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American Abortion Culture Wars as Religious Populism: “Truth” and “Fight for Truth” as Floating Signifiers

Dayei Oh | ORCID: 0000-0002-6574-8103

Helsinki Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities,
the University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland
dayei.oh@helsinki.fi

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Abstract

This paper explores the American abortion culture wars through the lens of religious populism, focusing on online discourse of the Christian pro-life confederation, Personhood Alliance. Drawing on Laclaudian post-foundationalist theories, the paper conceptualizes culture wars as a populist logic of meaning-making, where the floating signifier “truth” is central to mobilizing support and constructing Us-Them boundaries. The analysis identifies two key floating meanings of “truth”: restoring divine, cultural, and scientific truth about personhood, and battling the perceived conspiracies of the liberal abortion establishment. Hybrid media ecologies provide a controlled space for the movement to disseminate narratives circumventing platform moderation. The movement’s affective Us-Them construction portrays “Us” as righteous truth-seekers and saviours of the marginalized, while “Them” is cast as a corrupt liberal elite deceiving and exploiting the marginalized. This affective dichotomy expands abortion culture wars beyond the Christian pro-life base, inviting marginalized groups to join the fight against the establishment.

Keywords

religious populism – culture wars – United States – abortion – Christian right – floating signifier

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1 Introduction

The fusion of religion and politics has gained increasing significance, particularly in the context of populist politics exemplified by the electoral success of Donald Trump with his White Evangelical voter base in the US,¹ Viktor Orban's appeal to Christian nationalists in Hungary,² and Narendra Modi's success with his Hindu nationalist support base.³ The convergence of religion and populist politics incorporates three dimensions: religious actors employing populist elements (populism *in* religion), political actors utilising religious elements (populism *about* religion), and populist politics manifesting as religious practices, characterized by quasi-religious, messiah-follower relationships between populist leader and their mass electorates (populism *as* religion).⁴

In addition to the interweaving of religion and populist politics, the evolving "hybrid media"⁵ landscape fundamentally altered the communication affordances available to religious-populist forces to disseminate their messages about religion and politics.⁶ Social media and Internet enable virtually any fringe, extreme, and fundamentalist groups to connect with their followers and recruits at minimal costs. Furthermore, hybrid media affords less institutional gatekeeping than traditional journalistic channels, allowing these movements to communicate directly with their target audiences while circumventing authoritative editorial interventions.

This paper examines the distinctive convergence of religion, populist politics, and hybrid media by investigating the American abortion culture wars through the lens of religious populism. It focuses on the organizational website discourse of the Christian pro-life confederation, Personhood Alliance and analyzing how its discourse utilize emotionally charged narratives and religious-populist elements to justify their political demands and draw the

1 Whitehead, A. L. and Perry, S. L. *Taking America back for God: Christian nationalism in the United States*. (Oxford University Press: 2020).

2 Lamour, C. "Orbán Urbi et Orbi: Christianity as a nodal point of radical-right populism." *Politics and Religion* 15(2) (2022), 317–343.

3 Vasudeva, F. and Lin, S. F. "Revisiting the Populist Moments in Postcolonial India." *Populism* 7(1) (2024) 46–73.

4 Valaskivi, K., Sumiala, J., & Pyrhönen, N. "Conceptualizing Populism about/in/as Religion: Illustrations from Nordic Media Sphere." *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 2 (2023), 69–80.

5 Chadwick, A. *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. (Oxford University Press: 2017).

6 Sumiala, J., Hoover, S. M., & Laughlin, C. "Religious Populism?: Rethinking Concepts and Consequences in a Hybrid Media Age Introduction." *International Journal of Communication* 17 (2023), 2795–2804.

affective boundaries of Us-Them.⁷ Although less studied than major social media platforms, organizational websites are crucial digital spaces, providing social movements with controlled environments to articulate coherent ideologies and narratives, free from the algorithmic or governance constraints of social media.

A novel contribution of this paper is to approach American (abortion) culture wars and Christian pro-life movement through the lens of post-foundationalist logics and performances of populism,⁸ rather than treating them as a fixed set of ideological content and cultural policies. As this paper will illustrate, the movement's legitimation of their fight for fetal personhood and extreme abortion bans represents a battle not only to bring back Christian America, a God's land for Christians,⁹ but also to restore the "truth" about fetal personhood and expose the supposed conspiracy of the liberal establishment – including Democrats, abortion clinics, and biomedical research firms.

The affectedly charged signification of the signifier "truth" is utilized to construct the collective identities of Us and Them in American abortion culture wars, redrawing the boundaries beyond the demarcation of Christian pro-lifers and others. The boundaries are expanded as a dichotomy between righteous truth seekers versus the liberal conspiracy establishment, inviting marginalized groups (such as sexual assault victims, people of color, disabled, economically disadvantaged) to join the fight against the establishment. This case study of the Personhood Alliance's website discourse highlights how hybrid media ecologies provide both affordances and a perceived safe haven for radical movements to shape meanings and propagate their messages, which they see as countering the biases and oppressive nature of mainstream platforms toward their culture warriors' pursuit of "truth."

This article is divided into six parts. First, I provide a historical overview of American culture wars and American Christian pro-life movement. Second, I outline the conceptual framework of religious populism, focusing on the post-foundational approach to populism as a logic of meaning making and Us-Them building.¹⁰ Third, I detail the data and key concepts in Laclaudian discourse analysis methods.¹¹ Fourth, I present an empirical analysis of the Personhood Alliance's floating articulations of the signifier "truth." Fifth,

7 Laclau, E. *On populist reason*. (Verso: 2005); Palonen, E. "Ten theses on populism and democracy." In *The populist manifesto*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2020), 55–69.

8 Laclau, 2005.

9 Whitehead & Perry, 2020.

10 Laclau, 2005; Palonen, 2020.

11 Laclau, 2005; Palonen, 2020.

I discuss how these floating significations redraw the boundaries between Us and Them in the context of American culture wars. Lastly, the final section reflects on what this study can suggest for future research on culture wars and religious populism as well as future reproductive justice movements.

2 American Culture Wars and Christian Pro-life Movement

In 1992, Republican politician Pat Buchanan addressed the Republican National Convention, expressing his support for the Republican Presidential candidate George Bush:

Friends, this election is about more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe and what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as the Cold War itself. For this war is for the soul of America. And in that struggle for the soul of America.¹²

Buchanan's speech continued:

The agenda that Clinton & Clinton would impose on America: abortion on demand, [...] homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools, women in combat units. That's change, all right. But that's not the kind of change America needs. It's not the kind of change America wants. And it's not the kind of change we can abide in a nation where we still call 'God's country.'

Buchanan's 1992 speech encapsulates the American culture wars as a battle over the idea of America itself. Culture wars is more than amalgamation of reactionary politics and policies on gender and cultural issues. The invocation of culture wars always entails the contingent meaning-making of nationhood and peoplehood, which are filled with specific symbolic content in given rhetorical and political contexts. Hunter defines culture wars as "a struggle to

¹² Buchanan, P. "Culture war speech: Address to the Republican National Convention." *Voices of Democracy*. August 17, 1992. <https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/buchanan-culture-war-speech-speech-text/>.

define the very meaning of America, a contest over whose vision of the nation's identity, history, and future will prevail."¹³

Hartman's historical analysis reveals that the rise of culture wars began as a reactionary resistance to the rise of countercultures in the 1960s.¹⁴ Movements associated with the New Social Left, including anti-war, Black power, feminist, and gay liberation movements, ushered in liberal, post-materialist visions of America, which diverged from the virtues of earlier generations, who prioritized security and conformity.¹⁵ President Nixon echoed these concerns in his second inaugural speech in 1973:

Above all else, the time has come for us to renew our faith in ourselves and in America. In recent years, that faith has been challenged. Our children have been taught to be ashamed of their country, ashamed of their parents, ashamed of America's record at home and its role in the world. At every turn, we have been beset by those who find everything wrong with America and little that is right.¹⁶

Although the discursive contestations over the meaning of America persisted since the nation's founding, it was after this cultural 'fracture' of the 1960s that universalized fears of rising secularism, erosion of Christian America, and an ongoing battle for the soul of America among many American voters.¹⁷

In American culture wars, Judeo-Christian heritage is often foregrounded as the most important tradition to restore.¹⁸ By the 1970s, conservative white Christians were increasingly confronted with the secularising American state, such as the 1962 *Engel v. Vitale* decision to render school prayers unconstitutional. Around the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* ruling, abortion became the defining issue for the Christian Right.¹⁹ The polarizing debates over abortion brought into

13 Hunter, J. D. *Culture wars: The struggle to control the family, art, education, law, and politics in America*. (Avalon Publishing: 1992), p. 34.

