

Third World Quarterly publishes “The Case for Colonialism” leading to censorship demands

Demands for retraction, to fire the journal editors, even to fire author and to revoke his PhD.

Robert R.

Legal Insurrection

Sunday, September 17,

[Bruce Gilley](#) of Portland State University (image above) published an article titled [“The Case for Colonialism”](#) in the decidedly anti-Colonial journal *Third World Quarterly* (home of the [Edward Said Award](#)).

In its self-description, Third World Quarterly [writes](#):

TWQ examines all the issues that affect the many Third Worlds and is not averse to publishing provocative and exploratory articles, especially if they have the merit of opening up emerging areas of research that have not been given sufficient attention.

Gilley is no newcomer to controversy.

Just last month, Gilley published a [piece](#) in *Minding the Campus* on his resignation from the American Political Science Association ([ASPCA](#)), over its lack of ‘viewpoint diversity’ (Gilley self-identifies in that piece as an independent and swing voter) In the *Third World Quarterly* piece, Gilley argues that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Western colonialism was “as a general rule, both objectively beneficial and subjectively legitimate in most of the places where it was found.”

This is [not the first academic \(free version\)](#) piece Gilley has written expressing these sentiments.

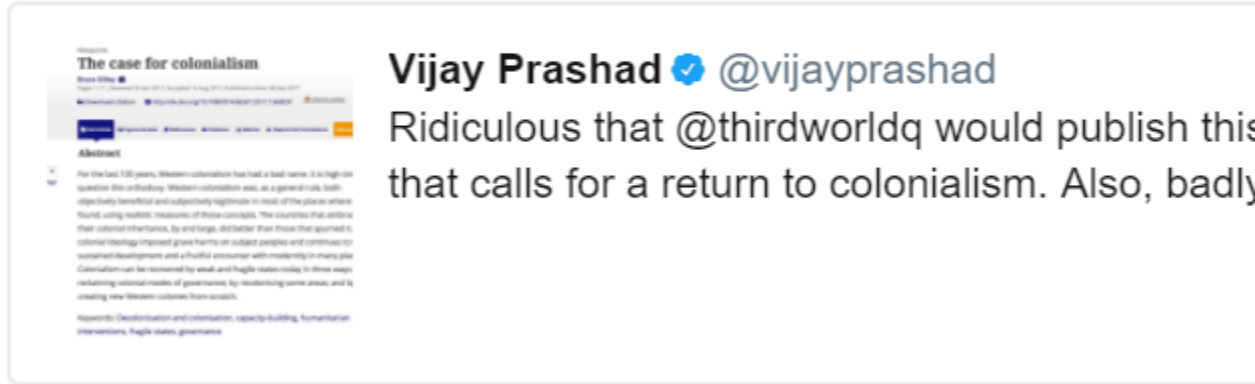
The article, written in a somewhat provocative tone, has sparked quite an outrage.

Rather than celebrating the open mindedness of the journal’s publishing a piece challenging some of the central paradigms of their discipline, and taking this challenge as an opportunity to refute the piece, numerous academics have cried ‘foul’ and are calling for the retraction of the article and for sanctioning the author and the editors.



Dr. Farhana Sultana @Farhana_H2O · Sep 11

Agree @vijayprashad, retraction is a must. What an insult to million through & continue to suffer from effects of colonialism.



10 133 171

[Note: Original link taken down, archive version is [here](#)]

Members of the editorial board have threatened to resign. Some have threatened to boycott the journal entirely (even not to cite it). Cries of racism and 'white supremacy' dominating academia have naturally followed.

It is ironic that those outraged are so blinded by their own self-perceived (and frequently self-serving) victim status that they fail to see that it is precisely the overwhelming success of their own anti-colonial orthodoxy, rendering the defense of colonialism so marginal, that makes it possible for a journal like *Third World Quarterly* to view publishing such a piece as unthreatening in the first place.



Dr. Farhana Sultana @Farhana_H2O · Sep 12

Replying to @vijayprashad @thirdworldq

This article is a classic display of peak Western, white, male pr empirical evidence, historical analysis, or experience 😞

1 1 1

[Note: Original link taken down, archive version is [here](#)]



Dr. Farhana Sultana @Farhana_H2O · Sep 12

That @thirdworldq could publish such an article is beyond shocking
like who have published in the journal & valued its existence



[Note: Original link taken down, archive version is [here](#)]

It has subsequently emerged that the piece was initially rejected (at least once) by the journal via the normal peer-review process but was then published as a 'viewpoint' piece: something akin to a scholarly op-ed.

