Letters to the Editor

Our colonial history and guilt over empire

2 December 2017

Sir, Following the campaign against the journal Third World Quarterly to force it to retract Bruce Gilley’s essay “In defence of colonialism”, we are writing to extend our collective solidarity to the journal and its editor, Shahid Qadir, who was also subjected to death threats. Whatever one’s views of Gilley’s essay, we feel the withdrawal of this piece under such public pressure sets a dangerous precedent for academic freedom. We defend the right of editors, journals and presses to publish any work — however controversial — that, in their view, merits exposure and debate. We are deeply alarmed by the censorious attitudes embodied in the campaigns directed against the journal and Mr Qadir. 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.

We need open, frank and vigorous debate more than ever. Third World Quarterly has been at the leading edge of debates on the developing world for nearly 40 years. We are determined it will continue to be so.

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