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War on the Ivory Tower: Alt Right Attacks on University Professors

Shortly before this issue of *The Public Eye* went to press came word that Alek Minassian plowed his vehicle into a busy street in Toronto, killing 10 and wounding many others—an attack that he explicitly framed as the start of a men's rights "rebellion." As Alex DiBranco writes in "**The Incel Rebellion**" (pg. 3), the massacre marked the latest development in an organized movement of misogynists who have turned their sense of "aggrieved entitlement"—to women, to power, to wealth—into a deadly weapon. For years, feminist warnings that online misogyny was scaling up—in ways that we now know enabled the rise of the White supremacist Alt Right—were ignored. It's well past time to start paying attention.

When members of the U.S. Christian Right helped exacerbate homophobic attacks, rhetoric, and policy in Uganda—most notably in the country's 2014 "Kill the Gays" bill—PRA Senior Research Analyst Kapyka Kaoma was among the foremost experts explaining what the export of American culture wars looks like and how the Religious Right has used policy victories abroad as a means of shaping debate at home. But as Kaoma points out in a new feature, "**The People's Pope?**" (pg. 5), it isn't just evangelicals who are responsible for amplifying bigotry against LGBTQ people in Africa. The Catholic Church has played a key, unacknowledged role in shaping attitudes and policy in countries like Kenya, where Catholic doctrine is inserted word-for-word into right-wing legislation. That particularly matters when the Vatican has embraced a right-wing perspective on discourse around gender, deriding inclusivity as "gender indoctrination."

Africa isn't alone in that. As Gillian Kane notes in "**Right-Wing Europe's War on 'Gender Ideology'**" (pg. 11), the Vatican concocted this term of derision in the mid-1990s as a means of pushing back against women's and human rights gains at the United Nations. More recently, that's developed into a number of global campaigns that cast efforts to ensure gender equality as dangerous. Sometimes the framing is predictable—suggesting that gender equity amounts to an attack on traditional religious values. Other times, it's meshed with populist anti-Muslim sentiment, grafted onto nationalism, or cast as a secular campaign to "save the children." The very abstractness of the indictment, Kane writes, "is what makes it so effective in the global marketplace of ideas. It can appear secular in France, unapologetically Catholic in Poland, and anti-Muslim in Austria."

Finally, in "**War on the Ivory Tower**" (pg. 15), Carolyn Gallaher looks at the increasing coordination of Alt Right attacks on university professors, and, perhaps more importantly, how academic institutions are responding. While academia is often viewed as a "haven for liberal professors," Gallaher writes, unprepared colleges have inadvertently abetted right-wing efforts to undermine academic freedom and universities' role in discrediting harmful ideologies with cowardly or inept reactions. Professors under attack too often find that their administrators accede to the demands of cynical troll campaigns, fail to correct misinformation, or condemn faculty in an effort to make the storm pass. In an environment where higher education is increasingly viewed as an enemy of the Right, what's needed is not just a stiffer spine, but smarter strategy.

Online, look for our recent interviews with authors Kathleen Belew (*Bring the War Home*) and Elizabeth Gillespie McRae (*Mothers of Massive Resistance*), as well as a new PRA report by Mariya Strauss and Tarso Luís Ramos, "Social Justice Feminism and How We Defeat the Right." As always, in between issues, PRA will continue its coverage and analysis of the Right, with new blog posts and online-only features every week, so make sure to follow us at politicalresearch.org.

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BY ALEX DIBRANCO

“The Incel Rebellion”

Movement Misogyny Delivers Another Massacre

On April 24, minutes before Alek Minassian plowed his van into a busy pedestrian street in Toronto, killing 10 and wounding at least 13—predominantly women—the 25-year-old posted an explanation of sorts on Facebook: “Private (Recruit) Minassian Infantry 00010, wishing to speak to Sgt 4chan please. C23249161. The Incel Rebellion has already begun! We will overthrow all the Chads and Stacys! All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger!”¹

The “supreme gentleman” that Minassian saluted, Elliot Rodger, was the notorious mass killer who in May 2014 stabbed his male roommates to death then set out to “slaughter” women at “the hottest sorority house” at the University of California, Santa Barbara.² When Rodger, then 22, failed to gain entrance to the sorority, he opened fire outside, killing two women from another sorority as well as a male bystander soon after. As an active member of the online community of “incels”—a term used in male supremacist forums to describe “involuntarily celibate” (heterosexual) men who say they’re unable to attract women for sex or relationships—Rodger claimed in an approximately 140-page manifesto that one girl going on a date with him could have prevented this massacre.³

Under the male supremacist framework Rodger had subscribed to, he believed that he was entitled to sex, and women en masse deserved death for his deprivation. Sociologist Michael Kimmel, who studies masculinities, argues that this concept of “aggrieved entitlement” explains the motivations behind disproportionately male-perpetrated mass killings and everyday violence against women.⁴ Aggrieved entitlement, Kimmel writes, is a belief by men “that



Flowers and messages are placed at a memorial for victims of the mass killing on April 24, 2018 in Toronto, Canada. Credit: CrowdSpark/Alamy Stock Photo.

they are entitled to certain things—power, wealth, sex—and that they are entitled to use violence to restore what they believe is rightfully theirs.” Kimmel sees this perception at play not only in explicitly misogynist attacks, but also in White supremacist groups, which tell White men that they have been unfairly deprived of their rightful place in society. According to Kimmel, entitled killers need “to believe that they were justified, that their murderous rampage was legitimate.”⁵ In a YouTube video Rodger posted describing his plans, he laid out the twisted logic under which he sought “retribution.” “It’s an injustice, a crime because I don’t know what you don’t see in me,” he said. “I’m the perfect guy and yet you throw yourselves at all these obnoxious men instead of me, the supreme gentleman.”⁶

Rodger was hardly the first man in the United States or Canada to commit mass violence against women because of his sense of aggrieved entitlement. In 1989,

25-year-old Marc Lépine killed 14 female engineering students at École Polytechnique in Montreal (which had rejected his application), leaving a note declaring, “I have decided to send the feminists, who have always ruined my life, to their Maker.”⁷ However, Rodger’s attack was distinguished by his known connections to male supremacist online forums. He frequented r/ForeverAlone, a subreddit forum for incels, and r/TheRedPill, a forum founded in 2012 at the intersection of the existing Men’s Rights Activist (MRA) and Pickup Artist (PUA) or “seduction” communities.⁸ MRAs claim that men are oppressed by feminist society, venturing into conspiratorial thinking. Pickup artists teach men “game”: tips and strategies for picking up women that include demeaning and “negging” them, and advocate techniques that frequently amount to rape.⁹ While little studied before the shootings, in 2014, misogynist online Reddit forums ranged from 30,000 subscribers (r/ForeverAlone) to

almost 200,000 (r/seduction); today, r/TheRedPill is one of the largest, with over 250,000 subscribers.

Rodger also posted regularly on PUAhate.com—a messaging board for failed pickup artists—which he credited with confirming “many of the theories I had about how wicked and degenerate women really are.”¹⁰ (After his attack, PUAhate was renamed Sluthate, a change viewed as seeking to avoid the spotlight Rodger put on the website; however, it also shifted focus from railing against

sexually active men”—voicing a resentment characteristic of the incel community. Online incel and Alt Right forums refer, as Minassian demonstrated in his Facebook post, to sexually successful White men as “Chads,” and to their attractive (and for an incel, unattainable) White female counterparts as “Stacys,” or to both as “normies.” Rodger’s resentment wasn’t only directed at White men, however; he was also deeply infuriated by Asian and Black men who attracted White women. Though himself

Roosh V. spouted the same line of blame, tweeting, “Alek Minnassian [sic] wouldn’t have killed people with a van if the media had not inoculated him and other lonely men against effective game teachers like myself. Sleeping with only two or three Toronto Tinder sluts would have been enough to stop his urge to kill.”¹⁹

Though incels have generally been associated with pickup artists—or failed PUAs—developments in recent years suggest that the incel community should be analyzed as a distinct identity within the overlapping spheres of male supremacist mobilizations. From mid-2016 to November 2017, a new misogynist forum, r/Incels, grew rapidly to some 40,000 subscribers before getting banned. While support for violence is an unaddressed problem across male supremacist forums, other misogynist subreddits have been more circumspect than r/Incels with regards to overt glorification of mass killers.²⁰ Reddit, which has long permitted hateful content under the guise of free speech, announced in late October 2017 that going forward the site would “take action against any content that encourages, glorifies, incites, or calls for violence or physical harm against an individual or a group of people.”²¹ This resulted in the prompt banning of White supremacist and neonazi forums, including r/NationalSocialism, r/Nazi, r/DylannRoofInnocent, r/EuropeanNationalism, r/KillTheJews, and r/Far_Right. Two weeks later, r/Incels went the way of these racist and antisemitic forums.²²

However, other forums, on Reddit and off, continue to propagate incel ideology. This latest act of mass violence explicitly referencing incels and hailing Rodger speaks to the importance of paying greater attention to the threat posed by this community. ☹

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“Aggrieved entitlement” is at play not only in explicitly misogynist attacks, but also in White supremacist groups, which tell White men that they have been unfairly deprived of their rightful place in society.

