

## The Emotional Public Sphere and Its Importance: Freedom of Speech as a Case Study

### *Commentary*

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The concept of the emotional public sphere is outlined and illustrated by contrasting *phantasies* of the state in the public mind. The dilemma frequently encountered around the principle of freedom of speech—when to prohibit speech that threatens the freedom or security of others—is explored as a problem of managing toxicity in the emotional public sphere. It is proposed that the aim of such management should be the containment of toxic feelings, both those expressed by the speaker and those evoked in the audience/targets of the speech. To that end, moral intolerance is distinguished from existential intolerance, the latter being a form of response to hate speech that does not allow the emotions it expresses to be engaged with and thereby contained. The work of containment is seen to go beyond the decision to permit or proscribe, and to involve the news media and framing practices. Analogous to psychotherapeutic work with individuals, a default orientation toward permitting speech is suggested, although this requires contextual provision of measures to contain its effects.

*Keywords: public sphere, state, freedom of speech, audience, emotions*

### **Introduction: What Is the “Emotional Public Sphere”?**

In the relatively limited discussion that there has so far been of the term *emotional public sphere*, some different meanings have emerged. It has been used to refer to the general performance of emotion in public (Lunt & Stenner, 2005), which is one aspect of the emotionalization of everyday life and is an important feature of contemporary culture. Alternatively, I have used it (Richards, 2007, 2011) to refer to the emotional substrate of democratic politics, the domain of public emotion in which the activities of the political public sphere are always and inevitably embedded. Given the increasing interpenetration of politics and popular culture, this meaning of the term—which is the one I pursue here—reaches far into mediated popular culture (see also Lunt & Pantti, 2007; Pantti, 2011). By *public emotion*, I mean the emotions of the public, whether they are publicly expressed or not. The dynamics of this emotional

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domain are often a major factor in determining the directions and outcomes of political processes, whatever the content and institutional locations of those processes.

The 2015 symposium organized by colleagues at the University of Navarra, on which this Special Section is based, was an indication of the growing interest in the concept of the emotional public sphere and an opportunity for its further development. The concept brings a psychological dimension to a major idea in sociopolitical theory, and as such illustrates the potential of the emergent interdisciplinary area of the psychosocial<sup>1</sup> for enriching our understanding of society and politics.

The psychological theory with which I attempt to understand the dynamics of the emotional public sphere is post-Freudian psychoanalysis (see, e.g., Kernberg, 1976; Klein, 1975; Mitchell, 1988; Sandler, 1993). It cannot be assumed that all of the emotions involved will be fully and easily visible, either to members of the public in question or to observers; we are quite often in the territory of unconscious emotions. Typically, the core emotions involved will be the fear, rage, and resentment associated with experiences of loss, abandonment, rejection, and humiliation. They will also include guilt and envy. Depending on the levels of emotional capital present in a specific public, they will also include the positive, prosocial emotions of love, remorse, and concern, derived from a basic outlook of trust in the world. Of course, we could deliberate at length on what the list of core emotions should include; the indicative list just offered is based on post-Freudian accounts of early emotional development, but other interpretations of those accounts, and other psychological theories, will generate variations on that list.

The source of these emotions in the individual is not directly political, but is in the early experiences of primary relationships with caregivers and significant others. However, at all points in later life, they are mobilized in the individual's dealings with the world, in personal relationships, leisure, work, and other aspects of social being. Their mobilization around political issues and influence on the individual's conduct as a citizen is what constitutes the emotional public sphere. A key point is that there is a systemic quality to this emotional public sphere. Developments in one part of it will affect parts elsewhere; all individuals within the public concerned are part of it, and both contribute to (albeit for many people only in face-to-face settings) and are influenced by it. As in the mind of the individual, certain feelings can be partitioned off, disowned, or buried, but they will continue to exert influence through their underlying pull on public experience and through the defenses used to conceal or avoid them.

For example, as the ultimate authority in our adult lives, the state is especially likely to be seen through the prism of early experience of parental authority. Both neoliberal denigrations of the state and classical socialist idealizations of the state can be seen as expressions, in part at least, of what Kleinian psychoanalysts call *unconscious phantasy*, in this example, extreme images of parental figures. These phantasy images are a strong presence in the emotional public sphere, and can influence our perceptions and opinions in a number of important areas in which fundamental feelings about the state are involved. One such area is freedom of speech. The American legal scholar Ronald Krotoszynski (2015) notes that the exceptional commitment to freedom of speech embodied in the First Amendment to the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> See the UK-based Association for Psychosocial Studies (<http://www.psychosocial-studies-association.org>).

