



The false equivalence of academic freedom and free speech: Defending academic integrity in the age of white supremacy, colonial nostalgia, and anti-intellectualism

Dr. Farhana Sultana

Associate Professor of Geography
Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs
Syracuse University
sultanaf@syr.edu

Abstract

While much attention has been paid to controversies over free speech and academic freedom related to university campus debates, events, and activities, I demonstrate that higher education is also under threat by the undermining of academic publishing ethics, integrity and standards, as well as what counts as scholarly rigor. The rise of problematic rhetoric and overtures as well as the circumvention of academic publishing standards pose threats to academia writ large, whereby academia is threatened from not just from outside but also from within the academy when some academics themselves participate in the erosion of academic integrity. At a time when there are concerted efforts to decolonize academia, there is a concurrent rise of colonial nostalgia and white supremacy among some academics, who are supported by and end up lending support to the escalating far-right movements globally, which misuse notions of free speech and academic freedom to further their agendas and attack higher education. Critical scholars thus need to hold accountable fellow academics, academic publishers, and universities in order to protect academic integrity and scholarship. The stakes are high at the current conjuncture and require greater introspection and intervention within academia to counter the dangerous



trends of anti-intellectualism, corporatized academia, white supremacy, and colonial violence.

Keywords

Academic freedom; free speech; academic integrity; publishing ethics; colonial nostalgia

Introduction

There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there always has been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that “my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.” (Isaac Asimov, 1980)

Free speech and academic freedom have been intensely debated and polarizing topics in and outside of academia for some time but reached a boiling point in 2017. Dozens of articles have been published by academic organizations and outlets such as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), *Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Inside Higher Ed*, and *Times Higher Education*. Discussions have also been held across innumerable blogs, discussion forums, social media, and college campuses, especially in the US, Canada, UK and Europe. Increased media coverage has brought the issues to greater public attention. For example, an article in the *Huffington Post* in 2017 was titled “The Alt-Right Does Not Defend Free Speech. It Threatens It.” Similarly, numerous other media outlets have covered the ongoing battles over free speech on university campuses. A January 2018 news report in the *Washington Post* was titled “Hate groups make unprecedented push to recruit on college campuses.” The AAUP released several statements and investigated cases of faculty under attack as well as the overall threat to academic freedom (AAUP 2017a, 2017b). These are the current realities in higher education, especially in the US. They point to rising conflicts whereby academic institutions and the pursuit of knowledge generally are increasingly under attack. Academics are threatened for critiquing not only the rise of the far-right or for doing rigorous scholarship but also for defending academic integrity and procedures. These political battles often pitch ideologues against critical academic scholars.

While much attention has been paid to campus debates, events, and activities, it should be noted that higher education is also under threat by the undermining of academic publishing ethics, integrity and standards, as well as what counts as scholarly rigor. In what follows, I discuss how the rise of both problematic rhetoric and overtures as well as the circumvention of academic publishing standards pose threats to academia writ large, whereby academia is threatened from not just from outside but also from within the academy. These additional threats have arisen

because there are increasing attempts to provide a ‘scholarly’ veneer to what are otherwise hateful ideologies. I demonstrate why academics need to hold accountable fellow academics, academic publishers, and universities in order to protect academic integrity and scholarship. I also show how the notion of free speech is misused to silence the pursuit of scholarly rigor and critical engagement, why the stakes are so high at the current juncture, and where greater introspection and intervention are needed within academia to counter the dangerous trends. At a time when there are concerted efforts to decolonize academia from its colonial roots and legacies, especially in the western hemisphere and settler colonial states, there is a concurrent rise of colonial nostalgia and white supremacy among some academics, who are supported by and end up lending support to the escalating far-right movements globally. Both groups misuse notions of free speech and academic freedom to further their agendas. To critically engage with these issues, I draw from experiences and insights of two recent cases: a publication titled ‘A Case for Colonialism’ in the journal *Third World Quarterly* and the ‘Ethics and Empire’ project at Oxford University.