PUA lessons to simply hating sexually active women.) His posts included a rallying cry to fellow incels: “If we can’t solve our problems we must DESTROY our problems...One day incels will realize their true strength and numbers, and will overthrow this oppressive feminist system.”¹¹

Since 2011, a similar revenge fantasy has been referred to on 4chan—an online forum that has become a major gathering place for the growing Alt Right umbrella of White and male supremacists, and to which Minassian pretended to be reporting in his Facebook post—as the “beta uprising.”¹² Some incels admiringly also use the phrases “going ER”—as in “going Elliot Rodger”—or “going Sodini” (the latter of which was coined after another aggrieved, sexually inactive man, George Sodini, opened fire in 2009 at a fitness class full of women, killing three and leaving a year’s worth of sporadic online journal entries describing his motivations¹³). Christopher Sean Harper-Mercer, a 26-year-old who killed nine people at Umpqua Community College in Oregon in 2015, referenced Rodger in what the *Los Angeles Times* described as “a script of his life to convince the public and media that the killings were the result of his mistreatment by others, and that he was merely seeking revenge.”¹⁴

Though aiming most of his vitriol at women, Rodger also seethed at “all of you

biracial—with a White father and Asian mother—Rodger viewed his Whiteness as superior. Similarly, Harper-Mercer, also biracial, condemned Black men as “vile” (exempting himself because only his mother, not his father, was Black) and wrote that he “fully agree[d]” with Rodger’s position.¹⁵

In October 2017, incel commenters applauded Stephen Paddock, the mass shooter who killed 58 people in Las Vegas, for his successful massacre of such “normies.” Despite the fact that Paddock had a live-in girlfriend, incel supporters saw him as one of their own, identifying with the “despondent rage” and “alienation” of mass shooters, who were portrayed as the “real victims.”¹⁶

Even those members of the MRA landscape who don’t commend the violence of shooters like Rodger or Minassian still support their sense of being aggrieved. Daryush Valizadeh (“Roosh V.”), a PUA leader who founded the site Return of Kings (recently designated a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center¹⁷), did not explicitly endorse Rodger’s attack, but blamed progressive organizations like SPLC for the killings and warned that until “beta” men have accessible ways to have sex with women—such as legalizing prostitution or teaching “game”—“these massacres will be more commonplace as America’s cultural decline continues.”¹⁸ After the April 2018 Toronto attack,

BY KAPYA KAOMA

The People's Pope?

How the Vatican's Position on Gender Threatens Human Rights



Pope Francis arrives at Copacabana beach for a welcoming ceremony for World Youth Day 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Photo: George Martell/Pilot New Media via Flickr.

In September 2016, Sharon Slater of the U.S.-based Christian Right group Family Watch International issued a special appeal to a crowd of African conservatives, including Kenya's Catholic Conference of Bishops, which was sponsoring the gathering. Making reference to a documentary her group had produced, *The War on Children*—a jeremiad against LGBTQ rights and sexuality education—Slater suggested that African conservatives were the key to halting global advancements in sexual and reproductive rights at the United Nations and across Africa.

The event was the African Conference of Families, an anti-LGBTQ, anti-sexual and reproductive health summit in Nairobi, co-sponsored by the World Congress of Families (WCF), the Kenyan Ministry of Labor and Social Protection,

and Kenya's Catholic hierarchy. It was promoted on the website of Vatican Radio, and brought together African culture warriors like Stephen Langa, the infamous architect of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality (or "Kill the Gays") bill; WCF African representative Theresa Okarfor of Nigeria; and U.S. right-wing activists like WCF spokesperson Don Feder and the anti-abortion Lepanto Institute's Michael Hichborn.

Many speakers at the conference relayed a familiar message, warning that the Global North is engaged in a new form of colonialism, imposing liberal norms of sexual rights on African nations. To Feder, the 1960s sexual revolution in the U.S. and Europe profoundly destabilized marriage and gender roles in the West, and unless contained, he warned, it would wreak havoc on Africa

as well.

Kenyan Catholic Bishop Alfred Rotich blamed the Anglican Church's 1930 decision to allow contraception as responsible for not just abortion but "other accompanying vices such as necrophilia, bestiality, paedophilia, same-sex relationships as well as calls for free sex and reproductive health services for children!"

The argument that the Global North is exporting immorality has helped further numerous conservative campaigns in African countries—against homosexuality, reproductive healthcare, and comprehensive sexuality education. The role of the U.S. Christian Right in fostering this rhetoric has become well known. But less recognized is the involvement of the Catholic Church—including the leader touted for ushering in an era of modernization and tolerance, Pope Francis.

WHOSE POPE?

Since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has become a beloved symbol of progress in the Catholic Church. In 2013, *TIME* magazine declared him its “person of the year” and anointed him with a new title, “the People’s Pope,” in recognition of his championship of those on the margins of society—the poor, immigrants, and refugees. His outspokenness on issues

ed, particularly any form of aggression and violence.³

But while Pope Francis’s statements were widely hailed as the evolution of the Church, his actions have been more telling. On the same trip wherein Francis publicly met a gay couple, he also privately met with and embraced Kim Davis, the county clerk in Kentucky who refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex

Pope” has been silent.

CATHOLIC INFLUENCE IN AFRICAN POLICY-MAKING

Just as U.S. evangelicals worked with politicians in Uganda on the “Kill the Gays” bill,⁵ the Vatican and its clergy have strongly influenced African anti-sexual and -gender rights legislation. In 2016, for example, several Roman Cath-



Vatican City. Photo: Paul Williams via Flickr.

of income inequality, the environment, and corruption suggested a shift from his predecessor’s conservative views. But perhaps most surprising was his efforts to reach out to the LGBTQ community.

Shortly after his election, he surprised many by asking, “If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him?” On a 2015 visit to the U.S., he met with a gay couple (one of the men was his former student).¹ In 2016, he called upon Christians, and Catholics in particular, to ask forgiveness from gay people “for the way they had treated them.”² He even formalized the Vatican’s new attitude of tolerance in 2016, when he wrote in his book, *Amoris Laetitia*:

...every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while “every sign of unjust discrimination” is to be carefully avoid-

couples despite a court order. Davis told journalists that the Pope had thanked her for her courage, told her to be strong, and presented her with two rosaries. Initially, the Vatican denied Davis’ claim but finally admitted to it under media pressure.⁴

The Vatican’s attempt to conceal the meeting casts Pope Francis as double-faced: publicly courting progressives on one hand, and privately supporting the Christian Right’s anti-sexual rights agenda on the other. On Francis’ 2015 official tour of Kenya and Uganda—two countries where LGBTQ people have been particularly targeted—he never uttered a word on the persecution of sexual and gender minorities, although Roman Catholic bishops and priests have worked alongside Christian pastors and African politicians to systematically undermine LGBTQ rights. When it comes to African homophobia in particular, the “People’s

olic clergy sat on the drafting committee of a major piece of Kenyan legislation that undercut reproductive and LGBTQ rights, as Rev. Fr. Lucas Ongesa Manwa of the Kenyan Conference of Bishops told me at the September 2016 Nairobi conference.

Proposed by the Kenyan Ministry of Labor and Social Protection in 2016, the National Family Promotion and Protection Policy (NFPPP) was an addendum to the Kenyan 2010 Constitution. The Constitution, along with the 2015 Anti-Domestic Violence Act, had enshrined progressive gender equality principles into law. The NFPPP was intended to undo some of that work, by repealing two articles of the Constitution that had been particularly hard-fought: one allowing for legal abortion,⁶ and one providing anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ people.⁷

The initial fight over the Constitution had been fierce, drawing international advocates on both sides. U.S. anti-LGBTQ groups such as the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ) and Human Life International (HLI),⁸ funded their African allies to oppose the Constitution. In partnership with the Kenya Christian Professionals Forum (an offshoot of ACLJ) and WCF,⁹ Congressman Chris Smith (R-NJ) traveled to Kenya and campaigned against the new Constitution legalizing abortion. Nonetheless, in a national referendum Kenyans ultimately approved it by 67 percent.¹⁰

The movement to roll back the Constitution's progressive clauses, however, began almost immediately. The NFPPP is a key weapon in that fight, and its proponents are transparent about their aims.

"Our Constitution protects homosexuals and allows abortion—we are working to change this," Ann Kioko, a campaign manager for CitizenGO and organizer of the 2016 WCF conference in Nairobi, told me. Fr. Manwa also confirmed that the NFPPP was an effort to conservatize the document. Fr. Prof. Richard N. Rwiza, another priest who sat on the drafting committee, was even blunter: "The current Constitution is too liberal," he told me. "It allows abortion and homosexuality... Definitely, the policy will rectify this shortfall."

Although scholars have found conclusive evidence that homosexuality and abortion existed in pre-colonial Africa, Kioko, Fr. Rwiza, and other conference participants repeated a common argument: that homosexuality and abortion were against Kenyan "traditional culture." But their arguments read less as a defense of traditional Kenyan values than a barely-disguised recapitulation of Catholic doctrine. In fact, this was so much the case that, in many instances, the draft NFPPP contains language nearly identical to official Vatican publications, including writings by Pope Francis himself. The NFPPP reads:

The challenge is posed by the various forms of the ideology of gender that denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the

anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female.¹¹

Pope Francis's *Amoris Laetitia*, published in 2016, is an almost perfect match:

Yet another challenge is posed by the various forms of an ideology of gender that denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman

Pope Francis appears double-faced: publicly courting progressives on one hand, and privately supporting the Christian Right's anti-sexual rights agenda on the other.

and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family. This ideology leads to educational programmes and legislative enactments that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy radically separated from the biological difference between male and female.¹²

The document employed other Vatican writings as well. On religion and culture, the Kenyan draft policy states:

Throughout the centuries, different religions maintain their constant teaching on marriage and family by promoting the dignity of marriage and family and defining marriage as a community of life and love.¹³

This is a neat echo of the *XIV Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops*, which reads:

Throughout the centuries, the Church has maintained her constant teaching on marriage and family...promoting the dignity of marriage and the family.¹⁴

A section in the NFPPP dedicated to the media also repeated Pope John Paul II's message for the 2004 World Communications Day, in which he warned about the press's "capacity to do grave harm to families by presenting an inadequate or even deformed outlook on life, on the family, on religion and on morality."¹⁵

The similarities in these statements are no coincidence. The Roman Catho-

lic Church is one of the most influential and intellectually organized civil society institutions in Africa. Thus Catholic bishops, priests and laity—helped along by U.S. Catholic groups such as Human Life International (HLI) and the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (CFAM, formerly the Center for Family and Human Rights) and the U.S. Christian Right—are strategically employing the Vatican's ideas in policy development in Africa.¹⁶

As Professor Mary Anne Case of the

University of Chicago Law School argues, "whether speaking as an 'expert on humanity'...or as a state actor...[the Vatican's] emphasis is on the imperative to influence secular law and policy in line with the Vatican vision."¹⁷ The Vatican doctrine of "complementarity"—the idea that men and women have distinct, complementary roles—Case notes, is the foundation of its ideological opposition to sexual liberation and LGBTQ rights. When the Vatican takes on the role of a state actor, Case continues, its bishops act as Vatican ambassadors. And the Vatican's foreign policy agenda becomes visible in its advocacy to ensure that its religious views are integrated into secular law and policy. And that agenda, overseen by Pope Francis, is at clear odds with the progressive image he's cultivated.

