



By Lotte Hughes



US-based [Parler](#) has been around since 2018, but was fairly unknown outside the US until recently. Billed as a conservative alternative to Twitter, it now has some two million users, including Kenyans, who post what Parler calls “parleys” rather than tweets. It champions free speech, claims not to censor, and has attracted many Twitter castaways who were banned for breaking Twitter’s rules – especially those concerning racist hate speech. (An FM radio station in Kenya claimed that Kenyans were “being taken by storm” by Parler.)

Parler has made concerted efforts to lure Donald Trump away from his Twitter addiction, thus far unsuccessfully, even though Twitter has started fact-checking Trump’s tweets and removing those that are false or misleading, which has made the US president very unhappy. Founded by conservatives fed up with the moderation of posts on Twitter and Facebook, it has become the go-to home for right-wingers and “libertarians” in the US, the UK and around the world.

But how popular is this social media platform likely to become in Kenya and the diaspora once its unbridled racism and Western-centrism becomes clear?

Despite its free speech credentials, Parler does in fact ban those it doesn’t like. “Pretty much all of my leftist friends joined Parler to screw with MAGA [Make America Great Again] folks, and every last one of them was banned in less than 24 hours because conservatives truly love free speech,” one user [wrote on Twitter](#).

This is largely the story of my experience on Parler. I joined in July, under a pseudonym, largely to find out what some of the British “castaways” were up to, and to continue calling them out on racism

and Islamophobia, in particular. What I've experienced in this shouty, swearsy bear-pit may act as a warning to those tempted to dive in.

Within days of joining, I was called (among other things) a tyrant, leftard, libtard, racist, fascist, pedo and peodo (sic), faggot, nonce, pervert, jihadist, globalist, c\*\*t, twunt (a reference to Twitter), whiney Karen, baby raper, commie, Marxist, moron, and a "stanky, sweat-dripping, hairy balls dude". One British man who lobbed constant anti-Irish abuse after I revealed my dual Irish/British citizenship, called me a "dirty peat-digging Paddy", Tinker and "bog trotting Mick". (The slur "leftie scum" is comparatively sweet.) Though I left my gender unclear ("bloke, possibly"), many have assumed I am a gay man, and have sent homophobic abuse that elides gay men and paedophiles.

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But this is nothing compared to the online abuse thrown at women of colour. When Kamala Harris was announced as Joe Biden's running mate, many on the official Team Trump timeline called her a whore ("ho") who has slept her way to the top. Revolting memes and doctored pictures showed her being f\*\*ked from behind by a donkey (a symbol associated with Democrats), going down on the J in Joe, as a scantily-clad prostitute standing on a street corner next to a photo-shopped image of Biden dressed as a pimp, and so on.

The same "birther" slurs that Trump and Trumpites lobbed at Barack Obama - for allegedly having been born in Kenya and therefore ineligible to be POTUS - are also being lobbed at Asian-American Harris, who was in fact born in the US. One sample racist comment stands for many: "You have to give Kamala Comealot Harris credit in one area... she has worked hard in her career. She has worn out 12 pairs of knee pads!" This kind of abuse continues unabated, whenever Trumpites refer to the Dems and their presidential candidates. I repeat, *much of this is on the official Team Trump timeline*. Let that sink in.

Shortly after joining Parler, I also began reading the online [Front Page Magazine \(FPM\)](#), founded in the US by far-right commentator David Horowitz, which features articles by former British Twitter queen Katie Hopkins (explained below). Some of the abuse in the comment sections on FPM is as bad if not worse than Parler

Much of what I've read cannot be reproduced here, because it includes unfettered racism, sexism, misogyny, Islamophobia, homophobia, and all the other "obias" one can think of. Language that would earn the messenger an instant ban from Twitter. (I will give some examples later.) One can usually identify fellow travellers by the fact that they "up-vote" your comment, whereas right-wing nasties give you the thumbs down, often followed by a torrent of four-lettered abuse. Parler does not do "likes" as Twitter does, and neither is there an edit option. Occasionally, just to draw people out, I throw in the odd (tongue-in-cheek) far-right endorsement, which is enthusiastically greeted as presumably coming from "one of us". I sometimes agree with Katie and her ilk; very few recognise this as sarcasm.