Free Speech versus Academic Freedom

We must first understand the content of and the difference between free speech and academic freedom, as these terms are frequently misunderstood, misused, and conflated. In the US, freedom of speech is protected under the First Amendment to the US Constitution; in other democratic countries free speech is guaranteed under the law. At a fundamental level this means that the state will not punish its citizens for voicing their opinions and expressions. However, it does not mean that free speech cannot be challenged or criticized, as all speech is open to debate and is not free from rebuttals or consequences. Invocations to free speech does not protect one from critique. We do not have to accept nonsensical, prejudiced, biased, or violent speech just because it is protected under freedom of speech. Free speech protected by law does not mean that all speech is accurate or defensible, as the content and context of speech matter. Those hiding under the guise of free speech often cry foul if any criticism is made of the content or consequence of their speech, clamoring that it is censorship, thereby trying to shut down any critique. However, Manne and Stanley (2015) correctly point out that “censure is not the same thing as censorship; indeed, it could not be. The right not to be censored by the government extends to the right to censure — that is, morally condemn — the speech acts of other people.” Indeed, not all ideas, opinions, or speech are accurate or worthy of our attention, and many require resistance and dissent as well as outright condemnation.

However, the notion of free speech is increasingly being abused by many to silence people, especially minorities and marginalized groups, most glaringly in the US where free speech is a politicized topic of national debate. Poignantly, Manne and Stanley (2015) argue that: “The notion of freedom of speech is being co-opted by dominant social groups, distorted to serve their interests, and used to silence those who are oppressed and marginalized.” Likewise, Hofmann-Kuroda and de Martelly

(2017) argue that “by failing to address the material conditions and uneven distributions of power that structure people's access to rights and protections, appeals to free speech rights have historically been used not to encourage the sharing of diverse ideas, but as a means of expanding the growth of often violent right-wing movements.” Free speech debates have resulted in ad hominem attacks against both minorities and progressives to shut down their right to free speech, and this is a common tactic increasingly used by white supremacists and ethno-nationalists.

Thus, the rules of free speech do not seem to apply evenly to all in practice, but rather mostly for those in power. Free speech rhetoric is frequently misused by those who would shut down the right to free speech by variously positioned Others and those who work on anti-racism, anti-fascism, anti-colonialism, feminism, and social justice advocacy. As Figueroa and David Palumbo-Liu (2017) eloquently argue, “the political and media frenzy over free speech is actually not about free speech at all but rather the free speech of racists over everyone else.” Social justice movements are being attacked by those who benefit from injustice and inequities by claiming that their right to silence others is more important than the right to free speech by minorities. Those who criticize structural inequities, institutionalized racism, systemic oppression, or other imbalances in power relations are often silenced and threatened. As many scholars and organizations like the AAUP have pointed out, this ‘free speech’ rhetoric is a red herring, deflection tactic, and a disingenuous maneuver. It’s never about free speech per se, but the right of might.¹

In recent years, free speech has been co-opted by far-right groups in liberal democracies such as the US, Canada, UK and Europe to promote hate speech whereby hate speech and calls to violence are being promoted, whether directly or covertly, under the guise of free speech. This is generally known as the ‘weaponization of free speech’ whereby the far-right uses the rhetoric of free speech to attack people and promote hate speech (Scott 2018; Picazo 2017). Under the protection of free speech, racialized ideologies and harassment are perpetuated. Often these speech acts of hate, harassment, abuse, and threats happen on university campuses but are increasingly happening online, especially via social media and online media outlets. Cyber-racism has become a considerable problem since there is a massive outrage machine targeted at people who address issues of white

¹ Indeed, renowned academic Judith Butler (2017) recently argued for curtailing free speech when it is hate speech on university campuses in the US. Points of view that don't meet minimum benchmarks of academic rigor really have no place in academia, and thus should not be given resources in academic settings, but universities have become the sites of the contestations over what counts as free speech and who has the right to speak. Butler says the following: “If free speech does take precedence over every other constitutional principle and every other community principle, then perhaps we should no longer claim to be weighing or balancing competing principles or values. We should perhaps frankly admit that we have agreed in advance to have our community sundered, racial and sexual minorities demeaned, the dignity of trans people denied, that we are, in effect, willing to be wrecked by this principle of free speech, considered more important than any other value.”

supremacy or racial violence (Daniels 2009). Online and digital harassment have thus become pervasive in recent years.²