<https://twitter.com/NasriAtallah/status/907626374302748672>

<https://twitter.com/slicksean/status/907416118620561409>

Two Petitions Calling for Gilley's (and the editors') Heads

At least two petitions, each with thousands of signatures, have been circulated calling for retraction.

First Petition

Petitioning [Editors of Third World Quarterly](#) and [1 other](#)

Retract "The case for colonialism"



Maxine Horne Manchester, United Kingdom

The case for colonialism

Bruce Gilley

Pages 1-17 | Received 24 Apr 2017, Accepted 15 Aug 2017, Published online: 08 Sep 2017

Download citation <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1369037> Check for updates

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Abstract

ner

For the last 100 years, Western colonialism has had a bad name. It is high time to question this orthodoxy. Western colonialism was, as a general rule, both objectively beneficial and subjectively legitimate in most of the places where it was found, using realistic measures of those concepts. The countries that embraced their colonial inheritance, by and large, did better than those that spurned it. Anti-colonial ideology imposed grave harms on subject peoples and continues to thwart

(NOTE - please do not validate this article by searching for it or downloading it. [Click here to find out how to read the text](#) without boosting the author's or journal's statistics.)

Sign this petition

Your info will stay private.

9,755 supporters

245 needed to reach 10,000

First name
Last name
Email

 Share with Facebook friends**Sign**

By signing, you accept Change.org's [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), and agree to receive occasional emails about campaigns on Change.org. You can unsubscribe at any time.

The **first** petition (which has already gathered nearly ten thousand signatures), begins with the call not to download the article.

The petition claims that the "offending article" has "brought widespread condemnation from scholars around the globe" and:

lacks empirical evidence, contains historical inaccuracies, and includes spiteful fallacies. There is also an utter lack of rigor or engaging with existing scholarship on the issue.

No examples of the above are given in the petition. The petition calls on the editorial team:

To retract the article and also to apologize for further brutalizing those who have suffered under colonialism.

Additionally:

Editors at Third World Quarterly allowing this piece utterly lacking in academic merit to be published should be replaced from the editorial board.

Second Petition

Petitioning [Third World Quarterly](#)

Call for Apology and Retraction from Third World Quarterly


 Jenny Heijun Wills Winnipeg, Canada

ABSTRACT

For the last 100 years, Western colonialism has had a bad name. It is high time to question this orthodoxy. Western colonialism was, as a general rule, both objectively beneficial and subjectively legitimate in most of the places where it was found, using realistic measures of those concepts. The countries that embraced their colonial inheritance, by and large, did better than those that spurned it. Anti-colonial ideology imposed grave harms on subject peoples and continues to thwart sustained development and a fruitful encounter with modernity in many places. Colonialism can be recovered by weak and fragile states today in three ways: by reclaiming colonial modes of governance; by recolonising some areas; and by creating new Western colonies from scratch.

We insist that you, *Third World Quarterly*, retract and apologize for the publication of Professor Bruce Gilley's appalling article, "The Case for Colonialism" published September 2017. In truth, we originally thought this work was satire; if that is the case, it is

Sign this petition

 Your info will stay private.

6,177 supporters


 1,323 needed to reach 7,500

 First name

 Last name

 Email

 Share with Facebook friends

By signing, you accept Change.org's [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#), and agree to receive occasional emails about campaigns on Change.org. You can unsubscribe at any time.

A second [petition](#), authored by Jenny Heijun Wills of the University of Winnipeg, with over 6,000 signatures, similarly calls for apology and retraction:

The sentiments expressed in this article reek of colonial disdain for Indigenous peoples and ignore ongoing colonialism in white settler nations.

The author is accused of insufficient respect for black and indigenous people of color (BIPOC):

The point that "Western countries should be encouraged to hold power in specific governance areas (public finances, say, or criminal justice)" (2) cannot be taken out of the context in which BIPOC around the world are surveilled, disenfranchised, and murdered by colonial and state structures of criminal "justice." This condescension also infantilizes and dehumanizes BIPOC by claiming that they are incapable of self-governance. This is especially appalling when the author elsewhere in the article takes the words of multiple decolonial scholars of colour out of context in order to justify his violence against their respective communities and cultures.