THE VATICAN AND GENDER THEORY

The Vatican's opposition to "gender theory" is a reaction to the argument, best articulated by feminist theorist Judith Butler, that sex, gender, and sexuality are historical social constructs that have been instead cast as immutable facts of nature. Butler's analysis contradicts conservative views of gender as biologically determined, and also opposes "compulsory heterosexuality," as well as the social "cultivation of discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions."¹⁸

By contrast, conservative Catholic ideas of complementarity view sex as biological and God-given. By permitting diverse gender identities and conceptions of what constitutes family and marriage, Butler's work threatened Catholic orthodoxy. As Paris-based feminist scholar Sara Garbagnoli writes in *Religion and Gender*, the Vatican saw "gender as the Trojan horse of 'ideological colonization'

influence of the Roman Catholic hierarchy on politics has undermined LGBTQ rights in Parliament,²² as in 2007, when the Italian Conference of Bishops organized a "Family Day" that led to the defeat of the "governmental bill that would have granted a limited form of legal protection for same-sex couples."²³ In France in 2011, she continued, "the expressions 'gender theory' and 'sexual gender

ity."²⁶ (Although O'Leary's work drew on Pope John Paul II's earlier pronouncements about gender and feminism, it was *The Gender Agenda* that popularized this strategic frame.) Her book was translated into Italian and presented at the Library of the Italian Senate in 2006. It was O'Leary's analysis, Garbagnoli argues, that shaped the Vatican's ideological arguments on homosexuality.²⁷

But the opposition to LGBTQ rights didn't end with Pope John Paul II or Benedict XVI. Mario Pecheny, professor of political science at the University of Buenos Aires, documents Pope Francis's opposition to sexual and gender equality in Argentina. In 2010, Pope Francis—then Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio and President of the Argentine Episcopal Conference—strongly opposed same-sex marriage in words that mirror the U.S. Christian Right. Legalizing same-sex marriage and adoption, he argued, would "seriously damage the fam-



Protesters gather in London to show solidarity with Uganda's LGBTQI community, April 19, 2018. Photo: Alisdare Hickson via Flickr.

denying a biological truth and produced by a powerful lobby."¹⁹

The Vatican responded, in various statements and pronouncements. As Cynthia Weber of the University of Sussex notes, "Butler's book *Gender Trouble* was critiqued in the theological writings of Cardinal Ratzinger, heavily implied in his 2008 address to the Roman Curia once he became Pope Benedict XVI, and lingers in Pope Francis's concerns about 'gender indoctrination.'"²⁰

The Pontifical Council for the Family's *Lexicon: Ambiguous and Debatable Terms Regarding Family Life and Ethical Questions*, published in 2003, also helped spread anti-LGBTQ sentiment in Europe. As Garbagnoli writes, "'gender ideology' became a useful political category used by different groups and activists to block social and legal reforms that affected LGBTQ people."²¹ In Italy, she argues, the

'theory' entered the French Parliament," and the Vatican and its French bishops provided "rhetoric and organizational resources" to anti-"gender ideology" protesters: casting gender theory as responsible for same-sex marriage, and thus a threat to children.²⁴

But the true origins of this anti-gender activism, Garbagnoli finds, are within the U.S. Right, which, like the Vatican, views feminist deconstruction of gender as a threat to the future of the human family.²⁵ In 1995, the U.S. right-wing Catholic writer Dale O'Leary presented to the Vatican her position paper, "The Deconstruction of Women: Analysis of the Gender Perspective in Preparation for the Fourth World Conference (in Beijing, China) on Women," which later became the basis for her book, *The Gender Agenda*, in which she advocates a "new feminism" grounded in complementar-

ity." He warned:

Let us not be naive: this is not simply a political struggle, but it is an attempt to destroy God's plan. It is not just a bill (a mere instrument) but a "move" of the father of lies (Satan) who seeks to confuse and deceive the children of God.²⁸

In 2010, after Argentina legalized same-sex marriage, he wrote that the new law was "a tool of the 'destructive pretension against the plan of God'" as well as "the Demon's envy, by which sin entered the world, and which slyly aims to destroy God's image: man and woman."²⁹

Contrary to his public statements on gay issues, Pope Francis's anti-LGBTQ actions have been consistent. For instance, during the November 2014 Vatican-organized interfaith Colloquium Humanum (attended by U.S. Christian Right lead-

ers such as Russell Moore of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Saddleback Church Pastor Rick Warren³⁰), Francis argued that the family “can’t be qualified by ideological notions” and “complementarity is a root of marriage and family.”³¹ He’s made similar statements in his writings.³²

While Pope Francis’s second encyclical, *Laudato Si’*,³³ which focused on environmental justice, is widely celebrated for highlighting the realities of ecological challenges, its opposition to gender theory is apparent:

Valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment. It is not a healthy attitude which would seek to cancel out sexual difference because it no longer knows how to confront it.³⁴

The concept of complementarity informs his opposition to sexual health and reproductive rights, as he writes, “Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion.”³⁵

Unlike in *Laudato Si’*, where complementarity is a relatively minor point, *Amoris Laetitia*³⁶ dedicates various sections to the “ideology of gender.” To Pope Francis, the family is built around a heteronormative couple—male and female. Since developments in gender studies challenge this assumption, he writes:

The weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world. I certainly value feminism, but one that does not demand uniformity or negate motherhood. For the grandeur of women includes all the rights derived from their inalienable human dignity but also from their feminine genius, which is essential to society. Their specifically feminine abilities—motherhood in particular—also grant duties, because womanhood also entails a specific mission in this world, a mission that society needs to protect and preserve for the good of all.³⁷

And his opposition extends to other is-

ues of LGBTQ rights. While Francis has been praised by progressives for a line in *Amoris Laetitia* that many interpreted as an endorsement of same-sex relationships—“We need to acknowledge the great variety of family situations that can offer a certain stability”—that isn’t his full meaning. In the same document, he writes, same-sex unions “may not simply be equated with marriage”; that only the “union between a man and a woman” has a critical “role to play in society”; and that “No union that is temporary or closed to the transmission of life can ensure the future of society.”³⁸

CONTRADICTIONARY VATICAN POSITIONS ON LGBTQ ISSUES

In the wake of Uganda’s 2009 draft “Anti-Homosexuality Bill,” which sought the death penalty for homosexuality, international outcry was intense. The Holy See at the United Nations joined the condemnation, releasing a statement to the UN General Assembly declaring its opposition to “all forms of violence and unjust discrimination against homosexual persons, including discriminatory penal legislation which undermines the inherent dignity of the human person.”³⁹ The statement further opposed “the murder and abuse of sexual minorities,” and

and HLL.

The 2009 statement followed the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church* (the official Roman Catholic doctrine), which acknowledges the existence of homosexuality “through the centuries.”⁴⁰ While the *Catechism* views LGBTQ persons as deserving of respect and compassion,⁴¹ it also views their sexual acts as “intrinsically disordered,” since they do not lead to procreation, and holds that, “Under no circumstances can they be approved.”⁴²

Other Vatican writings, such as the 2003 *Considerations* written by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict), call on Roman Catholic politicians to oppose same-sex unions and the adoption of children by same-sex couples, and to protect “young people [from] erroneous ideas about sexuality and marriage that would deprive them of their necessary defenses and contribute to the spread of the phenomenon.”

Thus the Vatican, like the Christian Right, justifies the creation of new anti-LGBTQ and anti-abortion legislation by presenting gender and sexual minorities as threats to traditional family values, providing a rationale for discrimination and violence against them. Notably, since becoming pope in 2013, Francis has been silent on discrimination against

The human rights community applauded the Vatican statement, and it seemed that the Vatican had successfully deflected responsibility for anti-LGBTQ movements in African countries onto U.S. conservative evangelicals.

called “on all States and individuals to respect the rights of all persons and to work to promote their inherent dignity and worth.”

The human rights community applauded the Vatican statement, and it seemed that the Vatican had successfully deflected responsibility for anti-LGBTQ movements in African countries onto U.S. conservative evangelicals, who had strongly influenced Uganda’s bill. All the while, however, the Church was endorsing similar anti-LGBTQ campaigns led by U.S.-based Catholic groups such C-FAM

African LGBTQ people. On his 2015 African tour, for example, he condemned corruption and demonstrated solidarity with Muslims in the Central African Republic, but said nothing about the killings and human rights violations against LGBTQ individuals across the continent.

The pontiff’s visit followed years of persecution and demonization of gender and sexual minorities in various African countries, as well as the expansion of anti-homosexuality laws and arrests of LGBTQ people in many nations. In 2014, bishops in Uganda and Nigeria praised

their countries' chief executives for signing anti-LGBTQ bills. (In Nigeria, they further commended President Goodluck Jonathan for courageously fighting the Western conspiracy to make Africa "the dumping ground for the promotion of all immoral practices that have continued to debase the purpose of God for man in the area of creation and morality, in their own countries.") The same year, despite the Vatican's opposition to criminalization and violence against LGBTQ people, bishops from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia jointly advocated for the criminalization of same-sex unions that they cast as unnatural and alien to African cultures.⁴³ Additionally, as political science professor Meredith Weiss has noted, some African countries began a trend of "anticipatory" or "pre-emptive" homophobic legislation,⁴⁴ passing anti-LGBTQ marriage and adoption laws even while it's still a crime in these nations to be openly LGBTQ.