Why describe my Parler experience? Because while it is tempting to ignore Parler and the far right and to wrinkle your nose and turn away, I believe it is dangerous to do so. That's also an empirical observation, grounded in my past experience as a newspaper hack who has interviewed far-right lads. In an earlier incarnation as a sociology student, I joined a gang in order to study youth

deviance, and learned plenty about fledgling British Nazis. Turning a blind eye allows these folk to fester underground, largely unseen and unchecked, and to assume that the far-right threat has receded. At least these haters were in full view on Twitter, and could be called out by thousands of people, before being banned if they violated Twitter's rules. Lift the lid on Parler and FPM and you find a hornet's nest buzzing with people stoking hatred against anyone perceived as the enemy.

### **British migrants from Twitter**

The best-known of these recent migrants to these platforms include far-right activist Tommy Robinson and his whacky pal Katie Hopkins, who is often described as a "media commentator". Islamophobic racist white supremacists would be a better label, though they both claim not to be racist or white supremacist. Both call themselves journalists, which is infuriating to those of us who really are.

Tommy is fond of wearing T-shirts reading "Convicted of Journalism", following his conviction and jailing for contempt of court in July 2019 after he interfered with the trial of a sexual grooming gang the previous year. (This is only the latest in a string of convictions; he faces trial for libel soon.) I helped to get Hopkins permanently banned from Twitter earlier this year after a sustained campaign (by me and others) that ranged from ridicule to flat condemnation. Hopkins never engaged with me, but eventually blocked me after the ridicule became acute. I dubbed her Shouty Nutkins, then Burkie Bonkins after she began wearing a *burqa* in videos sending up British "ISIS bride" Shamima Begum. So much for the great champion of free speech. Every time this happens I think: "They don't like it up 'em, do they? (That's a famous line from the British sitcom *Dad's Army*, about an amateur militia preparing to fight the Germans in World War II. It refers to a bayonet, a blade fixed to the end of a rifle which can be used to stab an opponent in hand-to-hand fighting.)

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Now, I am someone who swore until recently that I would never use Twitter, never mind anything other social media site. Stupid, big waste of time and energy, who the heck has the time to tweet all day? But like many others, I've found that it's addictive, especially during lockdown. Then the big migration happened, with fashes (that's what we leftie trolls call fascists) gleefully bragging about their newfound freedom on Parler, and calling to their pals to join them and abandon "Twater" It became tempting to see what was happening on the other side. I soon developed a second addiction.

### **Shocked Parler users**

The daft thing about Parler is that its devotees - especially those who boast about migrating from Twitter to these sunny, swearsy uplands - seem surprised that "the enemy" has followed them there. I was endlessly told it wasn't the right place for me, that I should "f\*\*k off back to Twater". Here's one example from a woman writing on 27 July: "You ever heard the saying the left can't troll? Thats why you want to de platform and censor us lol f\*\*k off back to twitter you melt (sic)." And on 2 August: "Why are there so many anti Katie Muslims on here?"

Neither do these folk understand the concept of free speech, which they seem to think simply involves swearing. It's been quite liberating to swear back harder when I am not being scrupulously polite, which winds them up even more. It's not for nothing that I have been a tabloid hack, Hell's Angel, and racing stable girl in my time. No experience is ever wasted.

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Far-right racists have effectively kettled themselves, and are now shouting pointlessly into the void at each other. Recent topics of "discussion" (at least on Hopkins' timeline, and before the run-up to the US elections began in earnest) are largely on Black Lives Matter, immigrants, Muslims, sexual grooming gangs in northern England, vaccines and COVID lockdown measures, which Hopkins opposes. The libertarian, gun-toting Trumpite Americans on Parler lap up Tommy and Katie, blissfully unaware that they are both reviled and mocked here in the UK. "We love you, Foreign Secretary!" (posted while she was visiting the US in August). Said another: "You are loved by a saviour and his church!" One up-voted my sarky comment: "Katie for Chancellor!" The same people are invariably Christian (I call them CINOs, Christians in name only), anti-vaxxers, conspiracy theorists, "Deep State" freaks and COVID denialists, their profile pic bristling with guns, MAGA, images of POTUS, and the Stars and Stripes.