...We will close by asserting that this article is not only offensive but damaging. It is an active attack on BIPOC scholars, thinkers, and people, as well as on the project of decolonization. In our current political context, the lives and safety of BIPOC, refugees, and allies are being threatened by radicalized white supremacist groups. These kinds of ideas are not simply abstract provocations, but have real, material consequences for those who Prof. Gilley seeks to dominate and objectify.

https://twitter.com/Jenny_Wills_/status/907736569733275648

https://twitter.com/Jenny_Wills_/status/907711818004553728

Social Media Campaign: Personal, and anything but Measured

Those protesting the piece are so outraged, that they are calling on people, if they must read the offending article, not to cite it or to download it directly from the publisher, which would give the piece traffic, rather they are sharing [free links](#) to the [piece](#).



Dr. Farhana Sultana @Farhana_H2O · Sep 12

People shouldn't download the article, it'll only increase its stat
click-bait, so please read it elsewhere through google



1



7

23

[Note: Original link taken down, archive version is [here](#)]

Meanwhile, Gilley's character is being impeached. Former PSU students are [accusing him](#) of racism and discriminating against non 'straight white males' and have called for his firing:

I don't think Gilley should have a job where he is allowed to teach students about public policy, especially given his track record of being unable to put his views aside to run the MPP program in an equitable way...At the very least, I'd like the institution to respond by distancing themselves from the views expressed in his works. This is an issue of student safety and having people at the institution who hold views like this does not create a safe campus for everyone."

PSU has a responsibility, especially now to rescind Dr. Gilley's tenure and terminate his employment. This article comes on the heels of other incendiary comments that

Gilley has made, and is clearly testing the limits of what is acceptable. This is, in no uncertain terms, racism

A colleague of Gilley's at Portland State says he will advise students against signing up for Gilley's classes:



Tom H Hastings · Works at Portland State University

I do not know Bruce Gilley but I do know Sy Adler and I applaud his actions. Gilley's article is indeed shameful, an embarrassment, and as someone who reviews for some journals, I am nonplussed that it made it into any peer-reviewed publication. It is so racist, so patriarchal, so condescending, and just plain offensive. Students need to cease signing up for his classes. That will be my advice to my students. I've taught at PSU since 2001 and have not once critiqued a colleague. Until now.

Like · Reply · 7 · Sep 16, 2017 7:15am

Calls for protest have begun, hoping to enlist *Black Lives Matter*:



Mia Baldwin I'm a student at this school.

I've forwarded this to the Black Student Union at PSU, and am currently looking for other student clubs (Native American, etc) to send it to.

Ideally I'd like to see a protest outside his office.

Any advice on how to spread the message/groups to contact would be greatly appreciated.

Like · Reply · 18 · September 14 at 12:27pm



Farhana Sultana Thank you for your efforts! Please make sure students know they're not alone and to sign the petition. You could try local BLM chapter?

Like · Reply · 1 · September 14 at 9:04pm

People claim claim to be frightened and unsafe



Esma Ally This is not just an offensive piece. It is a call for violence. It is a political project . It is scary that such political alternatives are being normalised.

Like · Reply · 4 · September 13 at 5:27pm



Esma Ally I am really scared about the future and what this means. Are academics seriously considering advocating colonialism? I don't feel safe in academia anymore.

Like · Reply · 2 · September 13 at 5:28pm

Some are calling on Princeton to revoke Gilley's PhD



Helen Thabile He got his PhD at Princeton :(

Like · Reply · 2 · September 13 at 9:47am



Farhana Sultana I know. It's been bugging me for several days. I wish Princeton would revoke it 😞 I wish we as alumni could do something but probably not.

Like · Reply · 2 · September 13 at 11:14am



Nicolas Janberg Doesn't really speak for our alma mater now, does it?

Like · Reply · 1 · September 13 at 12:16pm



Farhana Sultana Exactly, but I know there are many racist and colonial apologists there. His supervisor was probably one of them

Like · Reply · 1 · September 13 at 12:17pm



Nicolas Janberg well, when we were there it wasn't the liberal university that is seems to be now. There's bound to be some holdovers left... 😞

Like · Reply · 1 · September 13 at 12:19pm

In a [widely circulated email](#), Syracuse [professor, Farhana Sultana](#) [Note: Original link taken down, archive version is [here](#)] and [here](#)] has attacked the article and the author as someone who has:

published white supremacist drivel in the past disguised as academic scholarship (e.g. supporting ethnic cleansing)

(Note: The [article](#) Sultana refers to did not “support ethnic cleansing”, rather, it argued that as an analytical category “ethnic conflict” was not useful in characterizing disparate conflicts in different regions (i.e. that categorizing such conflict as ‘ethnic’ disguised greater differences)).