This climate compelled the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to pass a resolution to protect sexual minorities. The resolution spoke against "acts of violence, discrimination, and other human rights violations; 'corrective' rape, physical assaults, torture, murder, arbitrary arrests, detentions, extra-judicial killings, and executions, forced disappearances, extortion, and blackmail."⁴⁵ It also forced President Obama to publicly back LGBTQ rights during his Africa tours.

But rather than adding his voice to the Commission's and President Obama's, Francis used similar rhetoric as the Christian Right and the World Congress of Families to inveigh against the "colonial" spread of "gender theory" around the world, including in African countries, during a 2016 meeting⁴⁶ with bishops from Poland:

In Europe, America, Latin America, Africa, and in some countries of Asia, there are genuine forms of ideological colonization taking place. And one of these—I will call it clearly by its name—is [the ideology of] "gender."

Today children—children!—are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex. Why are they teaching this? Because the books are provided by the persons and institutions that give you money. These forms of ideological colonization are also supported by influential countries. And this [is] terrible!⁴⁷

A similar argument is made in *Amoris Laetitia*, where he denounced Global North countries for linking financial aid to the acceptance of same-sex marriage.⁴⁸

Pope Francis's characterization of sexual rights as a form of "colonization" had wide impact. His words were part of the theme for the November-December 2017

Pope Francis has been celebrated for his progressive views on various issues. But on sexuality and gender identity, he is as conservative as his predecessors.

WCF-sponsored anti-LGBTQ conference in Lilongwe, Malawi. As was the case in Kenya, Archbishop Thomas Luke Msusa of Malawi's Roman Catholic Episcopal Conference was among the speakers—testifying to the growing partnership between U.S. conservatives and African Roman Catholicism.

The previous May, the St. John Vianney Theological Seminary of Denver held its own anti-LGBTQ summit, Framing a Catholic Response to Gender Ideology, which was advertised by a pamphlet that read, "The Church faces a serious challenge from an organized and sweeping agenda... which Pope Francis has characterized as 'ideological colonization.'" The pamphlet further paraphrased Francis as saying that gender theory:

...is having a devastating impact on children and teens; ignore [sic] God as Creator and promotes a view of individual autonomy which is simply sinful; redefines the parent-child relationship, casting parents as "oppressing" children by raising them as boys or girls; and undermines basic Christian anthropology by defining the person as a disembodied mind and the body as a

mere instrument.⁴⁹

For Christian Right activists who have long argued against sexual liberation, the pope's comments are a reason to celebrate. As the embattled former county clerk Kim Davis told ABC News, after meeting with Francis in 2015, "Just knowing that the pope is on track with what we're doing and agreeing, you know, it kind of validates everything."⁵⁰

NOT YET THE PEOPLE'S POPE

Pope Francis has been celebrated for his progressive views on various issues. But on sexuality and gender identity, he is as conservative as his predecessors. His opposition to gender theory is an even greater threat to LGBTQ human rights than the U.S. Christian Right he has made common cause with, given the size and scope of the faith he represents.

Pope Francis's compassion for the poor, refugees, and immigrants, and his defense of the environment, all deserve applause. However, Christian solidarity demands he visits LGBTQ refugees in South Africa or Kenya, who have fled repression in other African nations. He needs to hear their stories of persecution, violence, corrective rape, and murder—and to act on that knowledge—if he is truly to become the people's pope. ☪

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BY GILLIAN KANE

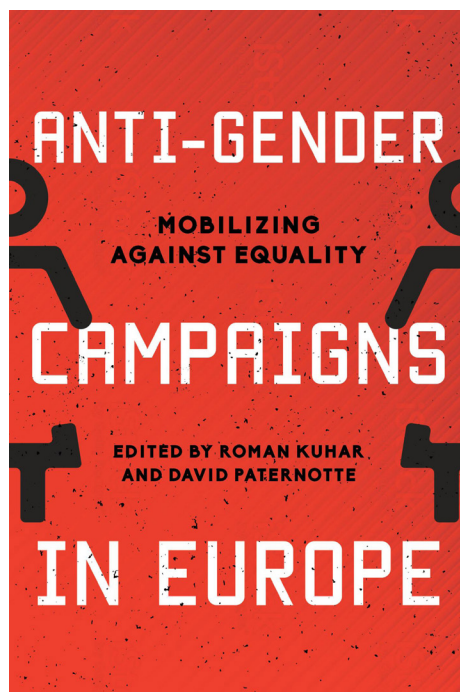
Right-Wing Europe's War on "Gender Ideology"

Last March, on a cold, early spring afternoon in New York City, a bright orange tour bus wended its way from Trump Tower, down Second Avenue, eventually parking in front of the United Nations' glass-walled Secretariat Building. Wrapped around the length of the bus, in massive letters, was the tagline: "It's Biology: Boys are boys...and always will be. Girls are girls...and always will be. You can't change sex. Respect all."

The bus's arrival was timed to greet the thousands of participants attending an annual United Nations summit on women's human rights. Apart from a smattering of protestors, and a few idling police officers, the bus drew little attention from passersby—in part because the message was inscrutable. But the organizers made clear that the #FreeSpeechBus was protesting "gender ideology," and in the process, attacking not just transgender adults, but transgender children.

The concept of gender ideology is a right-wing invention that intentionally misrepresents feminist, queer, and gender theory in order to justify discrimination against women and LGBTQ people. It was concocted by the Vatican in the mid-1990s, and has since spread globally. The Right claims gender ideology is being peddled by Western elites who want to destabilize the traditional family and the natural order of society. They use the label to delegitimize progressive social policies that support comprehensive sexuality education, LGBTQ equality, and abortion rights.

In Latin America, campaigns against gender ideology are well established. The Peruvian initiative "Don't Mess with My Kids" is one of the most successful. It contests government efforts to include instruction on gender equality—which



Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017).

they claim would force homosexuality on children—in public schools, and it has spread throughout the region.

In the United States, similar conservative campaigns against sexual and reproductive health and rights and LGBTQ rights are all too familiar. Yet outside of activist and academic circles, the term gender ideology is not. Until the early 2000s, this was also the case in Europe. But over the last 15 years, a cohesive anti-gender ideology movement has emerged—not just in Catholic strongholds like Poland and Ireland, but also in progressive countries like Germany and France, and likely soon the U.S. as well.

WHAT IS "GENDER IDEOLOGY"?

The 2017 book *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*,

edited by Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte, traces the emergence of the anti-gender ideology movement from its ideological shaping in the halls of the Vatican to its current blossoming in Europe as an organizing tool against progressive social policies. Although the overlap between this European movement and the U.S.-culture wars is considerable, the European experience offers key insights into how the movement is operating, often in partnership with rising right-wing populist movements, as well as how civil society can respond.

Gender ideology is not a legitimate academic term, but rather one cultivated by the Catholic Church. In their introductory essay, Kuhar and Paternotte trace the term's origin to the 1994 United Nations Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, and the World Conference on Women in Beijing the following year, where Hillary Clinton famously declared, "women's rights are human rights." Cairo marked the first time the United Nations recognized sexual and reproductive rights, and Beijing introduced the term "gender" into the United Nations' lexicon. Both of these moments signified major gains for the women's rights movement, and both events incensed the Vatican, which worried that countries would be further empowered to protect abortion access and LGBTQ rights.

But gender's official definition within the United Nations was so vague—the Beijing Platform for Action said that gender "was intended to be interpreted and understood as it was in ordinary, generally accepted usage"—that it opened the term to multiple understandings. And so the Holy See and Catholic intellectuals began manufacturing their own.

A few years later the concept of a gender ideology began to take root with the

1997 publication of *The Gender Agenda*, by Catholic writer Dale O’Leary. This influential text—members of the Vatican are said to have read the book—argued that substituting the word gender for sex in spaces like the United Nations was part of an international feminist stratagem to remake society. According to O’Leary,

reclaimed progressive notions such as gender or feminism and changed their meaning,” Kuhar and Paternotte write, “increasing confusion among average citizens and resignifying what liberal voices have been trying to articulate over the last decades.”³ It was, in essence, Vatican gaslighting.

Bishop Pieronek’s suggestion that “gender” was yet another foreign ideological threat to Poland found a captive audience in a population traumatized by decades of totalitarian rule.



Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek in Krakow, 2011. Photo: Piotr Drabik via Flickr.

feminists were undermining the idea of complementarity—that men and women fill distinct, immutable, corresponding roles—which, once gone, would inevitably lead to the dissolution of the family and society.¹

By the early 2000s, opponents of gender ideology were making inroads in Europe, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. They cast gender as the secular phoenix rising out of Marxism’s totalitarian ashes. “Gender” was, in their words, “the new Marxism.”²

Kuhar and Paternotte explain that gender ideology was being deployed as a marketing tool to reclaim Christian cultural hegemony in secular spaces. One way this was done was by corrupting liberal language, which was increasingly becoming vernacular. “[T]he Church has

AUSTRIA

Book contributors Stefanie Mayer and Birgit Sauer explore this idea further in their chapter, “Gender Ideology’ in Austria: Coalitions around an Empty Signifier.” A non-academic can get lost in the references to political theory and theorists, but the underlying point is clear: gender ideology is such a vacuous and ill-understood term that historically disparate social and religious groups can join together to oppose it. In Austria, this became particularly alarming when proponents of gender ideology linked with right-wing populist movements aimed against Muslim immigrants.

