ‘Words That Silence? Freedom of Expression and Racist Hate Speech’ in Maitra and McGowan[Eds], p. 245.
\item[93] Some, including the editor-at-large of The Australian, have claimed that Senator Hanson, by virtue of her controversial nature, was the beneficiary of an excess of free media time during the 2016 federal election campaign. Other media outlets admitted to having paid her for her appearances. Media Watch, ‘Episode 24: Press Play the Pauline Game’, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, (11 July 2016).
\item[95] Fricker, \textit{Epistemic Injustice}, p. 17.
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received the votes of ‘hundreds of thousands of Australian electors’. Hearers are not alone in using this marker of authority. Politicians themselves draw upon the epistemic privilege of political office to claim credibility.

It’s worth noting that some politicians do not solely rely on the authority inherent to political office. The kind of speaker I am interested in here derives a large part of their testimonial credibility from unconventional markers of expertise in politics. Hanson, for example, relies on the fact that she isn’t ingratiated with the political classes and their norms of discourse to cultivate credibility with relevant hearers. She is seen as ‘real’ and ‘one of us’, eschewing ‘political correctness’ to speak uncomfortable truths.

Even where citizens do not automatically perceive the speaker to be credible, their speech often receives derived credibility when it is licensed as legitimate political discourse by more credible speakers. When Senator George Brandis (as Attorney-General, a quintessentially authoritative speaker) claims that Hanson should be listened to, he licenses her speech as credible political discourse. It is framed as one legitimate opinion among many and she is thus in a position to claim that Australians have cause to fear Islam. As we have seen, such claims are discriminatory and discrimination itself is antithetical to liberal democracy. But in addition to adding the content of the speech to our national conversation, failing to reject fear-mongering as a style of rhetoric adds that style of rhetoric to our norms of political discourse. Senator Brandis qualified his defence of Senator Hanson’s speech by objecting to

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97 Brandis [Interview], Radio National.

98 David Lewis, “‘She’s One of Us’: meet the voters who shunned the major parties in favour of Pauline Hanson”, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, (19 August 2016).


its content. He did not, however, object to its mode of expression. This both confers credibility on fear-mongering as a mode of political discussion, and licenses fear as a tolerable public emotion. In the next section I will further unpack why this is unsustainable in a liberal democracy.

Even if Senator Hanson’s epistemic authority is unconventional, what matters for the felicity of politicians’ speech is whether it is ‘authoritative in the domain that counts’ and ‘authoritative for the hearers that count.’ Given her recent electoral success, we can assume that her speech is authoritative with a significant enough number of relevant hearers. Her success demonstrates that positional and epistemic authority gives politicians’ speech a greater chance of achieving its ends. In this case, Senator Hanson has a better chance of convincing voters that they have reason to fear Islam.

3.2 – Why Fear-Mongering Speech Is Problematic

Contemporary speech act theorists have shown us that because speech takes place in contexts of power, authority and prejudice, ‘people manage to do all kinds of things with words.’ In this section, I assess what discriminatory, fear-mongering speech does to a liberal democracy; what sorts of things these words do. I argue that these words define the nation and what threatens it in such a way that minorities are silenced, oppressed and precluded from equally participating in political discourse and the shaping of our national identity. Further, it legitimises fear as a political emotion and fear-mongering as a legitimate contribution to

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political discourse. Because of fear’s effects on our society and citizens’ democratic communication, I argue that this should not be accepted in the name of ‘freedom of speech’.

We don’t *instinctively* believe the kinds of things that make us perceive threats to the nation. Rather, we ‘learn from our society what is helpful and harmful’ to it ‘in ways that go well beyond evolutionary biology, and we then attach our fear mechanism to that conception.’ As Nussbaum points out, ‘national identity is a deliberate construct’ and political rhetoric plays a significant role in that construction. This is why prejudicial fear-mongering speech is problematic. It aims to define the nation as P and a particular group as ~P, or as ‘a threat to P’. It does so by ‘constructing the perception of danger where it does not’ actually exist.

Consider the following example. In her first press conference after the 2016 Federal Election, Pauline Hanson was explicit in defining the nation and what threatens it. ‘We are a Christian country,’ she declared. As a part of ‘our values, our way of life, our culture’ (an ambiguously defined P) ‘you don't have a full burqa’ and you ‘don't keep putting up mosques.’ (~P). Senator Hanson went further than defining Islam as a negation of ‘Australia’. She claimed that either the practice of Islam already in Australia, or else by increased Muslim immigration, ‘will actually destroy our culture and our way of life’ (threat-to-P).

