

Campus Repression Is So Bad That Academics Are Now Holding Conferences In Secret

This Oxford University event was held without any advertisement or social media discussion. Several people attended on condition their identities and attendance be kept secret.

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I was invited to a secret colloquium in one of the most beautiful and holiest of English cities this spring. It happened at Christ Church, one of the oldest colleges in Oxford. Some 25 academics gathered in total secrecy to discuss imperialism and colonialism, led by Bruce Gilley, an associate government professor from Portland State University. I was invited by Nigel Biggar, Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology, though I was the only one present who is not an expert in the field of comparative history (my area of research is foreign policy and military strategy).

It was a fairly standard roundtable, with three separate panels to discuss the recent controversy over research on colonialism, as well as academic pushback and postmodernist and post-colonial assault on academia. The first was particularly policy relevant, as a sort of comparative history between British counterinsurgency and American experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I have previously met academics, who stopped meeting students individually for feedback, ever since the MeToo movement started. But this was the first time I attended an academic colloquium held in utmost secrecy. The event was held without any advertisement or social media promotion. Nothing, none at all.

The reason is understandable, though. The context: Gilley wrote and published a paper on the cost benefit analysis of colonialism. His argument was fairly simple, although by no means simplistic. Gilley argued that the effect of colonialism was overall liberalizing, and is far more nuanced, than what is taught in post-colonial circles at universities.

The result was a predictable meltdown. Half of the journal editorial board resigned, and the outrage and social justice mob pressure ultimately led to the retraction and withdrawal of the paper from the journal. Gilley's tenure saved his job, though he claims to be under "investigation." To his credit, he has decided to continue further research, or as he says, "offend away." (Download the full paper [here](#).)

On this side of the pond, the story was similar. Biggar's project on the ethics of colonialism, in which he investigates the rights and wrongs during that phase of European domination of the globe, came under fire from fellow post-modernist and Marxist academics, before it was even launched. The fact that there could be a fresh intellectual inquiry about a topic that is dogmatically considered evil was a shock to an entire section of academia.

In both the cases, the charges against academic freedom were led by fellow academics from disciplines which are less academic and more ideological and activist. As I have written before, contrary to popular wisdom, what is happening across Western campuses is essentially an inter-academic war, where students are pawns in a bigger battle of ideological domination by one group of academics over all other disciplines.

Thanks to the secrecy, the colloquium went smoothly, without any protests or de-platforming. The topic of discussion, which is beyond the scope of this article, and can be read in the listed articles above, is of course debatable. No

rational individual would claim that colonialism and imperialism was purely good OR evil. In truth, it was neither.

Karl Marx, a Eurocentric philosopher himself, talked about the liberalizing effect of European colonialism had over tribal and feudal cultures, a lesson often forgotten by modern Marxists. Ghastly practices like widow burning in Hindu majority states, and Jizya tax and slavery in Arab and North African lands were stopped by the Royal Navy. As Helen Andrews wrote, "When Englishmen first arrived in Mashonaland in the 1880s, the civilization they encountered there had not developed currency, written language, irrigation, beasts of burden, the plough, or the wheel."

These are facts, which go against the Hollywood peddled narrative of Wakanda, or any research that comes out of any random post-colonial departments across the globe. Yet the mere mention of a common Anglo-American heritage and legal rights led some activists to accuse Jeff Sessions of racism. Nevertheless, the secrecy is what was the key takeaway from the colloquium, and perhaps a sign of things to come in Western academy. The Brits lack the enforceable legal right to free speech Americans enjoy. But as Joy Pullmann pointed out, this decolonize madness has now spread to Yale and Stanford, after Cambridge. Statues will be toppled and disciplines ruined, because of historical revisionism, and the whims of a certain section of scholars and academics who choose to act like Soviet commissars.

Oxford especially is under constant assault, as it remains the bastion of free speech, meritocracy and open research and has so far refused to cave in to egalitarian demands of affirmative action and censorship. But as revolutionary and activist tactics spread, secrecy seems to be the only option to continue research without the worry of mob violence.

Here's what Biggar told me when I asked him the reason for the secrecy and the way forward:

It is now highly unlikely that I will choose to involve any of the signatories in the project since I have no confidence in their readiness to engage in the reciprocal and forbearing exchange of reasons. What is more, if I want to hold lectures or seminars on the topic of empire, I will do so privately, since I cannot be sure that my critics will behave civilly. I held a day-conference to discuss Bruce Gilley's controversial article, 'The Case for Colonialism,' and found myself having to use pseudonyms to hide the identities of some participants. One young scholar only attended on condition that his name nowhere appear on print, nor his face on any photograph, lest his senior colleagues find out and kill his career.

Perhaps it was apt that a conference on imperialism would be held in Oxford — the relic of a time long gone by, of civility and intellect amidst gathering narcissism and tyranny; the withering of the last remnants of a social order, hierarchy and tradition, which is almost extinct in most of the country; a struggling bastion of meritocracy, which is under constant assault from fanatical egalitarians. The last truly great English city, from a nation (to borrow from Peter Hitchens) once known as Great Britain.

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