Sultatana’s email opens:

I wish to bring to your attention a highly problematic practice in academia of not holding scholars or journals to high standards of accuracy, merit, or rigor. This is particularly so when they publish shoddy racist click-bait pieces

Recently, an author published a piece calling for the return of colonization and white supremacy in the well-respected journal Third World Quarterly... The article is full of inaccuracies & falsehoods, misqualifies existing scholarship on the topic, lacks proper citations, is poorly written and conceptualized, and morally reprehensible.

In a stunning display of denial of how entrenched Sultana’s worldview is in academia she writes:

We all know there are plenty of colonial apologists in academia as well as overt and closeted white supremacists who enable/promote/encourage such success; many

more support it through silence and enabling such behavior to go unchecked thereby allowing racism to flourish.

Similarly un-self-aware

Accountability, rigor, empirical evidence, sound reasoning, and engaging with existing scholarship are essential foundations in academic publishing, and this particular article did not do any of that. TWQ needs to be held accountable for promoting such practices

A laudable sentiment of course, but the reader can peruse other [articles](#) and editions of TWQ or of [Sultana's writing](#) and judge for oneself whether this standard is applied more generally.

The vindictive part comes next:

If in the process they do retract the article, then that author and his supporters will have hopefully learnt a lesson. This will put a dent in his dossier, however small. In the process of all this, it'll also raise awareness that scholars and journals are responsible and can be held accountable.

Personally, I do not want to give any more oxygen directly to this racist fascist author who has written for alt-right websites and published reprehensible material in the past (his piece justifying ethnic cleansing was also published by TWQ and it should have generated pushback then but it did not — I think that emboldened both the author and the journal). We will not be able to change the mind of this man or racist his allies. I also worry about the hundreds of students who take his courses, and wonder what they have learnt. I doubt his university will take any steps to hold him accountable (it seems that US universities only fire professors if they call out injustices and not the other way around), so while many people have left this man, his department, his university voicemails and messages, I highly doubt anything will come of it in terms of reprimands. What we can do is put pressure on TWQ and other journals who enable this kind of behavior to count as 'scholarship' to desist from doing so any further. In my opinion, not doing that is a disservice to all of us for all the labor we put into our own publications and scholarship

Sultana also posted a public [Facebook](#) post (also [here](#)), which opens:

There is a horrendous scourge that has ravaged the earth called white supremacy. I've spent a lot of my life doing the emotional, physical and intellectual labor of fighting white supremacist and racist ideologies through various means (through my teaching, talks, writing, peer reviewing, discussions, activism, social media like Twitter and Facebook, email listservs, etc.) all in order to promote justice, equity,

and peace. The current situation of outrage and shock I'm experiencing is the result of a particular article published recently that has many up in arms, and rightly so. It concludes:

In the end, such pieces with their advocating for colonialism and the brutality they underpinned are meant to ruin our peace, trigger an emotional/emotive response, and make us angry, especially those of us who have suffered from white supremacy, racism, colonial brutality or its aftermath, and more so when it happens under the guise of an academic 'debate' or an official publication, which all basically display peak white, Western, male privilege in my opinion. Calling out such scholars often results in nothing happening, but I am hoping that a journal retraction will be a productive outcome. Criticizing such publications and raising awareness about such racism in academia and the problematic publishing industry that enables it are a part of my service to humanity; but it is exhausting and soul-draining, especially when I'm ill. On top of it all, it is also sad that none of this work that I or any other people of color do continually will ever 'count' officially as it is unseen and unrecognized labor (but that's another topic of discussion). However, I see this labor as an important act of resistance, however small, and also hopefully of transformation for change. All kinds of white supremacist racist drivel has to be resisted from all sides, especially given the craziness of the world right now, as silence is not an option.

Saner Responses: Rebut Rather than Retract

In the academy's defense, there have been other, more measured responses, even from Gilley's critics.

Nathan Robinson a Harvard [graduate student](#) published a [piece](#) in Current Affairs (of which he is the editor) called "A Quick Reminder of Why Colonialism was Bad", in which he harshly attacks Gilley's piece, calling "morally tantamount to Holocaust denial". Nevertheless, unlike the aforementioned petitioners, Robinson actually engages Gilley's claims and offers counterarguments in their rebuttal. Robinson opposes the petition to retract:

I am not signing the [petition](#) to have it retracted, because I believe that the journal shouldn't retract it simply because there was public pressure.