This act of defining Australia as P and Islam as threat-to-P constructs Islam and its practice as something to be feared, automatically excluding Muslims from the Australian national identity. It thereby ranks and subordinates them as less legitimate citizens. When politicians


104 Ibid, p.322.

105 The following comments are taken from that press conference. Media Watch, ‘Episode 24: Press Play the Pauline Game’.
claim that increased Muslim migration will increase the occurrence of terrorist attacks in Australia, ‘the speaker aims to mark their target as a terrorist and an undesirable, and in so doing, to rank her as inferior to others.’ This is problematic regardless of its effects on citizens or their behaviour. Fear-mongering from a place of authority undermines the public virtues to which a liberal society is supposedly committed: openness, toleration, compassion and publicly accepted standards of political discourse. Discrimination, meanwhile, is by definition a rejection of the principles of liberty and equality for all. To encourage fear and discrimination is to reject the kind of ethos that I explored in Section 1. But fear-mongering political rhetoric is especially problematic because it has the authority to be heard, taken seriously, and therefore to shape citizens’ beliefs.

When politicians use their privileged speech to portray a minority as a threat to the nation, and it is accepted into our discursive community as a legitimate style of speaking, fear is normalised within public political discourse. The concern here is that if fear-mongering is licensed as a mode of political discussion, it will incite fear-based behaviours because fear has ‘been made legitimate in [the relevant] arena of activity’: political discourse. I have already mentioned polls from 2016 in which 49% of respondents were inclined to restrict Muslim immigration to Australia. This poll was reported as suggesting that Senator Hanson’s anti-Islamic rhetoric had an impact on public perceptions of the Islam’s connection with terrorism, and its compatibility with Australian political culture. Restricting Muslim immigration would be an extreme avoidance-type fear behaviour indeed. Similarly, around


107 Langton points out that ‘the illocutionary act of legitimating something’ is distinct from ‘the perlocutionary act of making people believe that something is legitimate.’ Langton, ‘Speech and Unspeakable Acts’, p. 303.

108 Ibid.

the time of the Abbott Government's call for a ban on women wearing burqas into Parliament House, aggressive, fear-based behaviours seemed to increase in the public sphere. Media outlets and Islamic community organisations noted increased reports of discriminatory speech acts and behaviours against Muslim women wearing Islamic headdress, including attempts to pull it off them. These examples suggest that politicians’ repeated acts of defining Islam as a threat has a very real impact on citizens’ fear – or perhaps at least on their willingness to express their fear openly.

The effects I have so far considered have largely been on individual citizens’ attitudes toward Islam and Australia. But discriminatory, fear-mongering political speech can also create fearful, exclusionary social imaginaries about our national identity. Following Aristotle’s work in *Rhetoric*, Nussbaum points out that political rhetoric is crucial in shaping social imaginaries and therefore emotional attitudes toward the nation. Political classes’ conceptions of the nation and what is good for it significantly contribute to the social imaginary – ‘the repository of images and scripts that become collectively shared’ in a group or society – and thereby play a role in shaping citizens’ own attitudes about nationhood and identity. When politicians espouse fear-mongering definitions like ‘Islam is a threat to our culture and way of life’ repeatedly, the social imaginary itself can become one in which the nation is exclusionary and anti-liberal. Ideas like “Muslims do not integrate well” become widely assumed as background knowledge.

