



She lost a defamation case to food blogger Jack Monroe but professional provocateur Katie Hopkins

# People see me as a villain – but at least I'm not a victim

**A**S KATIE Hopkins refuses to read the interview with Jack Monroe, the food blogger who has just won £24,000 (plus an interim £107,000 in costs) from her in a court case over defamatory tweets, I give her a précis.

She bears no ill will and wants to invite you for dinner, I say. Hopkins snorts. Will she go? "No." Why not? "Mainly because I'm too busy," she says. "But notice how individuals who pursue litigation in courts end up delivering some noble gesture that makes them sound like they took the higher ground?"

It's true that the Mahmood family, who won a £150,000 defamation claim against Hopkins's employers Mail Online when she falsely labelled them extremists, invited her for "tea". But I'm

Charlotte Edwardes



not convinced this "always" happens. Perhaps the Mahmoods and Monroe share a general curiosity about who Hopkins, 42, really is. Does she really hold her more extreme "rent a gob" views? If so, why? How has a middle-class girl from a Devon market town grown up to be a national hate figure of such notoriety that GCSE English students analyse her articles?

In one outburst Hopkins, a mother of three (aged, 12, 11 and eight), columnist and presenter on LBC, called refugees "cockroaches", and suggested drilling

holes in the bottoms of their boats to help them sink. "I don't care," she said after a Syrian child was pictured drowned on a Turkish beach. "Show me bodies floating in water," and "skinny people looking sad. I still don't care."

Elsewhere she's invited suicidal prisoners to kill themselves, said fat people are lazy and ginger babies harder to love (surely a joke?). Her opinions are an out-of-control tank. On Twitter she lobs grenades to cause maximum impact. In 2015 she'd meant to tweet Laurie Penny, the New Statesman columnist who'd written she didn't "have a problem" with vandalism as a form of protest. "Scrawled on any memorials recently?" she wrote to Monroe by mistake. "Vandalised the memory of those who fought for your freedom? Grandma

got any more medals?" Monroe, whose family are military, demanded a "public apology + £5k to migrant rescue and I won't sue." Hopkins deleted the initial tweet but asked if Twitter could differentiate between "the irritant" Penny and "social anthrax" Monroe. Monroe consulted lawyers. Nearly two years later, here we are.

I suppose I was expecting an attack dog when I sat down to wait for Hopkins at Wild Honey in Mayfair. What I get is a puppy. Smallish, energetic and with a pink rinse over cropped blonde hair ("midlife crisis"), she comes balling in, liberally spraying "darlings" at me, the waiter, the photographer. She's "chitty chatty" and smiley but everything she says is extreme. For instance, beetroot is "the devil's vegetable". Accountants are "petty, sad bastards – that's one thing I'd never do, marry an accountant". (Later it turns out her brother-in-law is one). When the photographer tells her I've had good news – Interviewer of the Year at the Press Awards – she says: "I feel like your mother just died and I didn't say sorry – but the opposite, if you see what I mean."

On the subject of the case she hardens, saying she hopes to appeal on grounds she's not sure Monroe can assert she "felt" or "believed" she'd been damaged with so little proof, and the costs "have to be proportionate".

"It's around £25,000 if you lose a big toe in an industrial accident," she says. "So a tweet that was up for two hours or a big toe? Go on, choose: big toe or tweet?"

She says she has the money to pay the costs without re-mortgaging – "The business is set up so that I can manage costs," she says, obliquely, "And people have been very kind in support" – but that the case will bring a "defamation bar lower than my labia". It's a dangerous precedent because Twitter is "the place where big debates are held and there's a bit of rough and tumble that goes with it. I can see some people might want to silence 'Katie Hopkins' but it's never good if we start trimming the edges of that freedom. Because where do you stop?"

Perhaps. But equally, where does Katie Hopkins stop? Why not just say sorry? "There's never been an opportunity to say sorry – which I don't think is necessary if you've deleted and formally retracted – that wasn't linked to something else," she says. "There was always sorry plus a donation to migrants."