14 Hartman, A. *A war for the soul of America: A history of the culture wars*. (University of Chicago Press: 2019).

15 Hartman, 2019; Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. (Cambridge University Press: 2019).

16 Nixon, R. "Oath of Office and Second Inaugural Address." *The American Presidency Project*. January 20, 1973. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/oath-office-and-second-inaugural-address>.

17 Hartman, 2019, p. 4.

18 Hartman, 2019.

19 Ferree, M. M., Gamson, W. A., Gerhards, J., & Rucht, D. *Shaping abortion discourse: Democracy and the public sphere in Germany and the United States*. (Cambridge University Press: 2002); Hartman, 2019.

focus meanings of fetal personhood, motherhood, and family values, framed through competing Christian and secular moralities.²⁰ While largely believing in the absolute fetal right to life, American Christian pro-life organizations in the late 20th century were more pragmatic in their movement strategies and discourses. Post-*Roe*, the Christian pro-life movement often prioritized incremental restrictions on legal abortion over outright bans of abortion, which, while desirable, were deemed unlikely to resonate with the wider public or succeed politically.²¹

In recent years, however, the more extreme factions of the Christian pro-life movement have resurged.²² The Personhood Alliance, established in 2014 as a confederation of independent Christian pro-life organizations, exemplifies this resurgence. The group, like other more extreme pro-life factions, demands legal and constitutional recognition of fetal personhood and a complete ban on abortion. Despite being smaller in size compared to mainstream Christian pro-life organizations, the Personhood Alliance is particularly relevant to this paper's aims, as it centers its mission on biblical fetal personhood and explicitly presents its religious-populist orientation for "restoration" and "battle."²³ Its website states:

The Personhood Alliance is a Christ-centred, biblically informed organisation dedicated to the non-violent advancement of the recognition and protection of the God-given, inalienable right to life of all human beings as legal persons, at every stage of their biological development and in every circumstance. The Personhood Alliance defends against all direct assaults on God's design for life, marriage, family, sexuality, and gender.²⁴

Hartman concedes that cultural conflicts in America continue, but he insists that contemporary culture wars are "less poignant and more farcical," because many issues central to the culture wars of the 20th century (e.g., gay rights) have reached a relatively stable social consensus, leaving the logic of culture wars largely exhausted.²⁵ However, in contrast to Hartman's provocative

20 Ferree et al., 2002.

21 Ziegler, M. *Dollars for Life: The Anti-abortion Movement and the Fall of the Republican Establishment*. (Yale University Press: 2022).

22 Ziegler, 2022.

23 Marzouki, N., McDonnell, D., & Roy, O. *Saving the people: How populists hijack religion*. (Oxford University Press: 2016).

24 Personhood Alliance. *Mission/vision*. (2024) <https://personhood.org/about-us/mission-vision/>.

25 Hartman, 2019, p. 284.

diagnosis, the rhetoric and strategies of abortion culture wars have been evolving in recent years. According to Lewis, the American Christian Right has increasingly appropriated conventional left-wing and liberal arguments (such as emphasizing rights instead of morality) to justify its controversial, minority positions, broadening its appeal beyond its Christian base.²⁶

The content of meaning-making in American culture wars is constantly evolving, and these contingent developments demonstrate that culture wars remain a critical subject for academic inquiry. While previous studies have approached American culture wars as quantified degrees of partisan polarization,²⁷ as electoral support for reactionary authoritarian right-wing populists,²⁸ or as rooted in fundamentally incompatible moral foundations between the religious and the secular,²⁹ this paper frames culture wars as discursive logics and performances of meaning-making, assigned to competing visions of America, Americanness, and the perceived threats and values at stake. The benefit of this anti-essentialist is its flexibility, which allows it to be adapted to global contexts beyond the US. This approach enables cross-cultural studies of culture wars while leaving the specific ideological content of such conflicts open for national actors to define.

3 American Culture Wars as Post-foundationalist Religious Populism

One of the novel contributions of this paper is to conceptualize American culture wars as religious populism through Laclau's post-foundationalist theories.³⁰ American culture wars are discursive battles over the meanings of America and Americanness, articulated through numerous political issues that serve as expressive vessels, including the Christian pro-life demands. Abortion, as part of American culture wars, represents a contest over the meanings of personhood, motherhood, family values, and sexual morality, often framed in relation to Christian ethics.³¹

The concept of populism is widely debated, with various scholarly definitions. For some, populism is a thin-centred ideology that views society as

26 Lewis, A. R. *The rights turn in conservative Christian politics: How abortion transformed the culture wars*. (Cambridge University Press: 2017).

27 Mouw, T., & Sobel, M. E. "Culture wars and opinion polarization: the case of abortion." *American Journal of Sociology* 106(4) (2001), 913–943.

28 Norris & Inglehart, 2019.

29 Hunter, 1992.

30 Laclau, 2005; Palonen, 2020.

31 Ferree et al., 2002.

fundamentally divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: “the people” versus “the corrupt elite”.³² Others define populism as a political communication style and strategy.³³ From a post-foundational perspective, populism is performative: it is an empty logic of “us-building,” which draws affective frontiers between the in-group (e.g., Us, “the people”) and out-groups (e.g., Them, the Other, “the establishment”).³⁴ This anti-essentialist perspective highlights how different content and affects can be attached to the master signifier (e.g., “the people”) and other unifying signifiers.³⁵ In this sense, populism is not the end goal but a political means: populist performances aim to generate new visions and meanings as alternatives to the “failing” status quo.³⁶ Such a performative understanding of populism aligns with the theoretical framework of culture wars in this paper.

Understanding culture wars as a flexible populist logic, rather than a rigid set of ideological content, also helps scholars develop comparable and transferable knowledge about different culture wars unfolding globally. These wars involve diverse politico-historical and socio-cultural particularities. In this regard, culture wars are not a movement, a group of actors, nor a specific set of positions, but rather a logic and process of meaning-making that justifies competing visions of nationhood and peoplehood, and the meaning of their movement.

Religious populism, as discussed in this paper, refers to an intertwining of religion with populist performances. Scientific research on religious populism have explored multiple facets of this phenomenon, including populism *about* religion and populism *in* religion.³⁷ In literature on populism *about* religion, the interests often lie in the political utilization of religion by populist actors, such as “hijacking religion”³⁸ to serve populist political goals and to build the identitarian boundaries of Us-Them boundaries through religious codes, such as Christian Us versus Muslim Them.³⁹ The literature on populism *in* religion⁴⁰

32 Mudde, C. “The populist zeitgeist.” *Government and Opposition* 39(4) (2004), 541–563.

33 Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. “Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties’ discourse in Belgium.” *European Journal of Political Research* 46(3) (2007), 319–345.

34 Laclau, 2005; Palonen, 2020.

35 Laclau, 2005; Palonen, 2020.

36 Palonen, 2020.

37 Valaskivi et al., 2023.

38 Marzouki et al., 2016.

39 Haynes, J. “Right-wing populism and religion in Europe and the USA.” *Religions* 11(10) (2020), 490.

40 Valaskivi et al., 2023.

examines how religious groups employ populist elements and narratives to construct their discursive self-conception of religion. For instance, religious groups utilize two key populist strategies – invoking “restoration” and “battle” – to mobilize support against threats (e.g., secularism, established/corrupt church elites).⁴¹ Populism *in* religion also involves the media and communication dimensions of religious mobilization, in which Christian groups frame their Christian activism as part of missionary work, “spreading the good word” to wider public and seeking to convert those they view as needing “saving”.⁴²

This communicative dimension of religious populism becomes more complex in the “hybrid media” environment,⁴³ where traditional notions of editorial gatekeeping and authority are disrupted. Organizations like Personhood Alliance can leverage digital technologies to disseminate their extreme pro-life demands and construct Us-Them boundaries to mobilize support, while circumventing conventional authoritative editorial inventions by the media elites and other mainstream knowledge elites (e.g., experts).⁴⁴

While much of the literature on religious populism in hybrid media focuses on social media platforms such as Twitter,⁴⁵ the role of social movement websites warrants further attention. Movement websites serve as controlled, foundational spaces where organizations articulate their ideologies, construct coherent narratives, and establish legitimacy without interference from platform algorithms or moderation/governance decisions that may affect the visibility and flow of their messages. Analyzing the Personhood Alliance’s website publications provides insights into their core narratives and populist strategies, offering a more comprehensive view compared to the more often short and fragmented discourse observed on social platforms.