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114 EMC, ‘Ban on Muslim Immigration’. 
Earlier I argued that political fear of Muslims is objectionable on the grounds that defining Muslims as a threat to nation also renders them *non-credible* on issues of national identity, security and political culture. When Muslims suffer this epistemic injustice, citizens’ full democratic participation and discussion is quelled. On this issue, West, Langton and Fricker dovetail. Their work can be combined to show how the silencing of Muslims is an injustice borne out of (and perpetuating) epistemic injustice, *perpetrated by more powerful speakers’ fear-mongering speech*. When a speaker suffers the testimonial injustice of a credibility deficit described by Fricker, she is afforded less credibility than she deserves because of a hearer’s prejudice, namely, fear-based discrimination. West refers to this kind of injustice as a ‘consideration failure’: ‘the audience grasps what the speaker means to say perfectly well, but ignores it or dismisses it out of hand because they believe the speaker is not the kind of person worth listening to.’ Following MacKinnon and Langton, I would argue that this is an act of silencing Muslims. When Muslims are marked as a threat to national security and identity, they are rendered *non-credible* on those subjects, and therefore incapable of speaking in meaningful ways. “We don’t endorse violent terrorism”, for example, is not taken as testimony against P: “Islam is violent.” The injustice of this silencing lies in its *prejudicial* nature. Muslims are precluded from ‘receiving the fair hearing required to challenge these attitudes’ because others’ discriminatory beliefs about Islam render them less credible than is warranted.

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116 This silencing argument contends that by ranking women, pornography renders some of their speech acts unspeakable in the sense that their speech is precluded from performing certain actions (consenting, or declining consent, for example). See: Langton, p. 299.

117 West, ‘Words that Silence?’, p. 245.
Let me clarify this with a real example. On an episode of QandA, Randa Abdel-Fattah made a series of comments about the connection between the history of Western intervention in the Middle-East and anti-Western Islamic radicalisation. Soon after, her local Federal MP sent an e-mail newsletter to his constituents condemning her comments as extreme ‘anti-Western and anti-Australian conspiracy theories.’ Her comments expressed a not-uncommon view that has been expressed by non-Muslim commentators, and yet it was perceived as a threat. Speaking as a Muslim woman, Abdel-Fattah observed, her ‘very agency and ability to speak is questioned’, based on prejudicial ideas about what it is to be a ‘moderate’ Muslim. Abdel-Fattah’s ability to meaningfully and equally participate in national discourse was undermined when her speech read as extremist and ‘anti-Australian’. This instance demonstrates that fear for one’s nation can result in a series of epistemic injustices against minorities, who are rendered incapable of equally participating in national discourse.

When groups within a society are unable to contribute to political discourse in meaningful ways, our collective self-imagining as a nation can become increasingly constructed in the absence of their contributions. It therefore becomes easier to frame them as a threat, and to manipulate society’s fear of that threat. Discriminatory, fear-mongering speech thus ‘functions to reproduce and reinforce’ citizens’ fear, hostility and contempt toward Muslims. At the same time, fear-mongering rhetoric protects such discrimination ‘from challenge by sapping

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119 Abdel-Fattah, ‘What I Couldn’t Say’.


121 Listening to Abdel-Fattah’s speech, it is hard to think she is unaware of Langton’s argument about illocutionary disablement. Abdel-Fattah, ‘What I Couldn’t Say’.

122 West, ‘Words that Silence?’, p. 245.
the power of minority speech to contest it. Muslims are silenced by fear-mongering speech, and thereby not afforded an equal position in political discourse, leaving a dangerous space in society for fear and exclusion to reinforce each other.

In other words, politicians’ fear-mongering speech has the consequence of rendering Muslims less credible than they are, by virtue of fear’s epistemically narrowing effects on non-Muslim citizens. Muslims as a result are unable to speak in ways that might work against such prejudice and fear, reinforcing their marginalisation and exclusion from the nation’s political discourse and self-imagining. So while politicians are able to achieve widespread consideration by virtue of their social position, Muslims, as victims of testimonial injustice, cannot use their words to do the things they intend, such as define themselves as part of the national identity or testify that their religion is not a threat to our pluralist democracy.

So far I have demonstrated how political rhetoric goes about defining Australia as P and Islam as a threat-to-P. When this is done, and licensed, by authoritative speakers, it can shape society’s social imaginary in ways that convince citizens that Islam poses a threat to Australian political culture. Further, defining Muslims as a threat to that national identity renders them non-credible speakers on topics of national identity and security. They are rendered unequal speakers in the national political discourse. These harms perpetrated against citizens when politicians speak in discriminatory, fear-mongering ways are the result and the support mechanism of political fear. My contribution to the turn to ethics has been to extend Nussbaum’s account of political fear to a specific consideration of the harms perpetrated against citizens, and liberal democracy, by fear-mongering speech. This kind of rhetoric

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123 Ibid.

manipulates the self-centred and short-sighted nature of fear’s behavioural and belief profiles. When it does this, it divides societies and damages the epistemic and discursive community that exists within a liberal democracy. The damage fear does to our communicative environments is magnified by fear’s epistemically stunting effects on non-Muslim citizens; cognitive biases and lacunae take hold, and Muslims are further excluded from our sense of self as a nation.