The connection is not intuitive; after all, polling indicates the majority of observant Muslims don’t support abortion or LGBTQ rights.⁴ But in Austria, anti-

gender ideology activists made common cause with anti-Islamists. They did so by suggesting that women’s and LGBTQ rights activists and Muslims alike seek to reconstruct and control the political and social order; that both take advantage of anti-discrimination policies and protections; and that both want to crush Western Christian society.⁵

Mayer and Sauer’s chapter was written before the October 2017 Austrian legislative elections, when, for the first time, the People’s Party (which has historical roots in the Catholic Church and 1930s Austro-Fascism) cinched the election. Reconfigured for modern times, the People’s Party is staunchly anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. It also works closely with the right-wing Freedom Party, which was founded by ex-Nazis in the 1950s, and which was the runner-up in the election.

While both parties are recognized for their anti-immigration positions, they have also weakened state mechanisms that protect women. In 2000, the two parties formed a national coalition government, and together downgraded and disempowered the Women’s Ministry by folding it into the Ministry for Social Affairs. They then added a “men’s section.”⁶

Mayer and Sauer were prescient. They anticipated that the gender ideology discourse might energize a new right-wing movement against Austria’s social-democratic society in favor of a nationalist, anti-pluralist one. And indeed, the recent election seems to bear this out.

POLAND

As in Austria, the “anti-genderism” movement in Poland created a causeway between nationalists and religious fundamentalism. This alliance helped generate the conditions for the right-wing Law and Justice Party to win enough votes to form a majority government in the 2015 parliamentary elections. According to Agnieszka Graff and Elzbieta Korolczuk, who authored the chapter, “‘Worse than Communism and Nazism Put Together’: War on Gender in Poland,” Poland’s experience with anti-genderism originated with homegrown right-wing movements against gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights. They also take pains

to note that it was greatly enabled by, and a part of, broader transnational mobilizations.⁷

The chapter title refers to a 2013 statement by Polish Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, who said that gender ideology is worse than the two despotic regimes responsible for the death and victimization of millions of people in the region. Pieronek's reflections, suggesting that "gender" was yet another foreign ideological threat to Poland, found a captive audience in a population traumatized by decades of totalitarian rule.

Organizing against gender started in earnest in 2012. This is also the year the minister of justice justified his opposition to the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, on the basis that it was a "carrier of gender ideology." Groups mobilizing against gender, which had formed a few years earlier, supported this position. They also had a targeted focus on opposing abortion, LGBTQ rights, and divorce. These views were consonant with those agitating against gender writ large, and the movements gradually coalesced against emerging issues like sexuality education and reproductive technologies. They were soon connecting with conservative Polish think tanks like the *Ordo Iuris* Institute for Legal Culture, and eventually with European platforms working globally, like the Spain-based right-wing group CitizenGO (one of the main organizations that sponsors "Free Speech Buses" like the one that parked outside the United Nations building in 2017).

By 2015 the Polish movement against gender had a decidedly Western European patina; in August of that year a demonstration against the inclusion of sexuality education in public schools included high-profile speakers from Germany, England, and France.

While Polish people flocking to protest in plazas created arresting visuals, the movement against gender was also skillfully manipulating new technologies and social media to get their message further out. Embedded in the message was the idea that protections for gender were an EU imperative promoted by the "homo-lobby" and the "pro-abortion lobby"—

that is, gender ideologues. This narrative benefited Polish Euro-skeptics who argued that joining the EU would result in the loss of Polish culture, religion, and identity.

Graff and Korolczuk point out that despite the appeal of the narrative, it didn't decrease Poland's support for EU integration. Indeed, a 2014 poll showed that 68 percent of Poles trusted the EU. Notwithstanding, conservative Poles succeeded in having their cake and eating it too. "Polish Eurosceptics have capitalized on this gap by arguing that Poland has the right to benefit from European integration economically, but must retain its cultural integrity as a Catholic country," Graff and Korolczuk write.⁸

The Polish anti-genderism movement was particularly good at generating panic on the issue of protecting children. While this theme emerged in other European countries, such as France, there was no greater doomsayer on the issue than the Polish Catholic Church. (Which was unconscionable given that at that time the church was caught up in a priest sex scandal.) Still, they were sufficiently

The abstractness of "gender ideology" is what makes it so effective in the global marketplace of ideas. It can appear secular in France, unapologetically Catholic in Poland, and anti-Muslim in Austria.

convincing that in 2014, the right-wing party *Solidarna Polska* (United Poland) formed the STOP Gender Ideology Parliamentary Committee.⁹

The following year, in 2015, the right-wing Law and Justice Party won a majority in parliament, becoming the first Polish party to do so since the fall of Communism. Newly victorious, the party made Beata Kempa, leader of the STOP Gender Ideology Parliamentary Committee, head of the new right-wing government's chancellery of the prime minister.

Anti-genderism was also officially part of Law and Justice's policy of "Change for the Better." The ministries of science and education committed to strip away the influence of gender, including pledges to remove "gay and lesbian studies journals

from the official rankings of academic journals," and promised to ensure that school "be free from various ideologies" and that "Children will study normal, classic subjects."¹⁰

What was initially perceived by the public as a local effort to cover up pedophilia scandals in the Polish Catholic Church was in fact a nationally-driven alliance-building project between foreign, illiberal influences and a gendered form of nationalism.

Anti-gender activists in Poland and the rest of Europe exploit these strategies to great ends. And in places as unexpected as *laïcité* France, the religious battle to erase "gender" is fought using a secular arsenal.

FRANCE

In their chapter, "Resisting 'Gender Theory' in France," Michael Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Josselin Tricou describe a putatively "grassroots" movement that capitalized on conservatives' anxiety over a 2012 Socialist Party victory and the expansion of LGBTQ rights. The movement, *La Manif Pour Tous* (LMPT,

in English, "The Protest for Everyone"), was led by the Catholic Church, although that fact was not made public. Instead, it masterfully deployed a secular campaign against "gender"—and co-opted the "rights" framework—using defense of French national identity as its call to arms.

Anti-gender movements in France began stirring around 2010, over public schools' embrace of "gender mainstreaming": a globally recognized strategy for promoting gender perspectives and equality in all areas, including policy, research, and legislation.¹¹

But it was the 2012 introduction of the same-sex marriage and adoption laws that brought the movement out of the shadows and into the public square.

The first anti-marriage equality protests firmly linked gender ideology and same-sex marriage, echoing concerns that O’Leary first articulated in 1997. Protestors carried placards demanding “We want sex, not gender,” and “marriage for all=gender for all.”¹²

France’s fervent commitment to secularism, explain Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Tricou, compelled anti-gender activists to adopt non-religious language. At

lar historical roots in the French popular imagination that appealed to a sense of French collective identity,” Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Tricou write.¹⁴ This distracted attention from the movement’s right-wing, anti-LGBTQ agenda. They even appropriated gay iconography, playing Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive”—arguably an LGBTQ anthem—at protests and rallies.

The campaign ultimately failed. De-

All this while working to disarm human rights for women and LGBTQ people across the continent.

What does this mean for the United States? The message of the #FreeSpeechBus may have stalled on the streets of New York City, and gender ideology may not yet be on the average American’s radar, but that’s probably just a matter of time. The organizing issue for U.S. anti-gender ideology activists will likely be the rights and dignity of trans people—the very issue the #FreeSpeechBus raised last year at the United Nations.

U.S. Catholic leaders are already looking ahead. At the close of 2017, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops focused its end-of-the-year pastoral letter on the theme “Created Male and Female”:

We come together to join our voices on a more fundamental precept of our shared existence, namely, that human beings are male or female and that the socio-cultural reality of gender cannot be separated from one’s sex as male or female...

Gender ideology harms individuals and societies by sowing confusion and self-doubt. The state itself has a compelling interest, therefore, in maintaining policies that uphold the scientific fact of human biology and supporting the social institutions and norms that surround it.

This is one of the few times that the USCCB has addressed gender ideology. What makes the statement so remarkable is that it claims scientific certainty to demand government intervention to codify the Catholic “socio-cultural reality of gender.” The Trump Administration’s attempt to ban transgender people from enlisting in the U.S. military may or may not succeed, but the emerging U.S. anti-“gender ideology” movement—which could ensure it succeeds at a later point—is just getting started. ☹

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Demonstration against marriage equality in Strasbourg, France, February 2013. Photo: Claude Truong-Ngoc via Wikimedia Commons.

the same time, they benefited from the French Catholic Church’s largess and infrastructure, which helped when it came time to organizing protests against marriage equality. While public opinion in France is strong for same-sex marriage, LMPT was able to capitalize on widespread discomfort with same-sex parenting to generate a moral panic around concerns for children, same-sex adoption, artificial insemination, and surrogacy.¹³

Given prevailing social opinions in France, the one thing activists couldn’t do was directly attack LGBTQ people. That is, if they were going to express their contempt for same-sex marriage, they couldn’t do so in homophobic terms. Because they were forced to be both secular and kind, they ended up with a positive campaign that, on its face, seemed benevolent. Who doesn’t want to protect the children?

The LMPT protests were striking: drawing in huge numbers of young people deploying “secular slogans with secu-

spite the outpouring of opposition, same-sex marriage and adoption remain legal in France. But this didn’t represent a loss for the larger movement. In fact, Stambolis-Ruhstorfer and Tricou believe this was a turning point in French politics. *La Manif Pour Tous* became an official political party in 2015, and with that, France, that most secular of countries, succeeded in forming a political party with Catholic roots and a dedicated anti-gender ideology platform.

BRINGING THE CULTURE WARS HOME

Threaded throughout the many country case studies highlighted in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe* is the suggestion that the abstractness of gender ideology is what makes it so effective in the global marketplace of ideas. It can easily be repackaged for any country context. The ingenuity of the anti-gender ideology formula is its malleability to appear secular in France, unapologetically Catholic in Poland, and anti-Muslim in Austria.