4 Data and Laclaudian Discourse Analysis

To analyze the American abortion culture wars as religious populism through a post-foundationalist approach, I collected textual materials published on the website of the Personhood Alliance (<https://personhood.org/>). Among the various communicative affordances of the website, this paper examines four

41 Marzouki et al., 2016.

42 Valaskivi et al., 2023, p. 73.

43 Chadwick, 2017.

44 Sumiala, Hoover, et al., 2023.

45 Sumiala, J., Harju, A. A., & Palonen, E. “Islam as the folk devil: Hashtag publics and the fabrication of civilizationism in a post-terror populist moment.” *International Journal of Communication* 17 (2023), 2864–2882.

specific types of text materials that are likely to contain core messages about their religious-populist meaning-making practices about the convergence of religion and politics: (1) press releases (PR, $n = 20$); (2) action and strategy memos (ASM, $n = 6$); (3) educational resources about abortion (EMA, $n = 15$); and (4) educational resources about foundational worldviews (EMF, $n = 12$).

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this data collection. This dataset does not capture all materials published by the Personhood Alliance (e.g., newsletters, news articles) due to the limited scope of this paper. These omitted materials could provide valuable insights for future research, particularly in comparing more public communications (e.g., website materials) with internal communications (e.g., newsletters for subscribers and members). Data collection was conducted on 20 May 2023, leaving the most recent publications for future investigation. Video materials are excluded unless full transcripts are available. Appendix 1 provides a full overview of the dataset, including material type, title, text preview, and hyperlinks.

Methodologically, this article draws on Laclaudian discourse analysis. Rooted in post-structuralist and deconstructionist theories, Laclau emphasizes the political and contingent nature of meaning.⁴⁶ A meaning assigned to a signifier is never natural, neutral, or fixated; it is always a product of competing political struggles – both hegemonic and counterhegemonic – to universalize a particular interpretation while repressing alternative meanings.

Within this theoretical framework, Laclau introduces the concepts of “floating” and “empty” signifiers. An empty signifier is a unifying signifier devoid of specific content of its own, allowing various groups and struggles to project their particular meanings onto it. An empty signifier often serves as a central point, representing an overarching goal and uniting diverse, potentially contradictory demands and ideas. A floating signifier is a signifier whose meaning is not yet fixed and remains contested among different discourses, thereby “floating” between different interpretations. Therefore, the distinction between floating and empty signifiers is not always clear-cut.

Affect plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning within religious-populist performances.⁴⁷ By attaching emotional weight to key signifiers, movements can effectively demarcate boundaries between Us and Them. This affective charge not only reinforces group identity but also delegitimizes opposing viewpoints, framing them as threats to the collective well-being of “the people.”

46 Laclau, 2005.

47 Laclau, 2005; Palonen, 2020.

In summary, using Laclaudian discourse analysis, this paper analyses (1) what are the key signifiers in the Personhood Alliance's religious-populist performances to assign meanings to their movements and demands; (2) how the floating articulations of meanings are constructed for these key signifiers; and (3) how these floating articulations are charged with affects to create the demarcation of Us and Them.

5 Truth as a Key Signifier with Three Floating Usages

During the iterative reading of the data, I noticed that the word "truth" appears repeatedly as a key signifier in the Personhood Alliance's discourse. One material (EMF1) states: "To bring victory here, we need to point broken people in broken situations to the *truth*" (emphasis added). Another emphasizes the value of truth for pro-life activism, arguing that "the *truth* sets us free" (EMA7), and that "the movement needs to seize this opportunity and prepare Christians to boldly speak the *truth* in love" (PR2). The Personhood Alliance also links to another Christian pro-life organization, the Radiance Foundation, whose mission is to "motivate people to put *truth* and love into action ... Love illuminates *difficult truths*, without fear, so that others may experience freedom" (EMA12).

The repeated usage of the signifier "truth" illustrates how religious groups "mobilize, debate, and negotiate" populist elements and narratives in the religious movement's discursive self-conception (populism *in* religion⁴⁸). Previous research on American Christian Right often focuses on how American Christian nationalists appropriate Christian symbols and elements to construct America as the land of God.⁴⁹ The Personhood Alliance's discourse certainly involves a significant volume of arguments constructing America as a Christian nation since its foundation (e.g., PR11, EMA1). However, what is more interesting for this paper is this discursive self-positioning of the religious movement through the signifier "truth." The articulation justifies the Personhood Alliance's mobilization as a fight for restoration and revelation of "truth," to set free and protect the American people. In this way, the movement redraws the boundaries of people who can join and support the movement, who are not necessarily Christian but who are nonetheless "truth fighters" for American society.

In the remainder of this paper, I will explain the results of my analysis about how the Personhood Alliance's discourse allocates two floating meanings to the signifiers "truth" and "the fight for truth" vis-à-vis abortion and

48 Valaskivi et al., 2023.

49 Whitehead & Perry, 2020.

fetal personhood. The movement's fight for truth is, on one hand, framed as a "restoration"⁵⁰ to cherish the divine, cultural, and scientific "truth" about personhood, but it is also framed, on the other hand, as a "battle" to unmask and expose dark, hidden "truth" of abortion and liberal establishment. The themes of "restoration" and "battle" can be invoked simultaneously; therefore, the two themes should not be understood as distinct categories but as overlapping themes that illuminate the movement's contingent emphasis on different meanings of truth in a given rhetorical moment.

Furthermore, I highlight how the Christian extreme pro-life movement utilizes varying types of knowledge, information, and narratives as "truthful" sources to legitimize their truth claims. In doing so, the signifier "truth" contains floating meanings on two layers: one in terms of the movement's self-described missions (restoration and battle), and another in terms of the varying epistemic sources to validate their truth claims (cf. varying and even contradicting epistemic, from science to supernatural channeling in Robertson and Amarasingam's work.⁵¹

5.1 *Fight for Truth as "Restoration" of Divine, Cultural and Scientific Truth*

On one hand, the mission of the American culture wars – the fight for "truth" – is framed as "restoring" and rehabilitating the lost truth about fetal personhood eroding due to various reasons including the rising secularism. The Personhood Alliance argues that the absolute truth about fetal personhood has been forgotten or suppressed in contemporary American society, despite what they present as ample evidence proving the truthfulness (validity and legitimacy) of fetal personhood.

In some materials, the Personhood Alliance constructs "truth" or what is "truthful" as directly divine knowledge, such as biblical scriptures. In other materials, "truth" is constructed as a form of historical and collective knowledge about shared values and customs, such as etymology of Hebrew and Greek terms related to babies. This divine-cultural construction of truth appears as somewhat tautological: fetal personhood is true because the Bible and Western civilization has historically recognized it as true for centuries. The following excerpts illustrate this framing (emphases added):

50 Marzouki et al., 2016.

51 Robertson, D. G., & Amarasingam, A. "How conspiracy theorists argue: Epistemic capital in the QAnon social media sphere." *Popular Communication* 20(3) (2022), 193–207.

- “Humans are made in the image of God ... This **scriptural truth** is found in **Genesis 1:27–28** [...] Amazingly, the first person to announce the coming of the Messiah was a child at the foetal stage of development! In **Luke 1:40–42**, we read that John the Baptist leapt in his mother’s womb when he recognised Jesus’ existence” (EMF1).
- “The Bible consistently speaks of humans being both conceived and born ... In the Old Testament, the **Hebrew word zera** is used to describe both pre-born and born offspring or ‘seed.’ In the New Testament, the **Greek word brephos** is applied to children both inside and outside the womb” (EMF1).

It is noteworthy how the movement equates historical-cultural values and biblical with “truth,” while disregarding competing cultural systems, such as paganism, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

- “Though adoption of ‘abortion rights’ as a progressive political cause in Western societies is relatively recent, abortion has been practiced in every culture since ancient times ... In **classical paganism**, while sometimes controversial, abortion (like euthanasia) was common and widely approved” (EMF4).