In this section I have largely been considering the effects of fear-mongering political speech on individual and social fear of Islam, and why these effects are problematic. In the remainder of this section, I will briefly identify two more significant, and somewhat less abstract, consequences of fear-mongering rhetoric. This will get us to a point where we can begin weighing up the value of this style of political speech against what it does to citizens, their discourse, and the foundations of a functioning democracy.

One significant concern about fear-mongering speech is that, by virtue of legitimising discrimination against minorities, it can increase the prevalence of the discriminatory behaviours I outlined in section 2.4. Determining whether this is the case is largely an empirical question. In the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Arab and Muslim Australians reported the impression that ‘members of the wider community felt that it was acceptable to engage in verbal abuse toward them, in part because political leaders were also doing so.’ If politicians are successful in causing fear of a minority group, it seems likely that fear will be legitimised as a public emotion and as a mode of political expression. We

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125 Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, pp. 122-123.

should not discount the possibility that fear-mongering rhetoric has the real potential to cause further discrimination.

I earlier demonstrated that fear-mongering rhetoric can silence Muslims by discrediting their attempts to meaningfully contribute to political discourse. But discriminatory, fear-mongering rhetoric can silence minorities in less abstract terms. Matsuda describes the psychological and physiological impact of hate speech on victims as ‘devastating’. Victims internalise discriminatory depictions directed at them, feelings of shame and non-belonging, in turn leading to a sense of dispossession and alienation from their society. While discriminatory, fear-mongering rhetoric is not hate speech, it is difficult to imagine how an Australian Muslim could avoid the psychological and epistemic effects of controversial and much-reported politicians’ fear-mongering rhetoric. Matsuda’s observation that ‘victims become stateless when their government does not come to their defense but actively protects the people alienating them from their own society’ supports my point here. These consequences are likely be intensified by a severe magnitude when a government is the source of minorities’ marginalisation. This kind of silencing is part of the ‘psychic tax’ paid by minorities for having been defined as a threat to their own society. Political fear is the perpetrator of minorities’ subordination, including as speakers in a nation’s political discourse, and it is distributed by fear-mongering political rhetoric.


129 Ibid, p. 25.

130 Ibid, p. 18.
Clarifying the effects of discriminatory, fear-mongering speech on citizens and society equips us with a better understanding of the stakes when we get to the central problem of this thesis: whether such speech should be defended or discouraged. The novelty of my contribution in this thesis has been to pinpoint the specific cognitive and behavioural characteristics of fear as the objectionable force behind fear-mongering speech and its consequences for a liberal democracy. In particular, I’ve highlighted fear’s epistemic vices and injustices as the crucible of fear’s corrosive effects on democratic participation and stability.

Once we pay attention to the emotional engine of fear-mongering rhetoric, we can behind to ask questions about its further effects. I turn to these in the next section. What is starting to emerge is a strong connection between political fear and the destruction of citizens’ communicative capacities and environments, and therefore healthy and stable democratic participation.

FOUR – BALANCING INTERESTS

In this final chapter, I consider a number of arguments made in defence of discriminatory, fear-mongering rhetoric in Australia’s political discourse. These claim that we should withstand and even listen to Islamophobic political speech in name of being a tolerant society committed to freedom of expression and democratic representation. I argue against this. Political fear’s caustic nature means that this speech does not achieve the benefits promised by liberal freedom of speech principles. Rather, defending this privileged style of speech requires sacrificing citizens’ communicative freedoms and capacities in a way that should make us deeply uncomfortable.
So far I've mostly discussed the harms done to people by fear-mongering rhetoric. Objections of this sort have historically proven unpersuasive to free speech theorists of a certain bent, who hear reports of harms and silencing to speakers and reply that these harms are not significant enough to trump the principle of "free speech".\textsuperscript{131} I now want to consider a second species of harm that may prove more persuasive to these people; the harm done not to \textit{speakers} but to the very communicative environment that ought to justify a free speech principle in the first place.