Constitution is not a product of positive belief in the benefits of unrestricted speech, but of a fear that if government were allowed to restrict speech, it would do so in ways that promoted a sectional interest. A negative attitude, distrust of government, is the driver, not a positive belief in the benefits of freedom. When legal theorists defending maximum freedom of speech have seen it as based on a positive, they have typically invoked a market model: Freedom of speech will lead to the best ideas winning in an open, adversarial competition between all ideas. There is another type of idealization involved here, one stated very clearly in the works of Hayek and other market champions, of the market as an omniscient, omnipotent force, a deity-type image that is the complement to that of the evil state. So when the state-market axis is viewed from within the split world of Kleinian infantile experience, one end (you choose which) is seen as good and bountiful and the other as evil and heartless, with a profound split between the two.

There may still be some resistance today, especially in highly rationalistic forms of political science, to the idea that emotion is important in politics as anything other than an occasional although dangerous intrusion. But the "affective turn" in the social sciences has meant that many academics would now take it for granted that emotions are integral to political processes. In this respect, academia may just have caught up with what most nonacademics would think. Minimally, the concept of the emotional public sphere can be a sort of checklist heading to make sure that we have considered the emotional forces at work around whatever political topic we are studying. But we can ask more of it beyond this descriptive utility. How may it be deployed in a focused way to deepen understanding of specific issues and contribute to clarifying or resolving issues of policy and practice?

### **Free Speech and Toxicity**

One area in which this concept may throw new light on a problem is that of freedom of speech, where there has not been much psychologically informed academic work of any sort. Some survey data give starting points for psychological inquiry, for example, the national differences reported in a Pew Research Center study (Poushter, 2015) and the (unsurprising) finding of Naab (2012) that although supporting the freedom of speech principle in the abstract, people can be less ready to apply it to voices with which they deeply disagree. Two studies (Cowan & Khatchadourian, 2003; Downs & Cowan, 2012) report that women are more sensitive to the harm of hate speech than men and regard freedom of speech as less important. This gender effect is mediated by empathy. However, most academic work in the area is, predictably, from a legal perspective, although an important strand in that work focuses on the psychological issue of dignity. From what is a minority position among scholars, defending restrictions on freedom of speech, Heyman (2008) and Waldron (2009) analyze "assaultive speech" as an attack on dignity and argue for the need to moderate freedom with protection from such attack.

An influential principle in the legal scholarship is that of *consequentialism*, according to which the "consequences" of any particular speech should give a basis for determining whether or not that speech should be proscribed by law or be denied a platform. Sometimes, a consequence can be seen clearly in people's outward behavior. For example, it can be argued that some forms of threat and abuse should be proscribed because they function to reduce the freedom of speech enjoyed by others, as seen in the withdrawal from public discourse by those threatened.

This is the argument put forward by, for example, legal academic Anita Bernstein (2014), who builds a case for a certain kind of censorship by noting that some women have stopped writing online, or have much reduced it, because of the abuse they have received from aggressive male sexists. They have suffered emotional distress, and in some cases have incurred the costs of security measures, and in the end they decide it is not worth it. So, a definite behavioral consequence can be seen to flow from a set of speech acts. Freedom of speech for some is fear and silence for others, or as the title of Bernstein's article puts it, extending an established saying to the online environment, "Abuse and harassment diminish free speech."

This is a strong point, and could be decisive if the consequences of freedom of speech were to be assessed behaviorally. But what about other consequences with less measurable overt effects? What if consequences were understood to include long-term and complex effects within the emotional public sphere? The first such consequences to come to mind might be ones that reaffirm the rightness of banning speech that silences others. The emotional consequences of unchecked bullying are likely to be damaging: higher background levels of anxiety, loss of trust in authorities who could stop the bullying, and perhaps also more intense animosity toward the bullies and deeper social polarizations. What about the consequences of an intervention that outlawed the bullying speech? Here, we would expect the benefits of feelings of greater safety and reduced anxiety and of trust and gratitude toward the intervening authorities, as well as the possibility that some abusers may be faced with the seriousness of what they have been doing, and may themselves then want to desist anyway. But we could also think about some possible adverse consequences. These might include a different sense of fear, linked to the knowledge that although something threatening has been shut out, it still exists, perhaps now in less known forms. On the other side, the bullies themselves, and the possibly substantial numbers of those whose sentiments the bullies express, may feel resentment at being suppressed, and instead of feeling contrition and remorse, may widen the target of their hostility to include the censoring authorities and may adopt more extreme attitudes. Also, any public controversy over the proscription may act to raise the profile and bravado of the abusers. Overall, then, denying freedom of speech to Internet trolls and other bullies may also serve to raise levels of fear and of hostility, at the same time as it brings respite to some of their victims.