What can be inferred here is that when the Personhood Alliance claims that what is truthful stems from shared historical-cultural customs and knowledge, they mean specifically Christian forms of knowledge. Competing pre-Christian knowledge systems, such as paganism, are dismissed. Why one form of heritage (Christianity) is considered more truthful than other pre-Christian systems (e.g., paganism) is not explained in the movement’s discourse, but rather assumed as a given.

Another important epistemic source, interestingly, is references to the biomedical and scientific evidence of fetal personhood. Contrary to traditional tensions between science and religion,⁵² the movement asserts that both the Bible and science agree on the nature of personhood and the beginning of human life at conception. The movement frequently uses scientific language to validate their claims:

52 Evans, J. H. “Epistemological and moral conflict between religion and science.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 50(4) (2011), 707–727; Funk, C. “Perception of Conflict Between Science and Religion.” *Pew Research Centre*, (2015). <https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2015/10/22/perception-of-conflict-between-science-and-religion/>.

- “Humans are human from their earliest biological beginning. It’s an **indisputable scientific fact** ... Biologically, this is when the fusion of haploid gametes (egg and sperm) forms the diploid zygote. In that moment, all of our DNA is created. In that moment, we are a living, separate, genetically distinct human being who is wholly human.” (EMF1)

The movement also cites papers by and interviews with scientists and physicians to argue that fetal personhood is validated by scientific and experimental data (EMA4). This strategy reflects a broader trend in religious-populist movements to use the “alternative knowledge authorities” as a means of legitimizing their ideological positions:⁵³

- “Professor Hymie Gordon, Mayo Clinic: **‘By all the criteria of modern molecular biology, life is present from the moment of conception.’**” (EMA4)
- “Dr. Jerome LeJeune, professor of genetics at the University of Descartes in Paris ... stated that this ‘is no longer a matter of taste or opinion,’ and ‘not a metaphysical contention; it is **plain experimental evidence.**’” (EMA4)
- “Professor Micheline Matthews-Roth, Harvard University Medical School: [...] ‘It is scientifically correct to say that an individual human life begins at conception ... Our laws ... should be based on **accurate scientific data.**’” (EMA4)

In the discourse of the Personhood Alliance, the intersection of science, religion, and ideology is particularly salient. By positioning pro-life scientific claims as objective, non-religious, and non-ideological, the movement attempts to lend credibility to its arguments about fetal personhood. The following excerpts illustrate these efforts to underscore the supposedly non-ideological and non-religious nature of their “truth” about fetal personhood:

- “At the time, Dr. Nathanson was an **atheist**. His conclusions were **not remotely religious** but **squarely based on biological facts.**” (EMA4)
- “Dr. Landrum Shettles, [...] an attending obstetrician-gynecologist at Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York, [...] states,

53 Ylä-Anttila, T. “Populist knowledge: ‘Post-truth’ repertoires of contesting epistemic authorities.” *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 5(4) (2018), 356–388.

‘I oppose abortion [...] because I accept **what is biologically manifest** [...] **My position is scientific**’ (EMA4)

In doing so, the movement frames its culture war over abortion as a fight for “truth”, a fight to restore the biblical, cultural, and scientific truths about fetal personhood. But how does the movement deal with competing truth claims about fetal personhood and abortion, coming from pro-choice scientific and medical experts, or even women themselves? This question connects to another floating articulation of the signifier, “fight for truth,” as a battle to unmask the hidden conspiracy of “abortion industry” and liberal establishment, to convert and save Americans and American society.

5.2 *Fight for Truth as a “Battle” to Reveal the Conspiracy of the Liberal Establishment*

While framing their “battle for truth” as an effort to restore the theological-cultural and scientific truth about fetal personhood, the movement also portrays that their fight as a mission to expose the hidden, dark secrets about abortion industry and liberal establishment that suppress this knowledge. The fight for “truth” in American abortion culture wars is constructed as a messianic struggle to proselytise and save the American people and society by spreading the gospel of “truth” about the evil, corrupt liberal establishment (populism *in religion*⁵⁴).

An in-depth reading of their discursive materials reveals that the imagined corrupt establishment in American abortion culture wars is an amalgamation of various actors, including those loosely or directly connected to biomedical science, abortion providers, and Democratic Party. More striking, however, is how the Personhood Alliance constructs the imagined communities of Us, by interpellating those who are argued as being exploited and wronged by this establishment. Specifically, women (particularly victims of rape and incest) and people of colour (particular Black Americans) are repeatedly interpellated as groups needing salvation by learning the hidden truth about abortion and the liberal establishment. The fight for “truth” is thus framed as a mission to “enlighten” these groups of people and inspire them to join the Personhood movement in opposing a shared enemy.

The following excerpts illustrate how the movement constructs the imagined conspiracy of the “pro-abortionist” establishment, who is accused of

54 Valaskivi et al. 2023.

distorting the “truth” about abortion and personhood for material gain, including harvesting aborted fetal tissues for vaccine developments:

- “Dr. Watson A. Bowes, University of Colorado Medical School: “The beginning of a single human life is ... conception. This straightforward biological fact should not be **distorted to serve sociological, political, or economic goals.**” (EMA4)
- “There are men in the medical community who are aware that ectopic pregnancies can be treated in a manner that allows both the mother and the child to survive, but these men generally [...] **suppress knowledge**” (EMA8)
- “**Harvesting aborted fetal cell lines in the past and present, which we know is currently happening for future vaccine production.** By ignoring this, we help perpetuate and further legitimise the **connection between abortion, biomedical science, and human trafficking.**” (PR12)

The movement discourse further claims that the “pro-abortion” establishment, to maintain the supply of aborted fetal tissues for research, promotes a “culture of death” in which abortion is normalised or even “encouraged” among targeted groups. Women, especially victims of rape and incest, and Black Americans are frequently portrayed as historical “victims” of this “abortionist” establishment.

One narrative the movement advances is that abortion is often encouraged or even “forced” upon sexual assault victims, both culturally and physically, against the actual desires of these women:

- “Several studies have shown that abortion is **rarely voluntary** for incest victims [...] Like the assault itself, abortion is often **forced or coerced**, which contributes to the **victimization.**” (PR3)
- “43% of rape victims who aborted their children reported **being pressured or strongly directed** by family members or healthcare professionals. [...] In several cases, the abortion was carried out **against the victim’s expressed wishes**, and in a few cases, without her being aware that she was pregnant or that an abortion was taking place.” (EMA6)
- “The abortion industry has a track record of pressuring sexual assault victims to abort and **covering for rapists and traffickers** who bring their victims to abortion facilities. Several years ago, a Live Action undercover investigation revealed that multiple Planned Parenthood facilities were willing to guide traffickers in how to use abortion and other services to **‘manage’ underage girls.**” (EMA6)

Although sources like the Live Action undercover investigation have been flagged as unreliable by fact-checking organizations,⁵⁵ these narratives construct the pro-life movement as the “savior” of women, claiming that opposing abortion is the true path to healing for sexual assault victims. One excerpt insists:

- “Women and girls who experience the horrific violations of sexual assault and trafficking deserve **healing and protection, not more violence, more trauma, and more violation.**” (EMA6)

To bolster this argument, the movement actively cites studies and surveys on the lived experiences of pregnancies and abortions among sexual assault victims. For instance, one material argues: “How can we argue against the voices of the victims?” (EMA6). This rhetorical strategy positions personal experiences and anecdotes as superior epistemic evidence compared to other epistemic sources, such as using legal institutional arguments justifying abortion in cases of rape and incest. While the movement often appeals to scientific and biblical sources as authoritative “truths” elsewhere in its discourse, this emphasis on personal stories as “truth” underscores the flexible epistemic base of the movement, which adapts its sources depending on rhetorical situations.⁵⁶ However, it should be noted that the movement selectively universalize the experiences of the victims who oppose abortion while ignoring or minimizing conflicting accounts of victims who actively seek abortion as part of their healing process.⁵⁷

The movement also constructs narratives about the “truth” behind the liberal-progressive establishment, accusing it of secretly oppressing marginalized groups, including Black and Latino/a Americans, the economically disadvantaged, and the disabled.

- “Over the past 100 years in America, eugenicists have openly used several means to their utopian end: Forced sterilization, institutionalization, childbearing permits, government-funded ‘family planning’ programs, prenatal genetic testing, and of course, abortion. [...]