\subsection{4.1 – For Truth and Progress’ Sake}

I give prominence to John Stuart Mill's defence of free speech because variations of his argument have been employed in Australian discourse to defend politicians' ‘right’ to express discriminatory and fear-mongering views.\textsuperscript{132} Mill's is certainly a powerful defence of \textit{citizens'} right to freedom of expression. But it's not clear that politicians' discriminatory, fear-mongering speech results in the epistemic and social benefits Mill idealised. In the previous section, I explored some effects of such speech on citizens. Here I'll show that those effects serve as evidence of a broader harm at play: significant damage to our epistemic and discursive environment as a nation.

Free speech theoretically allows for free discussion. Mill argued that this in turn facilitates societies' greater capacity to discover truth and opens us up to the social and moral progress

\textsuperscript{131} This is a broad school of thought perhaps epitomised by Ronald Dworkin.

\textsuperscript{132} Brandis [Interview]; Editorial, "Pauline Hanson's One Nation Should Be Heard - and Rebutted" \textit{The Age} (5 July 2016); Rachel Baxendale, ‘Federal Election 2016: Hanson Must Be Heard, Says Stan Grant’, \textit{The Australian Online} (7 July 2016).
associated with greater epistemic flourishing. Through the clash of opinions, we find opportunities to correct others, and where that is not possible, we at least refine our own reasons for holding our views. We enjoy the epistemic benefits of regular and robust debate.

This defence of free speech as a path to epistemic and social progress operates on the assumption that speakers are equally situated in political discourse, and that they are treated as such. In the vein of Mill, it is often said that the antidote to objectionable speech is “more speech”. But talking about speech in this way obfuscates the fact that speech can ‘deeply and grievously wound’ individuals and societies. In reality, “more speech” doesn’t happen. Minorities are not able to contribute to national discourse on an equal platform, as I demonstrated in section 3. Fear-mongering speech silences and marginalises minorities as knowers and speakers to such an extent that they do not receive a fair hearing in the national conversation. They cannot, therefore, respond to discriminatory speech or participate in political discourse on an equal footing. It seems unlikely that we will reap the social and epistemic benefits of debate when some groups are prevented from speaking in meaningful ways that would constitute free democratic discussion.

Mill’s defence of free speech is predicated on a second assumption that publicly justifiable reasons are being given for peoples’ claims, and that people are engaged in coherent discourse. But discriminatory fear-mongering rhetoric doesn’t engage in a practice of broadly

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acceptable reason-giving. Without supporting reasons, Senator Lambie claimed that a violent form of Sharia law is being rolled out in Australian communities by ‘maniacs’ who will rape and murder ‘until every woman in Australia wears a burka[sic].’ When Senator Lambie’s misunderstanding of Sharia law was pointed out to her, she reiterated her original statements without acknowledging error or justifying her claims. We can disagree with Senator Lambie, point out her lack of reasons, and provide our own to the contrary. But if she does not agree that reason-giving is essential to public discourse, these efforts will have questionable effect on either her or us. They will do little to help us access ‘the truth’ of the matter. Senator Lambie appeared to either fail to consider the reasons provided to her, or refused to accept publicly justifiable reason-giving as an essential background assumption of our political discursive environment. Whichever is true, we do not achieve the epistemic and social progress that we try to protect when we defend free democratic discourse. This is because the epistemic vices that fear induces in individuals cause a severe divergence of discursive standards. I will return to this, my final point, shortly.

No future state of epistemic or social flourishing is guaranteed when we are not engaging in epistemically beneficial reason-giving, or when some speakers cannot be heard. Tolerating politicians’ discriminatory, fear-mongering speech requires ‘that we endure whatever pain [their] speech inflicts for the sake of a future whose emergence we can only take on faith.’ Part of that pain is the chilling effects of political fear on our communities’ speech: silencing citizens’ meaningful speech and ability to exchange ideas free from epistemic distortion and injustice.

137 Greg Jennett, ‘Jacqui Lambie says sharia supporters are ‘maniacs’ who will rape and murder ‘until every woman in Australia wears a burka’, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, [30 October 2014].

138 Latika Bourke, ‘Jacqui Lambie says Islamic law involves terrorism as she stands firm on burqa ban’ Sydney Morning Herald (September 21 2014).