The basic question here can be framed in terms of *toxicity*. We are talking about toxic effects within the emotional public sphere, and my suggestion is that in making decisions about whether or not a particular type of speech should be censored, it would be helpful to apply a consequentialist approach to the emotional public sphere, and thereby to consider the emotional costs and benefits of different choices: increasing toxicity (emotional damage and social polarization) or decreasing it (building emotional capital and social cohesion). That means examining the types and degrees of toxicity that the unfettered speech exudes, *and* those that would be produced by prohibiting it.

Introducing the concept of the emotional public sphere into debates about freedom of speech is a step forward. It focuses on emotional consequences and approaches them at the level of a whole and complex entity, the emotional public sphere, rather than trying to weigh and compare a range of discrete, separate consequences for certain individuals or groups. The concept of emotional toxicity strengthens this systemic approach by suggesting the power of written or spoken messages to circulate poison (or an

antidote) through the whole system. This organic analogy, which has classical origins in the notion of the "body politic," needs to be handled with caution, but has a useful resonance here, invoking as it does a sense of the interdependence of all parts of the emotional public sphere.

### **Managing Toxicity**

However, there are different types of toxicity. Does the speech in question try to evoke fear, resentment, or hatred? Which groups in society are likely to be most vulnerable to it? What is the likelihood that its influence will interact with or potentiate other toxic forces? There is no simple, single measure of the toxicity that a particular piece of speech may bring into the system, or of how different groups in society would respond to its being banned. The difficulty of deciding on the best course of action increases when we acknowledge that the decision to allow or to prohibit a platform of any kind (an event, website, tweet, or whatever) is not all there is to it. That decision is only a starting point. Let us examine this point with reference to an example I have written about in more detail previously (Richards, 2013). Six years ago in Britain there was a brief but very intense public debate about an invitation issued by the BBC to the then-leader of the British National Party (BNP) to appear on the current affairs television program *Question Time*. The BNP was then the nearest thing we have had in Britain for many decades to a substantial political force with clear racist and neofascist leanings. Its leader Nick Griffin had initiated a strategy to refashion the BNP as a populist, electable party. He would have had great difficulty in finding a university where he could speak, but here he was invited on the back of strong results in European Parliament elections to a platform signifying full involvement in the national conversation.

Many people objected vehemently to this. In the event, Griffin performed disastrously, coming across as a dishonest and incompetent figure. This triggered within the BNP a challenge to his leadership; the party imploded, its public support tumbled, and it has not recovered since. So, it might seem that it was a good thing to give Griffin a platform, to expose him for what he is.

Nonetheless, that overlooks another aspect of the program. However unimpressed some BNP sympathizers may have been by Griffin's behavior, it is likely they would have felt at least equally strongly about the way he was, it might be said, "set up." One questioner after another put questions to him that were not questions but accusations or dismissals. The panelists all ensured they attacked him at some point, and the one next to him sat with her back partly turned toward him. The chair, an eminent broadcaster, joined in the general attack on several occasions. It could easily be seen as an ambush carried out by a left-liberal elite and planned by the BBC. Those in the television audience for whom Griffin might have been seen as someone speaking to their anxieties about immigration and cultural change could have been excused for retaining some sympathy for him in face of the onslaught and for thinking that, yes, the complacent ruling elite never listen to those living hard lives at the bottom of the pile. So, although the program could be seen as contributing to a detoxification by revealing the ugliness of a fundamentally antidemocratic party and triggering its decline, it may also have deepened the rift between an anti-BNP majority of the public and those who had some sympathy for it (i.e., people who felt that the BNP, unlike any other political party, had some sympathy for them) by adding to the toxic resentments of the latter.