However, inciting violence, calling for harm/harassment, or active discrimination of people or groups violates the rights of others to enact their lives and is actually not protected under free speech. As Siegel (2017) aptly points out: “Arguing about the free speech rights of Nazis, fascists, and KKK members is a trap. The issue is not speech, it is violence. The fascists do not want to argue with us, they want to kill us.” He goes on to point out that in 1969 “the US Supreme Court ruled in *Brandenburg v. Ohio* that there is no free speech right to advocate violence when there is a likelihood that violence will actually occur.” Yet hate speech is increasingly being promoted under the rhetoric of free speech on university campuses, in academic publishing, in the media, and in politics. Hate speech is punishable by law in many countries but remains controversial in the US. Progressive academics in the US are thus increasingly threatened by those who willfully misrepresent what they have said or written, often causing greater signal boost to the right-wing outrage machine which then attacks faculty and institutions (Quintana and Brock 2017).³

This brings us to academic freedom. As Scott (2018) points out: “Free speech makes no distinction about quality; academic freedom does.” This distinction is critically important. Academic freedom enables free speech that is both informed and with reasoned argument to take place, as it is intellectually-driven and knowledge-based. Academic freedom is different from free speech in that it is founded on the principles of scholarly rigor, which involves engaging with theories and methodologies, and demonstrating competency of ideas that have been debated. Academic freedom is not about spreading random ideas or opinions but about the pursuit of truth, the construction and dissemination of knowledge that is clearly grounded in academic scholarship, and which meets a basic level of intellectual rigor. Knowledge, democracy, and the common good are only safeguarded and promoted when we have academic freedom and advancement of critical thinking, systematic inquiry, and rigorous education (Scott 2018). This is in contrast to growing problems of the promotion of anti-intellectualism and the cult of ignorance, especially in the US (Asimov 1980), where there is a refusal to accept that not all ideas are evidence-based or grounded in reality and that opinions are often ill-informed or outright wrong and immoral. There is often no distinction made between knowledge-based or intellectual arguments (which are protected under academic freedom) with the often-ill-informed or biased opinions of those who clamor for free speech to carry

² The regulation of what counts as ‘free speech’ has become key for some online, especially those who focus on enabling the voice of the already-powerful at the expense of the marginalized, often driven by a white supremacist logic. The hypocrisy of silencing the free speech of Others online is quite notable.

³ It is worthwhile noting that the far-right outrage machine is well-organized and well-funded in the US, with numerous websites, news outlets/papers, blogs, television and radio shows, think tanks, and other mechanisms. On the contrary, there is no similarly organized or funded ‘left’ in the US.

the same weight as academic freedom. This false equivalence is a crisis currently facing universities and academia at the moment, where all opinions are seen as equivalent when they are evidently not.⁴

While free speech enables academic freedom to flourish, it can also be misused to erode and attack academic freedom. The ongoing assaults to academic freedom, as Scott (2018) rightly points out, is an assault on intellectual rigor, scholarly inquiry, and critical thinking and analysis. She makes the following important point:

These days the Right's reference to free speech sweeps away the guarantees of academic freedom, dismissing as so many violations of the constitution the thoughtful, critical articulation of ideas, the demonstration of proof based on rigorous examination of evidence, the distinction between true and false, between careful and sloppy work, the exercise of reasoned judgment. Their free speech means the right to one's opinion, however unfounded, however ungrounded, and it extends to every venue, every institution.

Indeed, the weaponization of free speech has resulted in attacks on academic freedom, shutting down academic inquiry, the flourishing of ideas, and rigorous debate, in order to promote suppressive and McCarthyesque ideologies that reproduce discrimination and difference, especially along gender, race, class, religious, and ethnic lines.⁵ Anti-intellectualism that has been simmering in the US for some time facilitates such overtures. Intellectuals and critical thinkers can challenge the status quo, confront injustices with evidence and research, deconstruct facile arguments, or challenge white supremacy, all by using knowledge and scholarship, under the protections of academic freedom. Yet academic freedom is now under assault by those who fear knowledge production and dissemination, which would result in having an educated citizenry that is able to understand democracy and rights (Scott 2018). The ability to ask questions is foundational to democracies, yet this is exactly what the far-right fears as they would rather rule through decree, racist ideologies, and the support of the outrage machine (Wilson 2018). Such tactics enable few to keep power while the majority are controlled