4.2 – Democratic Expression

Another common defence of discriminatory, fear-mongering political speech is the idea that it is a non-negotiable fact of democratic representation. Senator Brandis defended Hanson’s comments about Islam by pointing out that ‘the point of view she represents is a point of view supported by hundreds of thousands of the Australian people and they are entitled to have their views respected.’ People make this argument because we value citizens’ democratic expression as the backbone of democracy. The greater the representation of citizens’ views in government, the greater the integrity of our democracy.

There are two preliminary comments to be made about why this reason for valuing freedom of speech does not apply to politicians’ discriminatory and fear-mongering speech acts. First of all, opposing fear-mongering rhetoric isn’t an attempt to limit citizens’ speech, the right to express one’s views to political representatives, or the entitlement to be listened to and represented in parliament. It is a comment only on a certain type of speech by a certain type of speaker. Second, there are ways for citizens’ views to be represented without politicians engaging in speech that is corrosive to liberal democracy. Discriminatory, fear-mongering political speech is a style of rhetoric. Its content can conceivably be expressed without speaking in ways that discriminate or manipulate a corrosive emotion from a privileged platform (‘My constituents have reported to me that they are feeling…’). Further, as Stanley Fish points out; the only places in which people can sound off without consequence are artificially cordoned off spaces. In our parliamentary democracy, we have created such a space for politicians: parliament, where their speech is protected by parliamentary privilege. There are both ways

140 Brandis [interview], Radio National.

141 Fish, ‘There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech’, p. 106.
and places of honouring citizens’ views – even the more anti-democratic ones – without performing and propagating acts of discrimination and subversion oneself.

More substantially, I would point out that valuing speech as a means to democratic expression is the reason we don’t actually protect absolute freedom of speech. In Australia, no one has the right to discriminate against others on the basis of group-based identity, because this comes into conflict with other citizens’ democratic participation. Because speech does things and takes place within contexts of power and privilege, ‘sooner or later, you will come to a point when you will decide that some forms of speech do not further but endanger’ the purpose of democratic expression.\footnote{We value certain standards of public discourse in part because they ensure that all citizens get a voice in the national conversation. Discriminatory, fear-mongering speech rejects those standards and marginalises and even silences the input of minority groups. In short, discriminatory fear and its rhetoric ‘exclude minorities from participating in the contemplation of public issues because their concerns are discounted by the majority and because they have been demoralised by repeated victimisation.’\footnote{If we accept this consequence, we are prioritising a corrosive and anti-democratic mode of speaking over minorities’ equal democratic expression.}}

4.3 – Harms

One justification for restricting speech is the ‘harm principle’.\footnote{One justification for restricting speech is the ‘harm principle’.\footnote{In modern liberal democracies, it has been interpreted as a restriction on speech that directly incites violence or 144 }} In modern liberal democracies, it has been interpreted as a restriction on speech that directly incites violence or
hate. But because all speech does things, harm is not only caused by “fighting words”. In this last section, I consider a second class of harms caused by Australian politicians’ discriminatory, fear-mongering speech: harms to citizens’ ability to have the democratic conversations that freedom of speech principles try to protect. I conclude that these harms should not be accepted as long-term collateral for the short-term ‘benefit’ of protecting a corrosive and avoidable mode of speech.

4.3.1 – Tangible harms to minorities

I have already outlined the landscape of harm inflicted upon Muslims in Australia by fear-mongering rhetoric. If we license such speech, we are prioritising a style of political rhetoric over minorities’ rights, speech, and wellbeing. In any society grounded on citizens’ equal liberties, equal rights and ability to speak freely, this should be cause for deep concern. Yet pointing out harms to minorities has traditionally failed to convince those committed to a broad interpretation of freedom of speech principles. I therefore return to considering another category of harms perpetrated by fear-mongering speech that may be more convincing to those who strive to protect citizens’ ability to speak freely, and meaningfully.

4.3.2 – Damage to Discursive Community and Democratic Ethos

The turn to ethics within political philosophy aims to find a way of securing citizens’ commitment to fundamental liberal values and virtues, and a political culture of inclusion, compassion and care for the nation. In this final section, I argue that the overriding — and perhaps most significant — objection to fear-mongering speech is the trauma done to citizens’ democratic discursive environments by political fear. Licensing fear-mongering rhetoric does
not protect freedom of speech for citizens’ sake, but fatally wounds citizens’ capacity to communicate effectively enough to collaboratively care for the nation.