This points toward the importance, when we are discussing whether or not to give airtime or platforms to extremist opinions, of how the broadcast or event is managed. The decision to include an extremist voice on a platform is not the end of the deliberation, as what should follow is careful consideration of the dynamics of the platform and of its relations with the audience.

At no point in the *Question Time* program did anyone raise the question of why the BNP had secured nearly 950,000 votes (6%) in the last elections for the European Parliament. It was as if its message was an intolerable one that could only be exposed and attacked in order to annihilate it. Although Griffin's presence was some sort of acknowledgment that the BNP, its ideology, and its support existed, this acknowledgment was disavowed during the program itself. The broadcast exchanges represented an attempt to repress rather than contain the social forces that the BNP represented.

### **Intolerance and Containment**

The above conclusion may seem to tend toward some kind of acceptance of racist propaganda, as opposed to the intolerance shown toward it by the *Question Time* program. But there are two kinds of intolerance here. Let us call one *moral intolerance*, whereby a statement is seen to be unacceptable. The prohibition of certain types of expression by law embodies this principle, and implies that there is social harm caused by some statements. We may also find statements that fall below the threshold of illegality unacceptable in this sense because we have reason to believe they cause significant harm to some people or to society as a whole, even though our legislature has not proscribed them.

The other we could call *existential intolerance* because it refers to an inability to tolerate the fact of the existence of the message and the approval it receives from some people. This is a psychological phenomenon, at the core of which is an anxious wish to deny. It is a state of mind, not a moral principle. It is probably a very common phenomenon given that the mind characteristically seeks to escape from unpleasure and much extremist propaganda is highly unpleasurable to many people. This kind of intolerance is a major impediment to making good decisions about restricting freedom of speech because it will pull away from any effort to assess the overall impact of a restriction on the emotional public sphere and toward imposing the restriction in order to avoid confronting an unpalatable reality. Its opposite is perhaps best not termed *existential tolerance* because that would suggest being content for the views in question to exist and to be expressed. The opposite of existential intolerance is rather the capacity to tolerate the fact that they do exist, and to explore and engage with that reality.

Although these two types of intolerance may frequently present in blurred combination, they are in principle very different. To clarify this difference, let us return to the concept of the emotional public sphere, and ask whether it can be elaborated in a way that bears helpfully on decisions about whether to allow certain statements to be made, and how to manage situations in which the freedom of speech is being exercised controversially.

Can the concept be used to develop a normative principle, that is, to throw some light on the conditions in which democratic institutions and processes would most thrive? What helps most in the emotional life of a public to strengthen a peaceable democratic polity? By analogy with the individual, I

suggest that it is *containment*. By this I mean a state of affairs in which people can feel recognized, in the psychological sense that their feelings are acknowledged and understood, and existentially tolerated by some person or persons. Second, effective containment will enable people to feel "safe." Safety is a complex feeling; its conditions include physical security, but also a basic trust that the social environment is an emotionally safe one. Without containment, good-enough psychic functioning is hard to achieve, whether we are talking about individuals or large collectives such as national publics. I am drawing here on the post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory of containment, according to which it has two necessary elements. These are the acknowledgment of feelings, however distressing or dangerous they may seem, and the provision of experience which gives confidence that such feelings can be tolerated and managed (Hinshelwood, 1989, pp. 244–246).

The problem with what I have called existential intolerance is that it undermines the possibility of containment. It allows only one response to disturbing views, which is to banish them, rather than to manage them on the basis of a realistic acceptance of the fact that some people do hold them. The aim of containing toxic views does not necessarily mean "engaging" or negotiating with those who hold them, but rather points to the need for ways of neutralizing or dissolving them in the minds of their adherents. Although in some cases this may be achieved, or happen spontaneously, on an individual basis, at a societal level, it will mean the mobilization of resources and dynamics within the emotional public sphere. What might this mean in relation to the question of free speech on university campuses?

### **Some Problems in Challenging Extremist Ideology**

Since 2015, UK universities have been required by law to be proactive in countering the possibility that violent extremist ideology might have an influential presence on their campuses. Accordingly, they are now required to make decisions about whether or not to offer a platform to an extremist speaker, and to manage those occasions when a platform has been granted by ensuring that speakers with extremist views are accompanied by speakers who challenge those views within the same event. However, "challenging" could mean the kind of existential intolerance that, I am arguing, will not necessarily provide the most effective response. A lot will depend on the effectiveness of the opposing speaker. The exchange may leave unaddressed the sources of the sympathy for extremism that will be in the minds of some members of the audience, and may add to the perverse romance of vilification, the "allure of the bad object" as psychoanalysis has called it (Armstrong-Perlman, 1994), and the sense of heroic outsidership, which are among the drivers of "radicalization."

