Twitter Thread by Colin Mills

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I want to tell you a story. It illustrates the low level, but unpleasant hassle faced by academics holding views deemed unacceptable by self-appointed defenders of public safety. I'm not going to name names. I'm not interested in facilitating a pile on. The abused is>>

robust and capable of looking after themself. I was sent a screenshot of the abuser's protected twitter narration of the incident. I've also seen it tweeted on here. I've no idea how it was leaked. I've not seen its authenticity challenged. >>

So to the tale. Dr X organizes a seminar with a symposium panel under the auspices of a Faculty in a large well known UK university. Dr Y who is a member of the university with a legitimate interest in the subject matter of the panel registers to >

attend. Y is known to hold what for sake of succinctness I'll call Gender Critical views. X notices shortly before the seminar is to begin that Y will be in attendance and goes into meltdown. Y is deemed an "anti-trans campaigner" which in the commonly accepted >>

rather than Pickwickian sense of these words is false. X contemplates a last minute cancellation of the event. Hurried discussions are held with senior faculty and eventually with the VC who insists the event must take place and Y must be allowed to attend. The event takes place>

without incident. So, in the end nothing much to see. But X feels it necessary to tweet their account of matters to the faithful. And that account is what is interesting. Firstly they wheel out the safeguarding trope. The implication is that students and other attendees were >>

literally put in danger by Y listening to a symposium over Zoom. Then a libelous and unsubstantiated allegation is made. Y is said to have a "history of harassment of trans women" and further has "singled out" staff and students. I believe this statement to be untrue and have

seen no evidence to support it. Then there is a sideswipe at the university for not doing anything about the alleged behaviour. Which I suppose is unsurprising if there is no evidence to support the claim. Finally the piece de resistance, the attribution of motivation.

X plums the depths of Y's psyche and declares to their followers that the reason Y attended the seminar was not the obvious one of having an interest in the subject, but in order to get himself no platformed. Machiavellian eh? And if X had had his way, Y, by this reasoning, >>

would have succeeded! Which is a bit of a paradox and casts a shadow of doubt on X's tactical awareness. No matter. Just another day at the coal face. No bones broken. Nobody silenced, nobody traumatized, nobody's existence denied, nobody "literally killed".>>

So what to learn. 1) In this case the university acted correctly and refused to bow to hysterical grandstanding; 2) on the other hand it is not normal for a vice chancellor to have to intervene in such a mundane thing as deciding who can & can't attend a seminar; >>

3) It is unpleasant for an ordinary faculty member's attendance at a seminar to be questioned by a colleague and made subject to high level approval; 4) Y is laid open to "no smoke without fire" rumours. 5) Y is libeled and derogatory insinuations are made about their alleged >>

behaviour in the past and their present motivations. This is not part of the normal rough and tumble of academic discourse. It is something much nastier. It's part of the drip, drip of reputational assassination constructed from the fabricated narrative of victimhood. >>

Nothing to see but the social construction of reality in action. >>

It may be true that all is fair in love and war. But universities are in the truth business and seminars exist for the purpose of disseminating scientific knowledge, for debate and argument not for dispensing therapy, self-validation or a cult ideology that must not be >>

questioned. Without a commitment to that idea and the implicit agreement to adhere to a set of behavioural norms of decorum it is difficult to see how a university can continue to exist as a functioning community of scholars and learners. We may not always like each other

but we shouldn't treat colleagues as though they are public enemy number one and subject them to calumny. In a university ideas are to be debated and arguments tested. If you don't want to do that, you've made a mistake in your understanding of what a university is for. >>

Alternatives are available: cf churches, political parties, social movements, cults....