First, this thesis has explored a variety of ways in which Islamophobic political speech silences Muslims by preventing their speech from doing things available to other citizens. Their words cannot act as legitimate contribution to political discourse and imaginings of Australian identity, for example. When Muslims’ ability to testify about national identity and welfare is undermined in this way, they suffer a testimonial injustice that renders them unequal speakers in the national conversation. Fear, and its propagation through authoritative political rhetoric, silences some citizens’ speech is thereby suppressed, if not silenced. In other words: fear-mongering rhetoric functions to suppress, not protect, citizens’ speech.145 We should object to this given that it is citizens, not politicians, whose democratic voices we aim to protect.

There is a second way in which political fear undermines citizens’ freedom of expression: by fracturing our discursive community beyond a point of meaningful democratic communication. When we reflect on the effects of fear as culminating in this foundational harm, we can see why fear-mongering rhetoric seems to polarise and disable citizens’ political discourse. Fish observes that ‘freedom [of speech] has never been general and has always been understood against the background of an originary exclusion that gives it meaning.’146 The functioning of democratic political discourse is predicated on public and mutual assumption of a set of basic norms like “citizens’ speech is paramount”, “discrimination is wrong”, and “politicians should give good reasons for the things they say, because they are

146 Fish, ‘There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech’, p.104.
representing sovereign citizens.” Generally, one must accept these norms in order to be taken seriously as a speaker within a society that is committed to citizens’ sovereignty, freedom and equality. But sometimes when someone rejects these norms, their speech still manages to find an accepting community.

Sometimes this happens because speakers are licensed by other speakers and hearers, as seen in Section 3.1. Their speech is thereby either added to the background assumptions of our discursive environment, or accepted by another discursive community within our society, whose norms of discourse and treatment of minority groups are antithetical to our own. This is the other part of the ‘discourse’ problem in Australia. For a long time, fear of others was the foundation stone of Australian political discourse and identity-based exclusion the backbone of Australia’s self-identification. The phenomenon of politicians saying discriminatory, fear-mongering things has not long been among the ‘originary exclusions’ that give our political discourse meaning. Rejection of group-based discrimination has developed recently, and inconsistently. Further, as noted as several junctions throughout this thesis, Australian political culture is yet to settle on a conception of ‘the nation’ — i.e., what it is we are trying to protect — as distinct from racial, religious and ethnic identities.

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147 Even if we reject the most famous account of public reason, Rawls’, we can minimally accept that the nature of democracy depends on giving adequate reasons for our political claims and actions to others with whom we exist in cooperative society, and that our public discourse is bound within the basic normative commitments of our society: citizens’ equalities of freedom, dignity and access to goods. Political speech that disregards or undermines those norms operates outside the boundaries of meaningful speech.

148 For example in the wake of the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 and the dismantling of official White Australia policies in the 70’s and 80’s. But legislation will not (cannot) ‘transform a political culture.’ Indeed, it was not enough to prevent the rise of xenophobic public discourse and behaviour toward Asian migrants in the 1990’s, or the Cronulla Riots of 2005. Soutphommasane, “I’m Not Racist, But…”; pp. 76-80.
Speech ‘is always produced within the precincts of some assumed conception of the good to which it must yield in the event of conflict.’ But the self-absorbing effects of fear throw our conceptions of the nation, what is good for it and who can credibly speak about its welfare into question. With them go the previously accepted norms that give our political conversation meaning. When this inability to settle on the purpose of political discourse is combined with the epistemic vices and injustices perpetrated by fear, it is unsurprising that conflicting but legitimised discursive communities have emerged within the one political society. Sometimes this problem manifests in a lack of minimally adequate reason-giving for one’s political claims, and at others in the expression of speech directly antithetical to the aims of a pluralist liberal democracy. Fear exponentially exacerbates our inability to agree on a conception of ‘the good’ and its solipsistic and exclusionary nature makes us less likely to perceive each other as credible speakers. If we fundamentally disagree, or are even threatened by what others are trying to achieve as a nation, we’re unlikely to grant each other credibility as speakers in the national conversation. Fear plays a significant part in democratic polarisation and disengagement. In this thesis, highlighting the epistemic harms perpetuated by political fear has been a significant part of my contribution to the turn to ethics.