I'm not persuaded. She agrees it's not a hard word. "In the street I'd say sorry. If I got run over I'd probably say sorry." But now that the word is soaked in the politics of Left and Right, she is unyielding. She won't even utter Monroe's name. "I'm sorry there was a mistake," she offers. She's convinced the world sees her – on the Right – as "the baddy" and that Monroe – on the Left – is "the goody" and that the whole event was "gladiatorial". The reason this is noisy is that it's two perfect characters, the villain and the hero, fighting it out. Good verses evil. The underdog verses the big bitch. Leave and Remain.

"I saw someone on Twitter saying,



"Why is that gobby cow on Radio 4, surely it should be the victim speaking out, not the oppressor?". And I thought 'Well, at least I'm not being described as the victim'. Because that's the territory I never want to be in."

For all her energy, the last two years have been distressing, not just because of the court case. She is vulnerable physically, after having a brain operation last year that involved having a chunk of her skull cut out in a 12-and-a-half-hour procedure.

"Are you squeamish?" she asks, before taking my hand and placing it on her head. "That soft bit there is my actual brain. They opened me like an egg. I was a massive epileptic and my fits have now stopped. I can sleep again."

After the surgery she contracted meningitis. "It was dodgy for a bit," she says. "I lost three stone. I looked like Julian Clary." Was she scared? "Of course! Even the week before I didn't think I was going to have the operation. I kept bawling it. I was too scared to tell my children, so I didn't. I was too scared to say goodbye to my mum, so I didn't. We just passed on the driveway without speaking. So British." Her children didn't see her for six weeks. Half her head was shaved and she had 52 staples banded

won't say sorry. In a candid interview she reveals her passion for Corbyn and what makes her cry

"I'm sorry there was a mistake": left, Katie Hopkins. Below, Jack Monroe outside court last week after winning her case over a mis-sent tweet

"If I was fat and had a strong regional accent and was a bloke, I'd be a stand-up. I'm funny"

strong regional accent and was a bloke, I'd be a stand-up. Because I think I'm funny."

She believes there is a fuss around her because "people aren't used to a woman being quite so opinionated. It's not considered kind."

Does she consider herself unkind? She tells me how she helped a blind person into the lift at the BBC where she was being interviewed, while an employee looked on. "Those who are most pious and noble tend to be the least tolerant," she says. "Those that preach tolerance have become absolutely prescriptive in what's allowed to be thought."

I wonder if she hates before she likes as a defence mechanism. She'll identify a weak spot and pounce. She calls me "a Leftie" as an insult, teases that I'm obsessed with "migrant babies". When I spot what I think is an unusual spelling of the name "George" on her phone, she eviscerates me because she thinks I'm mocking her.

This hair-trigger response to perceived insult must be exhausting, but she says she's at her armour-plated toughest when she's being abused. Her parents were strict ("My friends were scared of my dad"). She was thrown out of Sand-

hurst because she didn't declare her epilepsy and only went "to prove that I could be in the Army".

Nevertheless, she cries when people are nice to her (or "cute", as she puts it). Someone sent her £10 to help with her court costs and she was a "sobbing wreck on the carpet".

"I have a thing that I don't cry and obviously I don't when I am being tough me, but with my family I do. I cry when I'm sorry."

How has the court case changed her? She says while "reinvigorated to keep going" she also recognises that she needs to concentrate on "things that really matter: personal stories. People email me all the time with stories they need to be heard. I want to articulate for the many that don't have a voice. I don't want to be just having a go at some random punter. It's not worth it for my family or for me."

No more will we see her sitting next to "a 24 stone woman" verbally prodding them to lose weight. "That was the old life. That feels like aeons ago. Do I still have stuff within my life that is relatively shocking of its own story telling? Yes. I over-share. That's how I cope."

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