55 Swann, S. “No, these decade-old-plus videos don’t ‘expose’ Planned Parenthood aiding sex traffickers.” *PolitiFact*. (July 20, 2023) <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2023/jul/20/instagram-posts/no-these-decade-old-plus-videos-dont-expose-planne/>.

56 Robertson & Amarasingam, 2022.

57 de Medeiros Guimarães, A. C., & da Silva Ramos, K. “Feelings of women in the experience of legal abortion due to sexual violence.” *Journal of Nursing UFPE/Revista de Enfermagem UFPE* 11(6) (2017), 2349–2356.

Planned Parenthood has taken this strategy to heart, putting the vast majority of their abortion facilities in inner-city neighborhoods, which has contributed to the **disproportionate number of abortions among Blacks and Hispanics.**" (EMA9)

- “Historically, the implementation of **eugenics** [...] can be clearly seen in forced sterilizations of **the poor and minorities** in the South, the genocidal policies of the Nazi regime, and the guiding principles of the KKK. Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood, levied for strict reproductive laws **against minorities and the poor**. She believed that only the **‘genetically fit’** should have the privilege of childbearing in hopes of developing a **‘cleaner race.’** Planned Parenthood has carried on its founder’s creed but deflects from it using reproductive-rights rhetoric [...] to rebrand itself after Hitler’s atrocities.” (EMA10)

Personhood Alliance further collaborates with Black and Latino/a Christian pro-life organizations, such as the Restoration Project and Latinos por la Vida, to amplify its narratives about legal abortion as a racist population control targeting minority communities. For example:

- “**The leading cause of death in the Black community** is not HIV-AIDS, cancer, homicide, accidents, diabetes, or heart disease. Tragically, the leading cause of death is abortion. [...] As Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said in 2009, *Roe v. Wade* enabled them to address **‘the population we don’t want too many of.’** The numbers do not lie.” (EMA11)
- “Our goal is to reveal the truth about abortion and the alternative viable options to the Latino community, which is **targeted by the abortion industry.**” (EMA15)

The epistemic strategy aligns with what Robertson and Amarasingam describe as an “assemblage” epistemic mode, which “links numerous smaller pieces of data across time, space, and context ‘dot-connecting’ to create highly suggestive narratives, while blurring the specific details and the mystification of the selection process.”⁵⁸ For example, the “Black Genocide” narrative combines evidence of historical anti-Black population policies, abortion rates among Black families, and the alleged history of Planned Parenthood’s founder to claim that contemporary legal abortions aim to deliberately curtail Black population in

58 Robertson & Amarasingam, 2022, p. 196.

the 21st century. However, Black reproductive rights and Black feminist works⁵⁹ have challenged this narrative, arguing that it places responsibility for Black survival “within the wombs” of Black women who are framed as lacking “critical thinking skills” to avoid falling into the abortion pitfall, while ignoring the “numerous social ills facing Black people,” including poverty, police brutality, and mass incarceration.⁶⁰

This conspiratorial epistemic base of American abortion culture wars illustrates how religious populism intersects with conspiratorial beliefs. The discursive construction of “truth” as a floating signifier in these culture wars sheds light on the epistemological and conspiratorial turns of populism in the contemporary post-truth era.⁶¹ Through the floating use of “truth,” the populist boundary of Us-Them incorporates not only nativist and religious dimensions (e.g., natives versus immigrants; Christian versus secular/non-Christian), but also the epistemic clash between truth seekers and conspiratorial establishment hiding “truth” from the people. It helps the movement to co-opt various sources of knowledge – from biblical scriptures to selective scientific claims and personal stories – and unite disparate grievances – not only Christian pro-lifers but women, assault victims, and racial minorities – under the banner of “fighting for truth.” These conspiratorial narratives circulate by benefitting from the hybrid media ecologies, where there is less editorial and authoritative gatekeeping by conventional knowledge authorities. Furthermore, different pro-life organizations circulate similar narratives and link their website to other organizations’ websites, cross-referencing each other to give epistemic credibility to their conspiratorial narratives.

5.3 *Fight for Truth in Hybrid Media Ecologies*

Lastly, the articulation of the signifier “fight for truth” underscores the perceived victimization of American right-wing culture warriors. The movement’s discourse constructs a narrative of the heavily imbalanced, David-and-Goliath style battle between abortion culture warriors and the biased mainstream media establishment including major social platforms – framing it as a clash between the virtuous *truth-seekers* versus conspiratorial forces *silencing* those

59 Dobbins-Harris, S. “The myth of abortion as black genocide: Reclaiming our reproductive choice.” *Nat’l Black LJ*, 26, (2017), 85.

60 Dobbins-Harris, 2017, p. 87.

61 Harris, K. R. “Conspiracy theories, populism, and epistemic autonomy.” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 9(1) (2023), 21–36; Nawrocki, M. “After the epistemological turn: A framework for studying populism as a knowledge phenomenon.” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 26(2) (2024), 444–465; Ylä-Anttila, 2018.

truth fighters. According to this narrative, major platforms and media establishment allegedly strive to “silence” and “censor” their fight for truth to continue deceiving the American people. For instance:

- “The Personhood Alliance asserts that **blatant censorship** of scientific data and ethical considerations surrounding these vaccines is not acceptable in a free society and must not stand.” (PR13)
- “Pro-life, pro-family Christians are familiar with the rise in **censorship by Big Tech** in its quest to remove ‘misinformation’ and combat ‘hate speech’ across social media platforms.” (PR13)
- “The presentation video is now available on several **alternative platforms**, including [...] Rumble channel [...] **We must not allow the truth to be buried [...] This information must not be suppressed.**” (PR13)

This framing highlights the significance of examining social movement websites and smaller, alternative platforms in addition to mainstream social platforms. These radical and extreme movements leverage websites as controlled, foundational spaces where organizations articulate their core ideologies, construct coherent narratives, and establish legitimacy. Crucially, these spaces operate outside the purview of platform moderation and other governance outcomes, which can otherwise disrupt the visibility and dissemination of their messages.

In summary, the signifier “truth” constructs a missionary, populist vision of the American culture wars. Within this framework, abortion culture wars are positioned as messianic movements – saviors of marginalized American people, who, according to the movement, are manipulated and exploited by a liberal “pro-abortionist” conspiracy. The movement also cultivates an identity of a victimized messiah: one who is perpetually silenced and expelled from the platform by the establishment but remains steadfast in spreading the “gospel” of truth about abortion to an allegedly lost American society.

Through this religious-populist mobilization, the movement seeks to expand its base by appealing to unconventional outsiders of the Christian pro-life movement, such as non-Christians, feminists, sexual assault survivors, racial and ethnic minorities and or even anti-vaxxers. These groups are invited to confront what the movement portrays as the “truth” about the abortion establishment and to join the broader culture war, to “restore” divine, cultural and scientific truths about personhood and abortion within American society.

6 Affective Us-Them Construction in American Culture Wars

Let us recall Laclaudian tradition of populism which emphasizes the affective dimensions involved in mobilizing and sustaining collective identities of “Us” and “Them”.⁶² Palonen argues that affect is not merely an auxiliary component of populism but central to the construction of Us-Them dichotomies.⁶³ Affect operates as a mechanism that binds individuals to collective identities “Us,” imbuing key signifiers (e.g., “truth,” “the people”) with emotional resonance. This affective charge allows diverse groups to project their desires and grievances onto the shared signifiers, thereby fostering belonging and solidarity despite internal contradictions or differences. Zembylas analyses “the affective modes” of Trump’s populism that legitimises affects such as anger and resentment at “Them,” but also hope and redemption for “Us,” his supporters.⁶⁴ Similarly, Salojärvi and colleagues show how Finnish far-right actors invoke various positive and negative affects to connect diverse demands and groups within the chain of “Us” and “Them.”⁶⁵ Finnish far-right discourse juxtaposes nostalgia, anger, and pride of “Us” (including White Finns, blue- and white-collar workers) against loathing, greed, and rootlessness of “Them” (including Reds, globalists, non-Finnish migrants).