The government guidelines have another potential shortcoming; their object is to prevent the direct radicalization of individuals through their exposure to extremist propaganda. They do not address the ideological "collateral effects": the complex, systemic, and possibly long-term impact of extremist speech on the wider emotional public sphere. A simple "ding-dong" or boxing match between one view and another is unlikely to leave any long-term "containing" influence within ongoing public discourse, and may even strengthen the appeal of the toxic ideology by confirming the Manichean worldview on which it is likely to be based.

UK government thinking on the dynamics of violent jihadist propaganda is inadequate in another respect. Then-Prime Minister David Cameron, introducing new counterterrorist measures in October 2015 (Boffey, 2015), spoke of how certain speech can “plant the seed of hatred,” suggesting he held a “hypodermic” model of message reception (albeit with a horticultural twist). Or, to return to the organic metaphor, radicalization is seen as comparable to contamination through contact with an external carrier of a toxin. In contrast, an understanding of the emotional public sphere would appreciate that the seeds of hatred are already planted, as they are intrinsic to both individual and collective psychology. There are always psychic toxins circulating in the psyche. Psychological well-being is not a sheer absence of destructiveness and hatred, but successful management of toxins and of potential malignancies. The question is whether they will grow and colonize the mind, and in what way. All the forces present in the emotional public sphere are potential influences on them, whether these forces act to contain them or to offer them public expression and shape them in the violent jihadi cause.

What would be needed for a more fully containing approach to the speech of jihadists, today’s most pressing example of “dangerous speech” (Maynard & Benesch, 2016), if we are mindful of the overarching dynamics of the emotional public sphere? The most obvious aim would be to contain the impulses and anxieties of those “vulnerable” to recruiters for terrorism, so that they found other less destructive ways of managing their insecurities and rage. An equally important aim would be to address the positive attractions of extremist propaganda in order to dilute its effect among wider audiences, and to reduce the silent or collusive support for terror that does exist in the wider population, especially among some young Muslims.

This is a very difficult area. Polling data going back over a decade have consistently shown that, especially among the young in many countries, there are substantial levels of support and sympathy for al Qaeda and ISIS, for visions of a global caliphate, for replacing democratic with sharia law, and for pursuing those aims with violence. For example, an international survey by the Pew Research Center in March–April 2013 found levels of support among Muslims for suicide bombing exceeding 10% in eight of the 11 countries surveyed, ranging from 12% to 62%. Although these figures were substantially below some levels recorded in earlier years, they suggest a significant limit on the global consensus against terror, especially when seen in the context of a median level of 13% support for al Qaeda across all 11 publics.

Looking closely at this phenomenon may arouse fears that “widening the net” of counterterrorism will cast a shadow of surveillance over ordinary, likeable young people who will never become a “Jihadi John” or “Jihadi Jane” (Halveson & Way, 2012). Moreover, drawing attention to wider projihadi sentiment is a risky move in a context in which it is widely seen as necessary to impress on the non-Muslim public that violent extremism is a perversion of Islam pursued by only a small minority. The need to counteract a generalized Islamophobia is clear, but the cost of doing that exclusively would be a failure to confront the breadth and depth of the problem.

Arguably, one of the key features of the emotional public sphere, when viewed systemically, is the production of climates of feeling and thresholds of acceptability. If that is so, it lends support to the views of those who see the collusive or explicit support for violent fundamentalism among some Muslim

youth, even when it clearly stops short of any direct involvement, as a major part of the problem, perhaps even more fundamental than the availability of “vulnerable” individuals ready for death. Due to the political sensitivities involved, the media seem to find this especially difficult to deal with in a productive, containing way. So, when the problem is acknowledged, it typically bursts out in a very uncontained, alarming way. For example, in July 2015, the *Daily Mirror* (overall perhaps the most restrained of the UK’s notorious “redtop” press) reported on a national UK poll by the respected polling organization ICM that had found that 9% of the population reported having favorable views of the Islamic State (an increase of 2% on the same poll conducted in 2014). With some questionable arithmetic, the *Mirror* worked out that this might mean that half of the UK adult Muslim population supported ISIS and made this its initial headline (Sommerlad, 2015).