War on the Ivory Tower

Alt Right Attacks on University Professors

Amanda Gailey, an English professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, started receiving hate mail after she protested a Turning Point USA (TPUSA) recruiting event on her campus. She got so much of it that she organizes it by theme. There's the "c-word" category, for people who call her a cunt, and another for mutilated animal photos.¹

For Olga Perez-Stable Cox, a psychology instructor at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, California, the harassment began after a student recorded and distributed critical comments she made in class about Donald Trump's election. One email warned, "We're cleaning out the rats, starting with shooting you like the rat you are."²

Rabab Abdulhadi, a professor of ethnic studies at San Francisco State who advocated for Palestinian issues,³ came to campus one day to find posters plastered across campus that described her and her students as "terrorist supporters."

In an effort to silence academics, right-wing activists, including many from the Alt Right, have doxed, threatened, and smeared professors across the country, without regard for academic hierarchy, type of institution, or discipline. They have attacked professors with and without tenure. Their victims work at research institutions and liberal arts colleges and in public and private schools. They teach in the humanities, social and life sciences.

Despite the pervasiveness of such attacks, it can sometimes be difficult to identify the individuals or groups behind them. Some are associated with Alt Right figures like Milo Yiannopoulos, who has

a history⁴ of encouraging "trolling" campaigns, where anonymous internet users swarm an individual's social media feeds and email with invective and threats of violence. Others are involved in White nationalist circles.⁵ Still other trolls operate independently, but take their cues from groups loosely affiliated with the Alt Right, such as TPUSA, whose founder, Charlie Kirk, is a *Breitbart* contributor.⁶ A small portion of trolls are likely motivated more by sadism than politics.⁷

Wherever they sit in the wider Alt Right ecosystem, trolls typically justify their attacks in two ways. Some argue that professors are "cosmopolitan elites,"

At stake in universities' responses to Alt Right attacks are not just professors' jobs and academic freedom, but the wider public good.

who have rejected national culture (and White dominance within it) in favor of internationalism and diversity. (Like other Alt Right terminology, "cosmopolitan" has an antisemitic history; in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia it was used to identify someone as Jewish.⁸) Others complain that professors are trying to turn students into "social justice warriors."

There is much at stake in how universities respond to these attacks. Professors' jobs are on the line as the Alt Right, seeking to stir controversy, makes outrageous claims about professors and then calls for their ouster. Academic freedom is also at stake. Risk is central to academic inquiry, but when universities refuse to protect professors who run afoul of the

Alt Right, other professors respond by playing it safe.⁹

Most importantly, with nationalism and fascism both on the rise, the wider common good is at stake. Universities provide a powerful place where these ideologies can be challenged. However, if universities fail to defend professors attacked by the Alt Right, their students are more likely to accept Alt Right groups organizing college students as legitimate actors. To better understand how universities respond to Alt Right attacks on academics, I interviewed three professors: Amanda Gailey, Johnny Eric Williams, and Dorothy Kim. I supplement these interviews with cases from the public record.

BECOMING AN ALT RIGHT TARGET

Although many professors are targeted for their work on race, any number of liberal positions can trigger attacks: supporting queer and transgender rights; criticizing Donald Trump; protesting right-wing groups like TPUSA and Identity Evropa. Professors usually get on the Alt Right's radar in one of three ways.

Right-Wing Media

Right-wing media outlets like *Campus Reform*, which defines itself as a "watchdog to the nation's higher education system,"¹⁰ play a central role in the targeting process. With a small staff in Arlington, Virginia, student correspondents who pen "exposés" about their professors, and a "send a tip" link,¹¹ *Campus Reform's* strategy is to feed names into the Far Right ecosystem so that trolls can launch harassment campaigns against them. According to *The Chronicle of Higher Edu-*

cation,¹² *Campus Reform's* editor, Sterling Beard, keeps a whiteboard in his office to track the success of each article. If someone loses their job after being featured in a *Campus Reform* article, Beard counts it as a victory.

el, Ciccariello-Maher announced he was resigning.¹⁸

The Academic-Alt Right Grapevine

Academia is often stereotyped as a haven for liberal professors, but it houses

ginia, criticizing the “weaponization” of her discipline²² and imploring the field’s senior scholars to denounce the Alt Right’s cooption of medieval history for racist purposes. Fulton Brown responded by bringing in Alt Right reinforcements. In promoting her blog rejoinder to Kim²³ on Facebook, Fulton Brown tagged Alt Right personality Milo Yiannopoulos, who has over 2.5 million Facebook followers and remains close to *Breitbart*, his former employer. The following day, *Breitbart* published an article about the row: “Lady With a Sword Beats Down Fake Scholar with Facts and Fury.”²⁴

Fulton Brown then spent the next two weeks writing about Kim on her blog,²⁵ mirroring the tactics of “Gamergate,” intentionally drumming up chatter about Kim so trolls would go on the attack. It worked. The threats started coming in after *Breitbart* posted its story and ticked up each time Fulton Brown mentioned Kim by name.

When I interviewed Kim, she told me that Fulton Brown “keeps bringing my name up,” explaining, “She wants to be an Alt Right media pundit and I’m her strawman to get there.”²⁶



Charlie Kirk (founder of TPUSA) speaking at the 2018 Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in National Harbor, Maryland. Photo: Gage Skidmore via Wikimedia Commons.

Turning Point USA (TPUSA) has a similar strategy. In 2016 TPUSA created its “Professor Watchlist” to identify academics said to “discriminate against conservative students and advance leftist propaganda.”¹³ Like *Campus Reform*, the goal is to identify targets for harassment.

Social Media Surveillance

The Alt Right also finds targets by surveilling the Facebook and Twitter feeds of activist professors. This is how Drexel professor George Ciccariello-Maher landed in the Alt Right’s crosshairs in October 2017. After the massacre of 58 people at a country music concert in Las Vegas, Ciccariello-Maher tweeted, “White people and men are told that they are entitled to everything. This is what happens when they don’t get what they want.”¹⁴ The next day *The Daily Caller* published a story about Ciccariello-Maher’s tweets.¹⁵ *Breitbart*¹⁶ and *The Blaze*¹⁷ quickly followed suit. After months of death threats leveled against him and his family and only tepid support from Drex-

conservative scholars as well. In recent years, some conservative professors have aligned themselves with Alt Right personalities and used their supporters to attack academic rivals. Dorothy Kim, an assistant professor of medieval literature at Vassar, experienced this after she drew the ire of fellow medievalist and Alt Right sympathizer Rachel Fulton Brown.¹⁹

Fulton Brown and Kim’s differences started more than two years ago when Fulton Brown began publically espousing Alt Right views about Whiteness and masculinity on her blog.²⁰ Although they had never met, Kim challenged Fulton Brown’s statements across a wide variety of academic outlets and social media, including²¹ on a private Facebook group for medieval feminist scholars (where Fulton Brown was also a member).

If the debate had stopped there, it would have been unremarkable. Academic disputes are often rough and tumble. But things changed when Kim wrote a blog post after the deadly Alt Right march last August in Charlottesville, Vir-

THE NATURE OF ALT RIGHT ATTACKS

Once a professor is on the Alt Right’s radar, trolls pounce quickly. Their attacks are personal and vicious and, for the period of time they last—anywhere from a few weeks to several months—unrelenting. Most attacks occur in cyberspace, but some bleed into real life.

The most common line of attack is doxing—publishing someone’s private information online. Most professors already have public profiles. Doxers go further, hunting down social security numbers, digging up the names of children, and tracking down home addresses, with Google Earth screenshots attached. Doxers then disseminate the information across the Alt Right ecosystem.²⁷ Attacks can go on for weeks. Even after the dust settles, the threats never completely stop. As Dorothy Kim explained, “Once you are in their crosshairs, it’s like you’re being stalked forever.”

TYPES OF RESPONSES

Universities respond to Alt Right at-

tacks against their professors in several ways. In a robust response, a school defends the attacked professor's academic freedom, offers due process if disciplinary action is being considered, and communicates the reasons for its decision to the professor and the wider public. A weak response, by contrast, usually entails on-the-spot dismissal without due process. Most responses fall somewhere in between: administrators offer a tepid defense of academic freedom, grant due process, but only late in the game, or give different explanations to public and private audiences.

Robust Defense

Dorothy Kim's case provides a good example of a robust response. When I asked Kim how she would rate Vassar's performance, she told me: "I got all the practical things I wanted." Her first request to Vassar was simple—"Don't put me on immediate leave." Kim knew that she had done nothing wrong, but she was also aware that universities sometimes try to quiet troll storms by putting professors on leave. "I had seen what happened at Trinity and Drexel," she explained, referring to George Ciccariello-Maher and another targeted professor, Johnny Eric Williams, "so it was my number one ask."

Kim also asked the college to remove the location of her classes from the website and to give her a different, unlisted office. On her own, Kim started holding office hours in the student cafeteria because only people with Vassar ID can get in.

Kim also requested that campus security do extra loops around her on-campus home and asked university housing to replace her name on the property deed with her partner's so trolls could not discover where she lived.

Finally, Kim asked Vassar's president to defend her publically. The president agreed to Kim's request and posted a

statement on the college's webpage a few days later.²⁸ Although the statement didn't mention Kim or Fulton-Brown by name, it reiterated the college's support for academic freedom and decried the use of threats of violence to shut it down.

On-the-Spot Reproach

University bureaucracies often move at a glacial pace. When universities decide to adopt punitive measures against attacked faculty, however, they can move

said it was inundated with complaints. Two days after the appearance, Durden was suspended for the remainder of the semester.³⁰

Durden told a local media outlet that she was never given a formal explanation for her suspension and did not receive due process before the decision was made.³¹ The college's Human Resources department told her she'd been suspended because she mentioned her affiliation with Essex on Carlson's show, although



Thompson Library at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. Photo: Noteremote via Wikimedia Commons.

quickly. The experience of Lisa Durden, an adjunct professor of communications at Essex County College in New Jersey, is a case in point.

In early summer 2017, Fox News personality Tucker Carlson invited Durden onto his talk show to discuss an upcoming Black Lives Matter BBQ that was not open to White people. In what became a contentious interview, Durden defended the decision and expressed little sympathy for those who thought the BBQ should be open to supporters of all races. "White folks crack me up," she said. "When we have one day for Black folks to focus on ourselves, but you've been having White day forever."²⁹ The college

she had not. The next communication Durden received was an email saying the college would no longer need her for the fall term.

