

Queen's joins the academic bullies

By Christie Blatchford

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As a recent visitor to academe, having written much of late about Canadian universities and so read many scholarly papers, I have seen my share of what I would call, in my white settler, cisgendered way, lightweight fluff.

I have read of the travails of a University of Ottawa law professor suffering the impossible dopiness of white students taking her class on racism and white privilege. (Guilty Displeasures: White Resistance in the Social Justice Classroom by Rakhi Ruparelia, 2015)

No one, certainly no one like me, can understand her pain: “I interpret the hostility of resistant (even if well-intentioned) white students as racial microaggressions that compromise the psychological well-being and deplete the emotional and physical resources of racialized professors; in short, these interactions can be harmful and exhausting to me as a racialized woman.”

I’ve read “100 Ways to Indigenize and decolonize academic programs and courses,” which includes No. 63, “Deconstruct the construct of racism”; No. 68, Watch out for those worrisome “discourses of multiculturalism” because some Indigenous people “believe that multiculturalism serves as a form of on-going colonialism”; and No. 81, “Participate in the anti-oppressive summer institute.” (Dr. Shauneen Pete of the University of Regina is the scholar here; she’s the executive lead of Indigenization at the school.)

I’ve read Towards Decolonizing the Pan-Canadian Science Framework, by the University of Saskatchewan’s Glen Aikenhead, who offers suggestions for science educators to cease attempting “to enculturate students into taking on a Western scientific way of knowing.” Etc., etc.

There are hundreds of such papers out there, probably thousands. I may find them variously tedious or pretentious, but I am not a scholar, and I certainly wouldn't censor them or have the writers censored.

This brings me to the curious case of Bruce Gilley. He is a scholar. A Canadian, a graduate of the University of Toronto and Princeton University, he's a former Queen's prof and now associate professor in political science at Portland State University and head of the Oregon branch of the National Association of Scholars. Until January, and for the past 10 years, he was also an external fellow at Queen's University Centre for International and Defence Policy (CIDP).

Last fall, he wrote a double-blind, peer-reviewed article that was published in the *Third World Quarterly*, a scholarly journal based in London. It was entitled "The Case for Colonialism." In it, Gilley argued that the modern "notion that colonialism is always and everywhere a bad thing needs to be rethought," and he argued persuasively that one of the things the colonial governance agenda was good at was recognizing "that the capacity for effective self-government (in fledgling states) is lacking and cannot be conjured out of thin air..." It rang true in my old bones.

He was also crystal clear that "colonialism can return (in any form) only with the consent of the colonized."

Predictably, the piece caused a holy uproar. He and the editor of the journal, Shahid Qadir, were viciously attacked, with about 16,000 people signing various petitions (one led by Jenny Heijun Wills, a University of Winnipeg English prof) demanding the journal retract the article and that Gilley apologize for it (he did, under what he called "the onslaught," then thought the better of it), and both of them ridiculed and threatened.

Fifteen members of the journal's editorial board resigned in protest. But in December, eight other editorial board members signed a letter in support of Gilley published in the London *Times*, joining about 72 leading scholars (not a one from a Canadian university) in condemning the hysteria.

"Whatever one's view of Gilley's essay," the letter said, "We feel the withdrawal of this piece under such public pressure sets a dangerous precedent for academic freedom... We see this as part of a rising tide of intolerance on

university campuses and within the academic profession, with certain scholars and students seeking to close down perspectives with which they disagree rather than debating them openly.”

Eventually, facing what he called “serious and credible threats of personal violence,” Qadir, with Gilley’s consent, withdrew the article from publication.

It was in January this year that Gilley discovered his profile and publications had disappeared from the Queen’s CIDP website.

No one had told him, so he wrote the centre’s director, Stefanie von Hlatky, and asked her to explain. On Jan. 16, she replied, expressing condolences for his travails, but saying, “My view is that you were not forthcoming about the *Third World Quarterly* controversy. Instead, I had to find out ‘the hard way’ meaning via Twitter, Facebook, emails from colleagues. When your appointment period came to an end, I decided not to extend a re-appointment invitation.” By not informing her “of what was going on,” she said, he had broken the trust.

(Von Hlatky was in a conference Friday and couldn’t reply to a *National Post* email asking her what she meant. Were fellows of the Centre expected to anticipate controversies around their work? Submit essays to her for approval?)

Last month, Gilley wrote David Walker, the director of the university’s School of Policy Studies, to which the centre reports. A couple of weeks ago, he got his answer, a terse note saying his appointment had expired and that procedures were followed.

In other words, as Gilley told Walker in his letter, Queen’s now “stands as the only global institution or organization ... that has acted not to defend and reaffirm my position, but to institutionally join in the academic bullying and censorship campaign.”

The world, it appears, needs not more Canada, but less.

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