...we must repeatedly emphasize that the reason Gilley's piece is so wretched is not just because it advocates something that contradicts our sense of justice, but because he has deliberately produced a false version of history. I am sick and tired of people on the right saying those of us on the left simply Can't Respond To Their Arguments. I've read their arguments, and they're bad

Cynics might suspect that Robinson's reading is not quite the impassioned objective reading he claims to be offering, but compared to the outrage emanating from other quarters calling for Gilley's head, this is an improvement.

In *Daily Nous*, one of the two most important Philosophy blogs, [Justin Weinberg argued](#) for a norm of rebuttal over retraction. Arguing that the norms for retraction should be restricted to extreme cases of misconduct, Weinberg implied, without directly saying so, that this article does not seem to run afoul of them. Weinberg criticized those who "overstat[e] the harms (e.g. "brutalizing", "violence") than an academic article can cause".

When Are Retractions Warranted?

Retractions of journal articles are not always inappropriate. The Committee on Publication Ethics which publishes guidelines for journal publication, states the [following for retraction](#):

Retraction should usually be reserved for publications that are so seriously flawed (for whatever reason) that their findings or conclusions should not be relied upon. Sometimes, an author will request retracting his own paper, because he believes it to be flawed. Instances of retraction by editors, on the other hand, are cases where

- they have clear evidence that the findings are unreliable, either as a result of misconduct (e.g. data fabrication) or honest error (e.g. miscalculation or experimental error)
- the findings have previously been published elsewhere without proper crossreferencing, permission or justification (i.e. cases of redundant publication)
- it constitutes plagiarism
- it reports unethical research

Absent from this, for obvious reasons, is research considered to be mistaken or disagreeable.

Conclusion

Every so often an episode arises in academia which lays bare how thin the distinction between academic scholarship and ideological advocacy has become. Scholarship purports to be evidence based, reasoned, and enlightening, even when mistaken. When scholars or reasoned advocates make a claim, other scholars will seek to refute that claim (or to support it). Whether one agrees or disagrees with the claim is almost immaterial: the claim is only as good as the evidence and reasons which support it. As the English Philosopher John Stuart Mill famously wrote:

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. His reasons may be good, and no one may have been able to refute them. But if he is equally unable to refute the reasons on the opposite side; if he does not so much as know what they are, he has no ground for preferring either opinion. (*On Liberty*)

Ideology, however, when disguised as scholarship, morphs into dogma and witch hunts. So when scholarship violates the sacred creed and taboos of the dominant ideology, censorship, condemnation, and cries of outrage frequently follow. The claims attacked are deemed not only mistaken, but 'offensive', 'hurtful', 'hateful', as are requests for reasons to support or reject that claim. The identity and character of the author is then impeached. In today's academic climate, if the author is a member of a so-called 'privileged class', this will never fail to go unmentioned, its supposed relevance understood by all involved.

<https://twitter.com/ZoeSTodd/status/907599103697330176>

<https://twitter.com/ZoeSTodd/status/907601993233035264>

Episodes like this have grown ever more frequent.

Just last spring, the academic world was rocked by a **scandal** involving an article in the Feminist Philosophy journal *Hypatia*. Rebecca Tuvel, a Philosophy professor at Rhodes College in Memphis, authored a piece arguing in defense of 'Transracialism' (the idea that someone can identify with a race other than the one they were born into), on the grounds that there is no relevant moral difference between this and being transgendered. Tuvel's article sparked outrage among those who found the piece insufficiently pious. A mass repudiation of the piece and of the journal ensued, including a mutiny by a substantial portion of *Hypatia's* editorial board apologizing for publishing the piece. Petitions demanding retraction and apology followed.

Tuvel was 'called out' as a white woman, insufficiently aligned with feminists of color. Grievances, minor, and more minor, many of which were entirely false, were raised. Ultimately, the bulk of the Philosophy academy seems to have supported Tuvel (Philosophy as a discipline is still relatively scholarly, rather than ideological, at least compared to the other humanities, although as the Tuvel episode illustrates, there are breaches in the walls), as did *Hypatia's* editor in chief (at the cost of mass exodus). The episode, though left many casualties in its wake: beyond Tuvel herself (who is untenured and whose name is now strongly associated with scandal), one surmises that others will not so easily defend such 'impious' views in print.

This episode seem to be a repeat of the Tuvel affair. So far, however, *Third World Quarterly* has been mum. Whether this persists, and the article continues to be posted, remains to be seen. Gilley, at least, is tenured.

Meanwhile, the fault lines on free speech in the academy continue to reveal themselves. The picture is not pretty.

The author is a graduate student who must write under a pseudonym for fear of retribution from faculty.