Historically, the American culture wars have been marked by polarized contestations over the meaning of American nationhood and peoplehood. The Christian Right and right-wing culture warriors of the 20th century have interpellated Americanness and the meaning of culture wars through religious-moral frameworks,⁶⁶ constructing a binary between Christian “Us” versus secular/non-Christian “Them.” In these narratives, affective dynamics of fear, anger, and moral indignation at declining religious traditions are deployed to reinforce the boundaries of Us-Them as clashes between two fundamentally incompatible value systems.

In the case of the Personhood Alliance in 2020s, this paper finds that the notion of “truth” emerges as a central signifier imbued with emotional resonance to construct Us-Them boundaries in the contemporary American culture wars. The Personhood Alliance defines “Us” as the righteous defenders

62 Laclau, 2005; Palonen, 2020.

63 Palonen, 2023.

64 Zembylas, M. The affective modes of right-wing populism: Trump pedagogy and lessons for democratic education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 39(2) (2020), 151–166.

65 Salojärvi, V., Palonen, E., Horsmanheimo, L., & Kylli, R. M. “Protecting the future ‘Us’: a rhetoric-performative multimodal analysis of the polarising far-right YouTube campaign videos in Finland.” *Visual Studies* 38(5) (2023), 851–866.

66 Hartman, 2019; Hunter, 1992.

of truth, positioning themselves as agents of restoration and salvation. Their discourse frequently invokes imagery of enlightenment and healing, framing their mission as not only a fight for Christian America or Christian epistemology but also a compassionate endeavor to restore scientific, “objective” truth and save marginalized communities, such as sexual assault victims and Black and Latino/a communities. The affective appeal lies in their combination of moral urgency and benevolent intent, rallying supporters around shared feelings of righteousness and hope. To validate their truth claims, the movement strategically draws from diverse epistemic sources – from scriptures, scientific studies, personal testimonies and conspiratorial narratives. These strategies consolidate the boundary of “Us,” portraying them as those who fight for truth and for racial and gender justice in ways that transcend religious boundaries. For instance, the circulation of the “abortion as Black Genocide” narrative with Black communities⁶⁷ illustrates how this conspiratorial Us-Them building process operates and underscores the importance of addressing it seriously.

In contrast, “Them” is constructed as a malevolent liberal establishment, comprising of Democratic Party, abortion providers, and their allies, accused of distorting “truth” for material gains and perpetuating systemic oppression. This antagonistic framing is charged with negative affects, evoking fear, anger, and mistrust of the establishment. By alleging conspiracies such as the use of fetal tissues for vaccines or the coercion of rape victims and Black women into abortions, the movement constructs an enemy that is not only ideologically opposed but morally reprehensible. This framing heightens the emotional stakes of the conflict, intensifying the polarization between “Us” and “Them” through discursive meaning-making.

To conclude, the affective Us-Them construction in this American abortion culture war discourse hinges on the articulation of “truth” and “fight for truth” as floating signifiers. The signifier’s dual floating meanings – restoration and battle⁶⁸ – enable the movement to adapt its rhetoric to different audiences and contexts, creating a broad coalition beyond the Christian pro-life base, uniting diverse grievances and aspirations under the banner of “truth.” Future research on culture wars should continue to explore the affective-discursive dimension of Us-Them building, particularly in relation to hybrid media ecologies amplifying affective polarization,⁶⁹ to better understand the emotional underpinnings of these enduring political divisions.

67 Dobbins-Harris, 2017.

68 Marzouki et al., 2016.

69 Sumiala, Harju, et al., 2023.

7 Consequences and Implications of American Culture Wars

In examining the floating use of the signifier “truth” in the Personhood Alliance’s discourse, we observe how the contours of American culture wars are continuously being redrawn and expanded. In Nixon’s 1973 and Buchanan’s 1992 speeches, the two Republicans appealed to the American people’s fears over eroding Christian traditions in society. American culture war in the 20th century was first and foremost a war about religion.⁷⁰ This paper, through its analysis of the recent abortion culture war articulated by the Christian pro-life confederation Personhood Alliance, highlights how “truth” has emerged as a crucial signifier in the religious-populist battle over the meaning of American values and what the personhood and pro-life movement stand for, adapting into the “post-truth” era of the 21st century.⁷¹ In this discussion section, I outline the main contributions of this paper for future research and political activism concerning reproductive justice and social equality.

First, the findings of this study have implications for future research on religious populism and culture wars in the 21st century. The recent American abortion culture wars do not only involve a battle over the meaning of America directly in terms of Christianity, but also center on a battle over the meaning of “truth” and “fight for truth.” The floating articulations of the key signifier “truth” in Personhood Alliance’s discourse demarcate affectively charged boundaries between “righteous truth seekers” (Us) versus “deceptive conspiracy of the liberal establishment” (Them), rallying for support outside the organization’s Christian base. Examining “truth” as a floating signifier in other global culture wars can lend further insights into the “epistemological turn” of populism in the contemporary “post-truth” era.⁷²

Second, this paper underscores the importance of analyzing culture wars from an anti-essentialist, post-foundational perspective to better capture the flexibility of these movements. By examining culture wars as religious-populist meaning-making practices, instead of fixed set of overarching and coherent value systems⁷³ or degrees of electoral and ideological polarisation,⁷⁴ this approach offers fresh insights into the rise of culture wars and reactionary politics. The global culture war phenomena are not only questions of degrees

70 Hunter, 1992.

71 Harris, 2023; Nawrocki, 2024; Ylä-Anttila, 2018.

72 Harris, 2023; Nawrocki, 2024; Ylä-Anttila, 2018.

73 Hunter, 1992.

74 Mouw & Sobel, 2001; Norris & Inglehart, 2019.

of polarization or electoral and demographic studies, but as equally important matters of discursive meaning-making and affective Us-Them building. This perspective allows a more flexible theoretical framework adaptable to a wide range of political and social contexts and for comparative studies on culture wars and religious populism.

Third, this paper demonstrates how religious populism manifests within hybrid media ecologies⁷⁵ by examining the Personhood Alliance's discourse on its website. This paper reveals that the organization uses its website as a controlled, foundational communicative space to disseminate its mission of fighting for "truth," while portraying itself as a victim of systemic silencing by the liberal establishment and major social platforms. Movement websites play a crucial role in this fight, offering a stable environment to mobilize support without being subjected to platform moderation. This highlights the importance of studying movement-controlled online spaces and smaller alternative platforms to better understand how hybrid media ecologies facilitate the dissemination and legitimization of radical or extreme demands.

Lastly, this paper identifies significant fractures within American abortion culture wars discourse, which future reproductive justice politics can address. Despite its reactionary agenda, the Personhood Alliance's discourse touches on genuine grievances concerning existing abortion practices. For instance, concerns remain about the inadequate legal protections for assault victims who wish to give birth to children conceived through rape and incest. Martin points out the pitfalls in current legislation that can harm these victims, such as insufficient parental rights and adoption options, as well as the legislations rooted in political and cultural stereotypes of assault victims.⁷⁶ Similarly, legitimate concerns exist about the intersections of race and abortion in America.⁷⁷

However, the American Christian culture warriors oversimplify these grievances, framing them as symptoms of the broader "cultural decline" and an alleged "lack" of awareness about the "truth" of abortion. This perspective ignores the deeply systematic and material roots of abortion in the US, which structurally disadvantage marginalized groups – especially Black women – against motherhood.⁷⁸ These women often resort to abortion not due to ignorance of the supposed "truth" but because material insecurities of food,

75 Sumiala, Harju, et al., 2023; Sumiala, Hoover, et al., 2023; Valaskivi et al., 2023.

76 Martin, A. K. "Making pro-abortion laws pro-choice for female rape victims." *Wis. J. Gender, & Soc'y* 33 (2018), 63.

77 Davis, A. Y. *Women, race & class*. (Vintage: 1983); Dobbins-Harris, 2017.

78 Dobbins-Harris, 2017.

housing, or healthcare leave them with few alternatives.⁷⁹ As Hartman has argued, while the Christian and right-wing culture warriors decry the liberal, secular, and feminist establishment for undermining traditional family values, it is capitalism which has done far more to erode these values than their imagined enemies.⁸⁰ The Personhood Alliance's discourse reveals how culture wars obscure the systemic and material dimensions of inequality and injustice.

