

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/3-women-accused-a-harvard-anthropologist-of-harassment-and-retaliation-now-theyre-suing>

Norman Zalkind, Janet Halley, and Ruth O'Meara-Costello issue the following statement, on behalf of their client, Professor John Comaroff, in response to the lawsuit filed today by plaintiffs Margaret Czerwienski, Amulya Mandava, and Lilia Kilburn.

Professor Comaroff categorically denies ever harassing or retaliating against any student.

To address the lawsuit's specific allegations, Professor Comaroff was never the subject of any Title IX or other complaint at the University of Chicago. There, as at Harvard, he was a sincerely devoted mentor to countless students.

Professor Comaroff denies the claim that he made advances on an unnamed second-year graduate student. No such student has ever sought an investigation of claims against him. The only students whose complaints Harvard has notified him of are the plaintiffs.

Regarding the 2017 meeting between Ms. Mandava and Professor Comaroff, Ms. Mandava and Professor Comaroff met at her request in order to speak about a grant proposal she was considering submitting. The conversation turned to the topic of gossip, which was relevant to Ms. Mandava's academic topic, and Professor Comaroff spoke generally about its dangers in professional academic settings. In doing so, he was repeating advice that he had given to countless students over the years, including while teaching a seminar on professionalization at the University of Chicago. He absolutely denies threatening Ms. Mandava or Ms. Czerwienski, during that meeting or at any other time. Harvard's thorough Title IX investigation found that not only had he not retaliated against either student—he was not even aware, during that meeting, of the rumors that the two were spreading about him. The truth is that Professor Comaroff consistently made every effort to assist these students and to advance their careers, both before and after the 2017 meeting.

Regarding Ms. Kilburn, Professor Comaroff did not kiss her or touch her inappropriately at any time. Harvard's Title IX investigation, which lasted over a year and was extraordinarily thorough, concluded that the evidence simply did not support claims that he had kissed or touched Ms. Kilburn. Allegations that he forbade her from working with her other advisor are simply false.

Professor Comaroff did speak with Ms. Kilburn, who proposed to conduct fieldwork in Cameroon while traveling openly with her same-sex partner, about the risks that could attend that plan, including the risk of sexual violence. This was a necessary conversation for her safety and numerous faculty witnesses in the Title IX process attested that his advice was appropriate. The Title IX investigation found that he was motivated only by concern for Ms. Kilburn's well-being and had no romantic or sexual intention, but that the advice nonetheless constituted sexual harassment. Professor Comaroff vehemently disputes this conclusion, which would cripple faculty members' ability to use their best academic judgment in advising students about essential safety issues.

Professor Comaroff is not only a leading scholar in his field—he is a deeply caring person who has devoted his energy for decades to mentoring and advancing generations of students. Attacks on his career based on gossip and fantasy rather than actual evidence are shameful.

(Statement available at www.johncomaroff.com)