⁴ Racist, sexist, and homophobic ideologies are increasingly being disguised in 'free speech' diatribes, often by white supremacists and racists inside and outside academic settings (Cooper 2017). These trends pose threats not only to individuals and groups, but also to what is taught, written, or debated in academia itself. Critical thinking is the antidote to hate speech masquerading as free speech. Expertise matters, yet experts and intellectuals are increasingly disparaged by anti-intellectuals in their pursuit to delegitimize knowledge production, acquisition, and dissemination. The proliferation of anti-intellectualism, specifically in the US, Canada, UK, Europe, has resulted in the politicization of speech and exploitative situations where discriminatory opinions are incorrectly given the same weight as scholarly knowledge. As Clover (2017) says, this is a great 'unknowing' that is being actively promoted by some.

⁵ Intersectionalities of multiple differences result in compounded oppression for many (e.g. racialized sexism affects women of color; Islamophobic racism affects Muslims of color; etc.)

through ideological hegemonies and virtue signaling. This is why invocation to free speech has become the dog whistle to dismantle academic freedom, scholarly rigor, and higher education, especially in the US.

These kinds of discriminatory mentalities and practices end up reinforcing racism, sexism, misogyny, and other oppressions both in society and inside academia (West 2017). For instance, women who fight patriarchy openly, who challenge hegemony, or ask questions about power relations, are seen as trouble-makers and become open to attack. Or, as renowned scholar Sara Ahmed (2017) says, “feminists are killjoys.” Women of color who bear the double burden of intersections of sexism and racism are further disadvantaged. Yet, in the face of discrimination, bias, and oppression, these oft-silenced and marginalized voices should be listened to more as they challenge dominant narratives that reproduce the very forms of discrimination and marginalization that exist in multiple forms in society. Feminist theorists, critical race theorists, postcolonial theorists, anarchist theorists, and those committed to social justice all challenge the dominant status quo in different ways, which is why the dominant group is resorting to using ‘free speech’ as a baton to attack and vilify them.⁶ Ironically, the equal right to free speech was a hard-won battle by oppressed groups in the past (such as abolitionist groups, labor unions, civil rights movement, etc.) (Dols 2017). For those who combine free speech with social justice, free speech is not some disembodied idea but rather is often rooted in anti-racist and anti-fascist movements (Clover 2017). Academic freedom was likewise a hard-won battle to allow academics to pursue scholarly rigor (AAUP 1940).

Safeguarding Academic Rigor

Higher education institutions are increasingly under assault from the far-right and white nationalists who want to shut down intellectual inquiry and the debate of ideas by provoking universities with racist, sexist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, homophobic, and other discriminatory speeches and acts, which when protested or countered, are attacked as being anti-free speech. This situation is repeating itself across college and university campuses, while administrators largely remain unprepared to defend both academic freedom and the rights of minorities to work in environments free from harassment and harm. Furthermore, donors and advisory boards often pressure universities with conservative or non-democratic ideologies, resulting in universities violating the academic freedom as well as the right to free speech of professors and students themselves.⁷ Such actions also enable platforming of misguided and intolerant free speech absolutists that corrode

⁶ For instance, the moniker ‘social justice warrior’ or SJW is used pejoratively by those who subscribe to far-right ideologies against anyone who fights for equity and justice.

⁷ The most well-known case of biased external influence on academic life is perhaps the case of Steven Salaita (Palumbo-Liu 2015). The current influence of the conservative billionaires Koch Brothers as well as others on US universities demonstrate growing concerns of corporate and political influence on university governance and academia more broadly.

academia.⁸ By co-opting the rhetorical device of free speech, by embodying anti-intellectualism, and by propagating white supremacist ideologies, those who actually don't really care about free speech of anyone but themselves are making universities and academia overall the battlegrounds of freedom and democracy itself. Universities must have better safeguards in place, carry out greater dialogue and introspection, and be more ethical in their pursuits, before allowing academic freedom to be eroded by those who do so under the guise of free speech (Quintana 2017). Worryingly, free speech absolutism is on the rise in academic settings in the US and it negates concern for equity or justice and can violate rights and ethics (Butler 2017).