Without a stable background of originary exclusions — among them a strong commitment to Australia’s political, rather than ethnic culture — and under the epistemically paralysing and polarising effects of fear, citizens cannot agree on the purpose of political conversation, let alone engage in it. Fear-mongering speech is ultimately objectionable because the spread of fear through a polity precludes collaborative care for the nation and its wellbeing. So let me be clear: when discriminatory, fear-mongering speech is not rejected, a style of political rhetoric is prioritised over the overall potential for citizens’ freedom of speech. Some speech is

149 Fish, ‘There’s No Such Thing as Free Speech’, p. 104.
always going to be ‘chilled’. ‘The only question is the political one of which speech is going to be chilled.’\textsuperscript{150} It seems preferable to chill a politicians’ damaging, opportunistic style of rhetoric than to chill the speech of citizens.

Resolving this issue is not a matter of everyone needing to speak the same way, or to say the same things. But in a democracy, everyone \textit{does} need to be respected as an equal speaker, and certain purposes of speech need to be prioritised and mutually accepted; first and foremost, citizens’ expression must be protected, not politicians’. Political fear, I have shown, is antithetical to this purpose. Perhaps, as Fish concludes, this is simply a matter of politics; having the nous to pick up the lines within which ‘free speech’ is bound and convince others they should be shaped around our own ideals.\textsuperscript{151} In the debate over Senator Hanson and others’ fear-mongering rhetoric, we do seem to be disagreeing over whose conception of ‘free speech’ truly defends our virtues and values. But when we’ve considered the effects of fear on a pluralist liberal democracy, objecting to fear-mongering political rhetoric no longer looks like a matter of partisan politics. The fragmentation of our discursive community along these lines goes to the core of our commitments as a liberal democratic society. Once we consider what politicians’ discriminatory, fear-mongering speech actually does — silencing citizens, perpetrating epistemic harms and injustices against all citizens, polarising our discourse beyond citizens’ meaningful communication — it becomes clear that this is not speech that protects freedom of citizens’ speech and democratic participation. In fact, it achieves the opposite.

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid, p.111.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, p.110.
The problem with getting this argument across is that politicians' freedom to engage in a rhetorical style is a relatively digestible concept of freedom coming into conflict with the more nuanced and invisible freedom of speech violated by fear's epistemic injustices. This is an even greater challenge given the paralytic and divisive effects of fear on citizens who are already feeling marginalised and ignored by those they perceive to be political and cultural elites. But at least without the high octane nature of discriminatory fear being circulated by those in power, citizens might have a better chance of understanding each other, and thereby having these difficult but democratic conversations that need to be had.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have re-centred fear as an emotion that deserves political philosophy’s concerted attention by focusing on the issue of fear-mongering political rhetoric. I have argued against the idea that such speech should be protected. I clarified what is at stake in this debate by considering the effects of fear on citizens and democratic discourse. Fear is a morally and epistemically narrowing emotion, and when it takes root, the foundations required for a functioning democracy are destabilised. Citizens’ speech is suppressed and silenced, we sacrifice the norms that give our political discourse meaning, and our discursive communities are pulled further and further apart. Under such conditions, care for the nation, its welfare and basic principles is critically compromised. We care about freedom of speech for the sake of citizens’ sovereignty and freedom. We should therefore be sceptical when politicians’ speech quells our own.

Fear is the culprit here. It perpetuates its own cycle of polarisation and harm to minorities, to our discourse, and to our democratic politics. I think the damages I’ve canvassed here can be identified more broadly when we reflect on the fact that increasingly polarised discourse
makes us all fearful — “How could they think that?” “What’s happening to our country?” “What are we to do?” It seems that when discourse becomes polarised, we are all thinking these things, but are unable to get past the paralysis and hostility of fear. I’ve argued here that the problem with fear-mongering speech can be explained by looking at the harms of the emotion of fear itself, and what it does to our ability to communicate with each other. Perhaps, then, the answer is to do what we are told to do for any fear: face it. Rather than run away, we might try bravely and calmly bringing our fear into our life until it is old news.


Commonwealth of Australia, Senate, ‘First Speech’ (14 September, 2016) p. 78.


Levy, Ariel, *Female Chauvinist Pigs; Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*, p. 142


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