The first and only explanation Durden would receive came *after* her contract was severed, when Essex president Anthony Munroe issued a formal statement.³² Munroe acknowledged that Durden did not represent her views as those of the college on the show and affirmed the Essex's commitment to "free speech and academic freedom."³³ However, he also asserted that Durden's comments were not consistent with the college's values. "The character of this institution mandates that we embrace diversity, inclusion,

and unity. Racism cannot be fought with more racism.”³⁴ Durden was displeased with the explanation, telling a local radio show, “[Munroe] called me a racist!... So, are you calling Black Lives Matter racist?”³⁵

Hans-Joerg Tiede, at the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), called Essex’s response a textbook example of what not to do. “There was no due process, she was basically fired on the spot.” Tiede said that Durden’s case was also indicative of another troubling pattern: the particular lack of “due process for adjuncts or non-tenure track faculty.”³⁶

In January of this year an open records request by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) called into question the university’s claim that it had been inundated with complaints. In the 13-day period between Durden’s cancelled class and her suspension, the university only received one email complaining about her appearance on Carlson’s show.³⁷

Muddled Approaches

Most universities muddle through Far Right attacks. Johnny Eric Williams’ case at Trinity College in Connecticut and Amanda Gailey’s case at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln provide two snapshots of what such flat-footed responses look like.

Johnny Eric Williams

The ordeal for Johnny Eric Williams, a sociology professor at Trinity College in Connecticut, began in mid-June 2017, after he tweeted a link to a *Medium* essay by the pseudonymous writer Son of Baldwin entitled, “Let Them Fucking Die.”³⁸ The piece discussed how a Black, queer, female police officer saved the life of Rep. Steven Scalise (R-LA), a right-wing politician who once spoke to a White supremacist group³⁹ and who opposes LGBTQ rights. Son of Baldwin used this “delicious irony” as a jumping off point to ask whether minorities should save racial bigots in distress. His ultimate answer was “no”—“do nothing...Let. Them. Fucking. Die.” A few days later, Williams tweeted two related comments, using the hashtag #LetThemFuckingDie, to refer

readers back to the article that sparked his comments. One tweet read: “It is past time for the racially oppressed to do what people who believe themselves to be ‘white’ will not do, put end to the vectors of their destructive mythology of whiteness and their white supremacy system.”

Williams said his tweets weren’t advocating violence against White people, but rather calling for an end to the ideology of Whiteness and the system of White supremacy.⁴⁰ But the furor around them erupted so rapidly that he was unable to defend himself. Two days after he’d posted the tweets, *Campus Reform* posted an article attacking Williams, without reaching out to him first.⁴¹ That day he received a call from the conservative website *Realclearlife*⁴² asking for comment. Williams hadn’t even known about the first article—“I had to ask the caller what he was talking about,” he told me—but by then a narrative was already congealing. *Campus Reform* said Williams supported killing White peo-

“There was no due process, she was basically fired on the spot.”

ple. The following day, the conservative mainstream newspaper *The Washington Times* accused him of calling all White people “inhuman.”⁴³

The social media threats began the same day. Then, the harassment came to his doorstep, in the form of a local news crew that had gotten wind of the controversy. Williams called his wife, and, out of concern for their children, the family left town for four days.

Trinity College was also receiving blowback. Its switchboard was temporarily overloaded, and its social media accounts were flooded with complaints. A new hashtag, #FireJohnnyWilliams,⁴⁴ emerged. Trinity also received several unspecified threats. On June 21, the day after the firestorm erupted, the college’s emergency management team announced it was closing the college “until further notice.”⁴⁵

Later that afternoon, Trinity’s President, Joanne Berger-Sweeney, issued

a public statement critical of Williams’ posts, writing, “In my opinion his use of the hashtag was reprehensible and, at the very least, in poor judgment.”⁴⁶ She also announced that the Dean of Faculty would conduct a review to determine whether Williams had breached university policy.⁴⁷

Williams next received a call from his department chair, who asked if he would go on paid leave. His Dean called next to press the case. Worried, Williams called a lawyer, who advised him against taking leave, since it could be read as an admission of guilt. The next time he heard from the college it was to inform him that he was being placed on involuntary paid leave, although the review that President Berger-Sweeney had promised was not even underway. The news was devastating. “I can’t believe I can’t teach,” Williams told me. “That’s my identity.”

Fortunately, when the review⁴⁸ was completed in July, it offered a strong exoneration of Williams. Tim Cresswell, Trinity’s Dean of Faculty and Vice President of Academic Affairs, affirmed that Professor Williams’ tweets were “protected exercises of academic freedom”; that faculty members have the right to express opinions at odds with political orthodoxy and public opinion;⁴⁹ and that far from constituting a threat of violence, Williams’ tweets “fall squarely within his area of scholarship.”⁵⁰ Cresswell also dismissed attempts to blame Williams for the threats leveled at the college, noting that they were “more attributable to extreme reactions to his posts than to the actual statements in the posts themselves.”⁵¹

Although Cresswell’s report vindicated Williams, the college’s prior actions—failing initially to defend Williams’ academic freedom or right to due process—weakened the overall effect. And Berger-Sweeney only reinforced the bad feelings by releasing a public statement after Cresswell’s report, continuing to criticize Williams’ tweets. “It had a chilling effect,” Williams told me. “It ceded the territory to *Campus Reform*.”

Amanda Gailey

In some ways, Amanda Gailey’s ordeal

is similar. When the Alt Right media machine turned its sights on her, Gailey's university was also hesitant to publically defend her. However, because she works at a public university—the University of Nebraska-Lincoln—Gailey also had to contend with the state legislature.

Gailey's troubles began at the start of the fall 2017 term, when she heard that TPUSA would be on her campus to recruit students. Like many professors, Gailey opposes TPUSA's Professor Watchlist. "Their entire objective is to intimidate you into silence." Instead of being cowed, however, Gailey had asked to be put on the watchlist. Up until that point the group had ignored her requests, so when Gailey heard about a protest in the works, she decided to attend, carrying a homemade poster that read, "Turning

Point: Please put me on your watchlist."

But when Gailey arrived at the event, she couldn't tell "who was protesting whom." Gailey positioned herself away from the scrum, near the TPUSA recruiting table. A short while later Gailey noticed that the student managing the table, Kaitlyn Mullen, was crying. "I rolled up my sign and walked over to ask her if she was ok," she recalled. The student seemed overwhelmed, so Gailey asked the student protestors to cool things down. She tried to reassure Mullen, telling her, "I don't want anyone to be upset. No one is protesting you. It's your organization they are protesting."⁵²

She gave Mullen her email address and offered to meet with her, but had a bad feeling about the encounter. "I knew immediately that this was going to turn into something," Gailey told me, so she called her department chair the same day to warn him. Gailey's hunch proved accurate. A few hours later, TPUSA had posted a video of the protest on its Facebook page and, misleadingly, included an old photo of Gailey. Although the video footage was taken before Gailey was even on campus, its caption suggested that she had been present during the filming and had harassed the student: "Radical Professor Amanda Gailey (off camera)

At University of Nebraska-Lincoln Leads Public Harassment Of Conservative College Students."⁵³ Gailey was angry. "It was a total fabrication."

Although Gailey came to the protest by herself, another instructor—Courtney Lawton, a graduate student lecturer in the English Department—had also attended. Gailey told me she saw Lawton standing with her back to the TPUSA table. At some point, someone with TPUSA came around the table to film Lawton. After TPUSA edited the video, it appeared as though Lawton had initiated a confrontation with the student. And, though the TPUSA video did not contain

In public universities, academic freedom is under assault not only from outside agitators, but also from state legislators working in concert with such groups.

footage of Gailey at the protest, the video's caption suggesting she was off-camera when Lawton was being filmed linked their cases and ultimately put the English department in the crosshairs.

Gailey and her Dean spoke about the event the following Monday. By then, however, other Alt Right outlets had pounced on the story.⁵⁴ The university started on the back foot and made several errors going forward.

The first mistake, Gailey explained, was the decision by Hank Bounds, the University of Nebraska system's president, to issue an apology on Monday.⁵⁵ Gailey was incredulous. "I had been telling them all along that [TPUSA] are lying about my involvement." Gailey would find out later that video footage from campus security cameras backed up her account. Two months after the protest, Gailey was finally allowed to watch the video in the Chancellor's office. Not only did the video cast Courtney Lawton's actions in a more positive light, she said, but "it verified that I was in another area [away from the scrum].")

The second mistake was to approach the hate swarm as a public relations problem. Gailey recalled the university's communications team told her, "We can't tell you to not talk to the press, but

let us handle it." Gailey was uneasy with the approach, but decided to "go with the flow." Unfortunately, the PR team's response was slow and halting. By then, Gailey said, the narrative "had gotten out of control. The *Omaha World-Herald* said I'd accosted the student."⁵⁶

The university's third mistake was to refuse to publically correct TPUSA's claims even after eyewitness accounts and security videos called it into question. Indeed, the university still refuses to release the footage to the public or acknowledge that it exonerates Gailey.

The university's failure to set the record straight left Gailey open to attack.

Shortly after the August protest, for example, University of Nebraska Regent Hal Daub complained to a Nebraska state legislator that Gailey's

"protest was a premeditated and organized effort to intimidate and shut down Kaitlyn Mullen."⁵⁷ He also suggested the university should consider disciplinary action against Gailey because her behavior may have violated the conduct clause of her contract. (Gailey doesn't believe Daub is a neutral observer, as later that fall he posed for a picture with Mullen at a charity event.⁵⁸ The next day Mullen tweeted the photo with a caption referencing "Team Nebraska TPUSA." It was subsequently retweeted by different TPUSA chapters, creating an impression that Daub was a supporter of the organization.⁵⁹)

Nebraska's Republican Party also subjected Gailey to a campaign of harassment. A few days after the protest, for example, three Republican legislators submitted an open records request for any of Gailey's emails that mentioned President Trump, Nebraska Senator Ben Sasse, or Nebraska Congressman Jeff Fortenberry.⁶⁰ Gailey only had to turn over one email, and it did not implicate her in any wrongdoing. Nevertheless, Gailey told me the request "felt alarmingly fascist."