Two months later, the *Mirror*’s rival paper *The Sun* repeated the performance with a poll that it claimed showed that “Nearly one in five British Muslims has some sympathy with those who have fled the UK to fight for IS in Syria. The number among young Muslims aged 18–34 is even higher at one in four” (The Sun, 2015, para. 1). This article rapidly attracted a record number of complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organisation (albeit only in that body’s brief 14-month history) and profuse criticism from many quarters. The polling agency involved also distanced itself from the interpretation and use of its data in this fashion, but *The Sun* stuck to the line that this was a disturbing reality that had to be faced.

Yet, so inflammatory were these headlines that we might be forgiven for thinking that the whole topic should be avoided, to contain the anxieties and anger it might evoke, which is one explanation for the record number of complaints to the Independent Press Standards Organisation. However, effective containment must start with acknowledgment and existential tolerance. This would involve acknowledging the scale of sympathy for violent fundamentalism, whatever it might be, and a readiness to explore the nature and power of the attractions that ISIS-style propaganda presents. These include what we might see as the broadly positive yearnings for a secure and respected identity, embedded in a stable social environment, and for a sense of purpose and moral certainty. Some recruits (perhaps a majority) suffer from a tyrannical moralism rather than a compulsive hatred, so there is little point in telling them that what they are doing is wrong. They are doing it precisely because they are convinced it is right. They need to hear their certainty challenged from a different direction, one that acknowledges and explores the reasons for their choice. At the same time, the perversion of moral sense, and the attendant guilt, that their choice involves has to be acknowledged.

Online projects to develop “counternarratives” and to “combat extremist ideologies” are proliferating and will hopefully have some effect. But their reach and impact are unlikely to match that of the mainstream and social media. Whether or not a particular speech act occurred in a containing context, there is another opportunity in the news production process for it to be contextualized in a way that helps contain the toxicity of the speech. The news media arguably remain the single most important power in the emotional public sphere. Of course, online material can always be found on its own terms, unmediated by any news frame, but for its consumers, the news is a potentially containing factor, depending on what it has to say about the speech act, the speaker, the implications, consequences of the act, and so forth. If the news can facilitate some thought about the speech in question, it may help to contain the feelings around it. “Thought” would mean some examination of the feelings it conveys, of the possible sources of

those feelings, and of how they could be existentially tolerated and socially managed so as not to lead to further conflict and insecurity. Such an approach would be very different from that taken in the examples discussed above, and would be one that would expand the capacity for existential tolerance in the emotional public sphere, not perform its reduction.

### **Conclusion**

I have used the concept of the emotional public sphere to frame a discussion of some of the issues of the day around freedom of speech. This has moved us away from an exclusive focus on the speech itself, and the harm it may cause, toward an examination of how and to what extent the speech concerned may appeal to sections of the public. I have argued that the context and management of the "speech event" may be as important as the content of the speech itself in determining its consequences. This argument, if accepted, would support the adoption of a general default principle with which to approach debates about freedom of speech, which is that anything legal should be permitted, provided that its expression can be managed in such a way that the overall impact of the speech event will be to some degree containing.

Prohibiting speech because it gives offense is not a way forward given that offense can easily be claimed (George, 2016). Nor does the opposite approach of simply requiring complainants to develop "thicker skins" stand up well when considered in the context of the emotional public sphere and its systemic circulation of feelings: Speech has effects beyond the speech situation. Empathic alertness to the emotional dynamics of speech must address both its potential appeal and its potential harm.

Containment will require the emotional appeal of the speech to be recognized and examined. Both extreme right wing ideologies and violent jihadism appear to have significant bodies of sympathy and support in the wider population. However, in neither case is this sympathy easily addressed in mainstream political discourse. Its fundamental psychological drivers are the same in both of these groups, and the existence in a society of substantial pools of deep insecurity and aggression is not a comfortable topic, so it readily attracts existential intolerance. In the case of sympathy for jihadism, there is an additional problem in that attending to its existence risks deepening anxiety and animosity toward all Muslims. Again, the practice of therapeutic work provides some guidance here for policy and practice in a sociopolitical context: Positive change is going to be more likely if repression is challenged, if the toxic material is examined and contained.

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