### **Some observations**

A key observation, from a British point of view, is that some of Tommy's followers are now turning against him. They question his source of income (that includes donations from fans), his wealthy lifestyle (he lives in a £1m mansion, or did until it was allegedly firebombed recently by persons unknown), and his support for Israel. "Are you talking about Britain or Israel, Tomme?" asked one former Tommy fan, whose profile declares: "100% white. 100% proud." Another disgruntled self-confessed racist told me: "Who said I like Tommy? He loves wogs and Jews."

Another observations is that working class Tory voters are turning against the British government, especially Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Home Secretary Priti Patel, largely because of their failure to take tougher action against immigrants arriving by cross-channel dinghy. (More than 5,000 migrants have entered the UK this way so far this year.) Nobody wants to discuss Brexit much, despite my best attempts to draw them out.

Overall, there is seething anger and scapegoating of "others", as one might expect. Cross-cutting themes, which straddle international borders, include a perceived loss of identity in the face of multiculturalism, a fear of being "invaded" by Muslims in particular, and foreign threats to "Western civilization" ("I think it would be a good idea," said Mahatma Gandhi, when asked what he thought of it). Underlying it all is a strong sense of insecure masculinity and fragile identity.

The mantra is white America first, white Britain first, Western civilisation first, the rest of the world nowhere.

### **Blocked**

Tommy Robinson blocked me after a particularly good day (from my point of view) when I taunted him for the hypocrisy of running away to Spain after the alleged arson attack on his home. This from a man who has spent years railing against immigrants and asylum seekers, yet now appears to be seeking asylum abroad. A man who voted Brexit and against freedom of movement, yet ran to mainland Europe at the first sign of trouble. A man who rails against "commies", yet is clearly in Putin's pocket. Jokers on Twitter say he's changed his name to Juan Kerr in order to assimilate more quickly in Spain. Katie blocked me soon afterwards.

I felt cheated: I'd only been on Parler about 10 days. Lots more folk started lobbing abuse and down-

voting my posts before blocking me. On 10 August I got this:

[Breaking!!!!](#)

[Watch out for xxx](#)

[Sounds like one very bitter and twisted individual. \(obviously on summer vacation\)](#)

While I could still follow Katie, I took the opportunity while she was in the US in August “pounding the sidewalks for Trump”, to sabotage her feed. Very politely, saying I am updating her followers on the “immigrants in boats” story which she can’t report on while away, I posted stories from the *Guardian* and anti-Brexit *New European* that punctured Priti Patel’s plans to send in the Royal Navy. Some naïve Yanks up-voted me (indicating approval), clearly before having read the stories.

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Having been dumped by those two charmers, I turned to trolling people on the Team Trump feed. On 25 August, 17-year-old self-styled vigilante Kyle Rittenhouse shot dead two strangers at a BLM protest in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and wounded a third. This came days after unarmed Jacob Blake was shot in the back by cops at point-blank range, leaving him partly paralysed. I need not tell you who was white and who black. Rittenhouse (who has been charged with homicide) is being hailed by some as a national hero, while Blake is accused of the usual: guilty while black.

I posted a comment, which got this swift response from a Rittenhouse defender: “Did you miss the part where one of his assailants was carrying a pistol? And they were in the process of beating the shit out of him? The fact that he held back as long as he did is testament to his desire to NOT kill them. They created the situation that caused their deaths, not him.”

At this point our reporter left.

For more on Parler in Kenya:

<https://www.nation.co.ke/kenya/news/world/with-social-media-in-tumult-startup-parler-draws-conservatives-1446834>. The quote “being taken by storm” is from [kiss100.co.ke](https://www.kiss100.co.ke) (21 July 2020).

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