The executive director of the Nebraska Republican Party also submitted a public records request for emails between Gailey

and Lawton that mention Betsey Riot (an activist group in Lincoln) or any Republican lawmaker by name. The chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party also joined the fray, requesting five months of email communication between the chair of the English department and any faculty or administrator.

In mid-October, UNL's chancellor Ronnie Green decided to try to calm the waters by calling another round of individ-

'novel.'"

On October 31, a few days after the senators sent their open letter, Bounds and UNL Chancellor Ronnie Green finally offered a public defense of the English department in separate letters. But by then, the Alt Right's narrative had gone unchallenged for two-and-a-half months, becoming the definitive account. Gailey's opponents were in a position to double down. One of the senators, Steve Hallor-

at administrators. It asked for all email communications mentioning Courtney Lawton and Kaitlyn Mullen.⁶⁵

The headlines notwithstanding, the university agrees that Gailey did not berate Mullen at the August protest and affirms that she was within her rights to go to the protest and carry a sign. Still, things have been difficult for Gailey. "I have not been disciplined," she said, "but they are still trying to get me fired."

Gailey's case demonstrates that in public universities, academic freedom is under assault not only from outside agitators, but also from state legislators working in concert with such groups.

BEST PRACTICES

In a 2017 report, the AAUP made two recommendations for how universities should respond when professors are attacked. First, university actors, from governing boards and high-level administrators to college deans and faculty, must aggressively defend academic freedom both collectively and individually. Second, administrators should develop policies that limit or prohibit "surreptitious recording of classroom discourse or of private meetings between students and faculty."⁶⁶ These recommendations are a good start, but universities can do more, including the following:

Condemn Threats

Unflattering stories about professors in *Campus Reform* and similar outlets rarely lead to constructive debate. Rather, they often beget harassment campaigns against targeted professors. Universities must not only condemn the threats but also the role that outlets like *Campus Reform* play in encouraging them.

Although condemning threats of violence should be an obvious response, some universities never even acknowledge that their professors receive them. In his first comments about the protest at UNL, for example, University of Nebraska system President Hank Bounds condemned protestors' behavior towards Kaitlyn Mullen but ignored the hate mail sent to Amanda Gailey and the death threats lodged against Courtney Lawton.

Other universities denounce threats of violence but bury the lede. When Trin-



Nebraska Union of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Photo: *ensign_beedrill* via Wikimedia Commons.

ual meetings with Gailey, Lawton, and Mullen. After Mullen met with the chancellor, however, she reopened the debate on twitter by complaining about the English department's mission statement, and suggesting that it was "teaching students to be social justice warriors."⁶¹

To Gailey, the attacks appeared coordinated between Nebraska's Republican establishment and TPUSA. Indeed, a few days after Mullen's tweets, three Republican state senators sent an open letter⁶² to the president and chancellor that echoed Mullen's complaints, grumbling that the department's mission statement lacked "traditional English Department words such as 'classic literature studies,' 'writing,' 'poetry,' 'fiction,' 'grammar,' and

an, told *The Hastings Tribune* that he and his colleagues were going to continue to "hold government accountable," since UNL "is a government-funded university."⁶³

In response, Bounds seemed to cave, announcing that Courtney Lawton's contract would not be renewed the following academic year. (Initially, Lawton had been reassigned from her teaching duties but had remained an employee.) Bounds and Green also announced the university was hiring a polling firm to assess the campus political climate for conservatives.⁶⁴

The Nebraska GOP remained dissatisfied. In late November they issued another open records request, this one targeted

ity's president first responded to the uproar over Johnny Eric Williams' tweets, she only mentioned the threats Williams faced at the end of the memo, and instead of forcefully condemning them, used tempered language—"not acceptable"—to describe them.

Get Educated

Many administrators don't understand how online harassment works. Dorothy Kim told me that she had to explain what doxing was to one administrator. Another dean questioned her account because he did not see anything about it on Twitter. Kim had to explain that the Alt Right was "deplatformed" after the Charlottesville rally, as Twitter banned several Alt Right accounts and others canceled their accounts in protest. As a result, the Alt Right turned to smaller forums, like subreddits, to plan attacks, and took cues from writers sympathetic to the Alt Right. "Pizzagate is the perfect example," Kim told me. "People didn't see it coming because it wasn't discussed in the usual places."

Correct the Factual Record

One of the hallmarks of *Campus Reform* and TPUSA stories is inaccuracy. In Gailey's case, both groups' stories contained basic factual errors. The caption for the TPUSA video, for example, inaccurately stated that Gailey was "off camera" during the filming. Both outlets also claimed that Gailey harassed Kaitlyn Mullen, when, in fact, she'd comforted her. Eyewitness accounts from the protest, as well as the university's own security footage video, contradict these statements. Yet the university never demanded corrections. When local newspapers repeated the inaccuracies, the university let them go unchallenged. Administrators' failure to publically correct the record made it easier for the legislature and one of its regents to unfairly call for Gailey's dismissal.

Develop a Counter-Narrative

The errors in stories by *Campus Reform*, TPUSA, and others are not the result of sloppy fact checking, but rather an agen-

da to get liberal professors fired. Accordingly, though correcting factual errors is important, this must be accompanied by a counter-narrative of events from the university. Williams' case provides a good example. The *Campus Reform* article about Williams' tweets used a heading that attributed Son of Baldwin's comments to Williams and accused him of impugning all White people. In her first public memo, Trinity President Berger-Sweeney made it clear that Williams was not Son of Baldwin, but she failed to put his tweets into context. As Williams ex-

The Alt Right has made no secret of the fact that it sees universities and colleges as a battleground. With little resistance from universities, the movement's attacks on professors are likely to continue, if not accelerate.

plained in our interview, critical race scholars do not believe that race is "real" in a biological sense. Nor do they equate Whiteness and White people. Rather, they teach that Whiteness is an ideology used to justify dominance. Within this context, Williams' tweets, in which he put scare quotes around the word "White," look very different.

Gailey's case also illustrates the importance of developing a counter-narrative. The Nebraska Republican Party used a factual error forwarded by TPUSA—that Gailey had harassed a TPUSA student volunteer—to claim that conservatives' free speech was under assault and that Gailey should be fired. A good counter-narrative would have noted two things. First, the First Amendment does not guarantee anyone a compliant audience. Heckling, making fun of political opponents, and carrying posters are just as protected as setting up a recruitment table. Second, if you defend Mullen's right to recruit for TPUSA, you have to defend Gailey's right to protest the organization.

Universities also should counter the Alt Right's use of the free speech mantle to legitimize what is essentially harassment. As Dorothy Kim told me, her case "was not really a free speech issue." Instead, Kim argued that by tagging Milo Yiannopoulos, Rachel Fulton Brown was "sending violence my way." Although

Kim was grateful that Vassar administrators met her safety requests, she was disappointed that the university handled her case as if it were about free speech.

The Alt Right has made no secret of the fact that it sees universities and colleges as a battleground. With little resistance from universities, the movement's attacks on professors are likely to continue, if not accelerate. The cases detailed here suggest that universities have a steep learning curve and not much time to climb it. The first step should be to change the terms of the debate. Univer-

sities must counter the Alt Right's claim that it only wants to be another voice at the table and instead acknowledge that its ideology is illiberal and menacing to a variety of demographic groups in the country. In tandem, universities must methodically rewrite their faculty manuals and their rules for renting space on campus in ways that reinforce universities' right to reject intolerant behavior and to protect and defend professors, students, and staff from threats of violence. 🗣️

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A Call to Love: Confronting the Religious Right's Attacks on Gender and Sexual Minorities in Africa

The rising global wave of conservative religious mobilization that singles out women and LGBTQI people for condemnation, punishment, and persecution is cause for alarm as well as action. While those who denounce, demonize, and cast stones belong to many nations, these oppressive campaigns often have their origins with U.S. religious conservatives seeking to impose their intolerant—and even theocratic—interpretations of Christianity on the rest of the world and who have recently found strong allies in the White House.

Over the last decade, PRA has worked to document and challenge this trend. The forthcoming book, *A Call to Love: Confronting the Religious Right's Attacks on Gender and Sexual Minorities in Africa*, reflects our ongoing commitment to producing accessible, relevant, action-oriented research and expert analysis. We hope that it will support and inform human-rights groups, news media, policymakers, grassroots activists, religious leaders, and all those looking to advance social justice and human rights. Ultimately, we are working toward the dream of globalizing hope rather than despair and justice rather than suffering.



Senior Research Analyst Kapya Kaoma. Photo: Allen Abdula.

In this book, PRA Senior Research Analyst Kapya Kaoma speaks frankly about his journeys to understand sexual politics in Africa, the growing militant attacks on sexual and gender minorities, and the role the Christian Right and U.S. conservatives have played over the years in shifting discourses and practices of many African religious leaders, and in engendering policies that have led to numerous deaths, imprisonment, and displacement of fellow Africans. Kaoma centers the life stories of African sexual and gender minorities, insisting on humanizing them in the face of attempts to erase them literally and metaphorically. He explains that there is nothing inherently African about homophobia just as there is nothing inherently Western about LGBTQI identities. He calls upon Africans, and particularly religious leaders, to practice Ubuntu and “reject theologies and ideologies that harm God’s people.” As religious leaders take positions detrimental to the well-being and human rights of members of the LGBTQI community, it becomes even more important to hear and elevate voices of moral courage, like Kaoma’s, demanding more inclusive and just futures for all.

-Zeina Zaatari, PRA Research Director

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