To counter this, progressive reproductive justice movements must address these oversights by reframing abortion discourse. They must build an inclusive "Us" that can unite diverse gendered, racialized and intersectional grievances rooted in material inequalities and insecurities under capitalism. These grievances include the struggles of women and families who are excluded from motherhood – not by choice but due to insecurities tied to precarious employment, inadequate legal protections, and insufficient social safety nets. Countering the Christian Right's abortion culture wars requires a *counter-culture war* – one that redefines the "truth" of abortion through the lens of material inequality and capitalism's role in reproductive oppression.

Future reproductive justice activism must engage in discursive struggles to challenge and reassign meaning to signifiers like "truth" about abortion, framing them as women's and families' struggles against systemic inequalities. Such a project would actively invite the participation of marginalized groups, moving beyond the liberal framing of abortion as an individual choice or a matter of personal enlightenment about its moral truths. Instead, it would center the interconnected realities of capitalism, racialized and gendered reproductive oppression, and systemic exclusion.

For example, a Marxist feminist framework could guide reproductive justice movements in constructing an alternative "truth" about abortion, highlighting the connections between capitalism and the racialized and gendered dimensions of reproductive injustice.⁸¹ Activists must also adopt hybrid communication strategies – mirroring the diverse media tactics employed by American abortion culture warriors – to disseminate this counter-narrative effectively.

79 Flederjohann, J., Patterson, S., & Owino, M. "Food Insecurity: A Barrier to Reproductive Justice Globally." *International Journal of Sexual Health* 35(2) (2023), 296–311; Morrison, J. C. "Resuscitating the Black body: Reproductive justice as resistance to the state's property interest in Black women's reproductive capacity." *Yale JL & Feminism* 31 (2019), 35.

80 Hartman, 2019.

81 Bhattacharya, T., ed. *Social reproduction theory: Remapping class, recentering oppression*. (Pluto Press: 2017); Davis, 1983; Federici, S. *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. (Pm Press: 2018).

This includes leveraging major social platforms, alternative media outlets, and dedicated websites to reach audiences entrenched in the abortion culture war discourse. While building these alliances will inevitably involve challenges and tensions, they are crucial for envisioning and mobilizing a reproductive justice movement against the tides of Christian Right culture war.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix

Material type	Material ID	Title	Preview of the text (1st sentence)	Link (Accessed on 15 August 2023)
Press release	PR1	Personhood Alliance officially launched	The cause of defending innocent human life – from earliest biological beginning through natural death – took a major step forward this weekend in the launch of a new national pro-life organization, Personhood Alliance (PA).	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-launched
	PR2	Personhood Alliance welcomes new educational organisation to its board	Our nation’s newest national prolife group, Personhood Alliance, announced today the addition of a new at-large organization, Educe® online learning, to its membership.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/new-educational-organization
	PR3	Right to life groups across the country call for opposition to pain-capable legislation	On October 3, 2017, the House passed the Pain Capable Unborn Child Protection Act (H.R. 36) with several serious flaws.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/opposition-to-pain-capable/

(cont.)

Material type	Material ID	Title	Preview of the text (1st sentence)	Link (Accessed on 15 August 2023)
	PR4	HHS ends FDA contract, promises bold action	On Monday, September 24th, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that it terminated the contract between the FDA and Advance Bioscience Resources (ABR), which allocated taxpayer money to purchase “fresh” aborted fetal body parts for experimentation.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/hhs-ends-fda-contract
	PR5	Personhood Alliance welcomes 3 new affiliates amid rapid organizational growth	The Personhood Alliance board of directors voted unanimously on March 7, 2019, to accept the applications of new affiliates in Tennessee, North Carolina, and Nebraska, raising the number of its affiliate organizations to 19, with three more state applicants currently under consideration.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-welcomes-3-new-affiliates-amid-rapid-organizational-growth/
	PR6	Personhood Alliance welcomes 3 more affiliates, continuing its rapid growth	The Personhood Alliance board of directors has approved three new affiliate applications in Arizona, Colorado, and Maryland, bringing the number of its affiliate organizations to 22.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-welcomes-3-more-affiliates/
	PR7	Personhood Alliance announces the first sanctuary county in America	For immediate release, WASHINGTON, DC, August 19, 2019 – The Yadkin County Board of Commissioners in Yadkinville, North Carolina, has just unanimously passed a resolution to designate Yadkin County as the nation’s first sanctuary county for pre-born children.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-announces-first-sanctuary-county-in-america

(cont.)

Material type	Material ID	Title	Preview of the text (1st sentence)	Link (Accessed on 15 August 2023)
	PR8	Personhood Alliance announces leadership change	America's fastest growing national pro-life organization, the Personhood Alliance, announced today the election of an interim president, Les Riley, to serve out the remaining term of former president, Gualberto Garcia Jones, Esq., who accepted a VP position at LifeSiteNews. Les will fulfill the role of interim president until March, 2021.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-announces-leadership-change/
	PR9	Personhood Alliance announces official position on vaccine ethics	The national board of directors of the Personhood Alliance announced today its official position on vaccine ethics.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-announces-official-position-on-vaccine-ethics/
	PR10	Personhood Alliance welcomes its 27th affiliate, Personhood Texas	The Personhood Alliance board of directors voted unanimously on November 13, 2020, to accept the application of Personhood Texas to become part of the Personhood Alliance, raising the number of its affiliate organizations across the country to 27.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-welcomes-27th-affiliate-personhood-texas/
	PR11	Personhood Alliance welcomes its 28th affiliate, Personhood California	The Personhood Alliance is excited to announce its 28th affiliate, Personhood California. As America's fastest growing pro-life organization, the Personhood Alliance has brought on affiliates from two of the largest states in	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-welcomes-personhood-california/

(cont.)

Material type	Material ID	Title	Preview of the text (1st sentence)	Link (Accessed on 15 August 2023)
			the nation, California and Texas, in the past month as people respond to its no exceptions stance on the sanctity of human life.	
	PR12	Personhood Alliance responds to dismissals of Covid vaccine-abortion link	In recent days, several Christian publications and conservative media outlets, including Public Discourse and its contributing editor Andrew T. Walker, have dismissed the connection between abortion and the COVID-19 vaccines being fast-tracked by Operation Warp Speed.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-responds-to-dismissals-of-covid-vaccine-abortion-link/
	PR13	YouTube removes Personhood Alliance / John Paul II Medical Research Institute vaccine ethics presentation	Citing “medical misinformation,” YouTube removed a video presentation on the science and ethics of Operation Warp Speed vaccines for SARS-CoV-2, given by Dr. Alan Moy of the John Paul II Medical Research Institute and Cellular Engineering Technologies and Sarah Quale of Personhood Alliance Education.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/youtube-removes-personhood-alliance-vaccine-ethics-presentation/
	PR14	New affiliate Personhood Minnesota to focus on abortion-trafficking connection	The Personhood Alliance is excited to announce its newest affiliate, Personhood Minnesota.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-minnesota-to-focus-on-abortion-trafficking-connection/

(cont.)

Material type	Material ID	Title	Preview of the text (1st sentence)	Link (Accessed on 15 August 2023)
	PR15	Personhood Alliance offers religious exemption form for Covid vaccines	In response to the growing outcry against COVID vaccine mandates and coercion, the Personhood Alliance is offering a religious exemption form to Christians who are concerned about the ethical, moral, and religious implications of receiving the shot.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-offers-religious-exemption-form-for-covid-vaccines
	PR16	Personhood Alliance reacts to Supreme Court decision to overturn Roe	In reaction to the Supreme Court decision today in <i>Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health</i> , Personhood Alliance president Les Riley issued the following statement.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/personhood-alliance-reacts-to-supreme-court-decision-to-overturn-roe/
	PR17	President of Personhood Tennessee arrested by FBI	The president of Personhood Tennessee, an affiliate of the Personhood Alliance, was arrested by the FBI yesterday while at home with his family in an early morning raid.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/president-of-personhood-tennessee-arrested-by-fbi/
	PR18	President of Personhood Tennessee speaks out after FBI raid	Paul Vaughn, president of Personhood Tennessee, an affiliate of the Personhood Alliance, was arrested by four heavily armed FBI agents, who showed up unannounced at 7:00 a.m. banging on his front door, threatening his wife and children.	https://personhood.org/media/press-releases/president-of-personhood-tennessee-speaks-out-after-fbi-raid/
	PR19	Statement on President Trump's remarks on abortion and the results	"The real reason pro-life candidates and ballot issues lost in 2022 was that in every single campaign, the pro-abortion side outspent the pro-life side."	https://personhood.org/personhood-alliance-statement-on-president-trumps-remarks/

(cont.)

Material type	Material ID	Title	Preview of the text (1st sentence)	Link (Accessed on 15 August 2023)
		of the midterm election		
	PR20	Surry county NC passes a personhood resolution	Surry county became the 6th county in NC to pass a Personhood Resolution making it a sanctuary for unborn children.	https://personhood.org/surry-county-nc-passes-a-personhood-resolution/
Action & strategy	AS1	State and local: Fight like David against Goliath	For 50 years, pro-lifers have been focused on the national centers of power: The Supreme Court and Congress.	https://personhood.org/take-action/state-and-local/
	AS2	National: Uniting to have a national impact	Many times, the average pro-lifer feels like no one is listening, that they can't make a difference, that the assaults on human life and human dignity are obstacles either too big to conquer or too complex for non-attorneys to understand.	https://personhood.org/take-action/national/
	AS3	International: Personhood is under attack worldwide	The global elites have been working hard to promote their secular utilitarian view of life for a very long time.	https://personhood.org/take-action/international/
	AS4	Petitions	Many organizations use petitions solely to build their email lists and raise money, but they don't leverage the power of the petition to actually make change happen.	https://personhood.org/petitions/
	AS5	Human Life Amendment	The Human Life Amendment: The ultimate goal of the pro-life movement	http://www.humanlifeamendment.com/index.php
	AS6	Personhood strategy: We need a winning pro-life strategy	After 50 years of abortion on demand, it is time to rethink our pro-life strategies and examine the efficacy of the national pro-life movement.	https://personhood.org/about-us/personhood-strategy/

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Educational materials on abortion issue	EMA1	Abortion and personhood	The killing of an innocent human being through abortion, at any developmental stage and for any reason, is a direct violation of their personhood.	https://personhood.org/issues/abortion/
	EMA2	Legalised abortion: US abortion law	For almost 50 years, the single decision of seven non-elected men saddled the United States with one of the most liberal abortion policies in the world.	https://abort73.com/abortion_facts/us_abortion_law/
	EMA3	Legalised abortion: Unborn children as constitutional persons	The featured article, by legal scholar Gregory J. Roden, discusses the question whether unborn children are “persons” within the language and meaning of the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments.	http://www.personhoodinitiative.com/uploads/7/7/9/1/7791541/unborn_children_as_constitutional_persons.pdf
	EMA4	Legalised abortion: Scientists attest to life beginning at conception	Some of the world’s most prominent scientists and physicians testified to a U.S. Senate committee that human life begins at conception	http://www.personhoodinitiative.com/life-at-fertilization.html
	EMA5	The ‘hard cases’: Life of the mother: Is abortion ever justified?	If continued pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, and there is no way to save the child, an ethical case can be made for the justifiability of abortion – whether you want to call it abortion or not.	https://abort73.com/end_abortion/is_abortion_ever_justified/

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	EMA6	The 'hard cases': ABORTION AND RAPE: RESPONDING WITH FACTS AND COMPASSION	What about abortion in cases of rape and incest?	https://personhood.org/abortion-and-rape-responding-with-facts-and-compassion/
	EMA7	The 'hard cases': ABORTION IS NEVER NECESSARY TO SAVE THE LIFE OR HEALTH OF THE MOTHER	In their zeal to protect "abortion access," Democrats inadvertently forced a change in our national conversation that has cast a very unfavorable light on their position.	https://personhood.org/abortion-is-never-necessary-to-save-the-life-or-health-of-the-mother-2/
	EMA8	The 'hard cases': Abortion and race: National Black Pro-Life Coalition Ectopic pregnancies and personhood	One of the most ardently presented pro-choice arguments is the claim that abortion is sometimes necessary in order to save the life of the mother.	http://www.personhoodinitiative.com/ectopic-personhood.html
	EMA9	The 'hard cases': What about personhood and miscarriage?	If a personhood amendment is passed, would that mean that a woman could be prosecuted for manslaughter if she has a miscarriage?	http://www.personhoodinitiative.com/personhood-and-miscarriage.html
	EMA10	Abortion and race: National Black Pro-Life Coalition	The National Black Pro-Life Coalition is a bold network of Pro-Life and Pro-Family organizations, including the National Black Church Initiative, that embrace the biblical model.	https://blackprolifecoalition.life/#about

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	EMA11	Abortion and race: The Restoration Project	The Pillars of Restoration. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings. Isaiah 58:12	https://www.therestorationproject.life/
	EMA12	Abortion and race: The Radiance Foundation	OUR VISION: To create a culture that believes that every human life has purpose.	https://radiancefoundation.org/about/
	EMA13	Abortion and race: Issues4Life Foundation	The Issues4life Foundation targets and works directly with Black American leaders nationwide to strengthen their Stand Against Abortion on demand and resolve the questions surrounding the Bioethical Issues that impact our humanity.	https://www.issues4life.org/index.html
	EMA14	Abortion and race: Black Genocide	Therefore, LEARN welcomes into the network all communities who support Christian values and to ensure the survival of all races of people, and improve our quality of life without sacrificing our children.	http://blackgenocide.org/mission.html
	EMA15	Abortion and race: Latinos por la Vida	Latinos Por La Vida is a coalition of organizations intent on responding to the urgent need to unify and mobilize Latinos in the pro-life movement.	https://latinosporlavida.com/home.html

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Educational materials on foundational	EMF1	Foundational: The 6 principles	Principle # 1: Humans are made in the image of God.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/principles/
	EMF2	Worldviews: What is a biblical worldview?: WHAT IS BIBLICAL PERSONHOOD?	Behind every major twist and turn throughout history, there is a social movement, driven not by legal subterfuge and political compromise, but unabashed truth, courage, and clarity.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/what-is-biblical-personhood
	EMF3	Worldviews: What is a biblical worldview?: Personhood and the Imago Dei	To be created in the Imago Dei (image of God) means being endowed with a body, soul, and spirit and a capacity to know and be known by God.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/personhood-and-the-imago-dei/
	EMF4	Worldviews: What is a biblical worldview?: Five biblical truths: What the scriptures say about abortion	Those who seek abortion in a concordance are unlikely to find it, and as a result ... suggest that Scripture is silent and therefore, we may do as we please.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/five-biblical-truths
	EMF5	Worldviews: What is situation ethics?: Situation ethics 101	Relativism (and specifically, situation ethics) isn't just for the secular world, which rejects scripture as having any bearing on morals.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/situation-ethics-101

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	EMF6	Worldviews: What is Utilitarianism?: Recognizing Utilitarianism	Whatever sacrifice needs to be made to contribute positively to the greater good is morally acceptable, because the value of an individual lies not in his inherent worth as a person made in the image of God, but in his usefulness as part of the larger group.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/recognizing-utilitarianism
	EMF7	Worldviews: What is Utilitarianism?: Utilitarianism in the pro-life movement	When the pro-life movement compromises its fundamental first principle in the push to end the destruction of human life, at whatever stage, we actually embrace Utilitarianism.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/prolife-utilitarianism
	EMF8	Worldviews: What is Utilitarianism?: Why We Should Avoid the Beethoven Argument	This seems like a good, solid pro-life argument.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/the-beethoven-argument/
	EMF9	Worldviews: What is Eugenics?: Abortion and the undesirable	The solution to the “problem” of the poor and the undesirables seems to be to convince them to use birth control, and when that fails, provide them with easy access to abortion (preferably, government-funded).	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/abortion-and-the-undesirables
	EMF10	Worldviews: What is Eugenics?: What is genoism?	Will this movement toward eugenic perfection one day put those people deemed “genetically inferior” in the same place African slaves were when they were deemed “racially inferior”?	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/what-is-genoism

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	EMF11	Worldviews: What is Eugenics?: Transhumanism: The Emerging Face of Eugenics	If we cannot unite at present to defend those in our current framework [the unborn, the aging, and the disabled] according to their value as God's image-bearers; if we cannot agree that our political strategies and policies must reflect this same truth in all circumstances, then we are totally unprepared for what's coming.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/transhumanism-emerging-face-of-eugenics/
	EMF12	Worldviews: What is Eugenics?: Transhumanism: Mankind's greatest threat	It is no longer enough to be anti-abortion.	https://personhood.org/issues/foundational/worldviews/transhumanism-greatest-threat