What are at stake are not just academic knowledge production and dissemination, but broader issues of equality, human rights, and wellbeing. There is no equality in the 'marketplace of ideas' when some ideas are backed by intellectual and scholarly rigor while others are opinions not backed by any evidence, scholarly rigor, subjected to peer review, debated or reworked by other intellectuals. While everyone may have the right to free speech, this does not constitute academic knowledge. Scholarly knowledge is open to challenge or transformation through similar knowledge or evidence-based findings, not individualized ideologies, discriminatory opinions, or ahistorical claims.⁹ In other words, authority of knowledge matters. For instance, if someone is a Holocaust denier, should their untruths carry the same weight in academia? Or those who believe that the earth is flat? Of course not. False narratives and claims-making need to be countered with knowledge and substantiation. As such, opinions in violation of basic standards of scholarly rigor cannot count as academic scholarship.

As famous African-American abolitionist Frederick Douglass said "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will." Thus, active resistance against the erosion of academia is needed, whereby academic freedom is

⁸ Universities are often allocating resources to have such discussions for fear of violating dominant groups' notions of free speech. Such activities end up undermining not only academic freedom and scholarly pursuits, they also undermine the universities' own goals of advancing diversity, equity, and inclusivity on campuses. The alarming misuse of 'free speech' narratives by white nationalists has also attempted to define the issue away from material conditions and allocation of resources at universities, where enormous amounts of monies are spent on hosting right-wing speakers and events (e.g. recent controversies at University of California Berkeley). Thus, by playing into the hands of the alt-right, universities are actually going against their very own purported goals of diversity, equity, or inclusion values that they claim to uphold. By helping the far-right in promoting their agendas of racism, sexism, fascism, and hate, many universities contradict their own discourses and policies as well as undermine advancing academic freedom and scholarship.

⁹ I use scholarly knowledge here to mean knowledge from institutionalized disciplines (whether established or emerging) as well as indigenous knowledge and situated knowledge (Haraway 1988; Smith 2013). Furthermore, rigor here does not mean only what is formally written or institutionally taught, but scholarship and ways of knowing and being that engage with and account for various forms of knowledge production and practices, varied epistemologies and ontologies, as well as positionalities and pedagogies in systematic and rigorous ways.

promoted to counter those who would challenge and destroy the rigorous exchange of ideas and knowledge under the guise of free speech. Critical thinking, rigorous research, intellectualism, and valuing scholarly rigor are the only ways to ensure that a society does not descend further into autocracy, dictatorship, or fascism. Protecting academic freedom ensures that future free speech is grounded in knowledge, rationality, equity, and democracy, and thus needs to be defended (Scott 2018).

In the wake of these recent disturbing trends, what is particularly alarming is the rise of white supremacy, racism, colonial nostalgia and the misuse of free speech to shut down critique of such positions by those *within* academia. This undermines not only academic freedom but threatens academia more broadly as the dangers are not just from outside the academy but from within. The notion of academic freedom itself is often misused by academics and administrators at universities, and increasingly so by conservative white academics who benefit from academic freedom but use it to promote racist and colonizing ideologies, misplaced convictions, and unsubstantiated claims. There is a difference between scrupulous, meticulous, and substantiated scholarly work that is foundational to academic freedom versus those that lack academic rigor or scholarliness but are promoted under spurious claims to academic freedom. Some scholars who promote discriminatory ideologies often use their academic positions of power to promote problematic and harmful ideas.¹⁰ There is thus a need to expose the ideologies and motives that undergird any claims to academic scholarship. The misuse of academic freedom by some academics have arisen in numerous instances, creating controversies across campuses, classrooms, and in academic publishing. Furthermore, free speech of minorities is routinely violated by those in power inside universities, where subaltern voices are not only silenced and struggles suppressed, but there is increasing threat to life, livelihood, and wellbeing. Thus, universities are increasingly sites of contradictions, but need to be more judiciously prepared with reasonable actions when their own constituents are under attack, whether from within or without. Those who care about academia's future need collective thinking and collaboration to move forward for more just academic spaces and futures.

However, it is not only what happens on campuses that we should be concerned with but also all the different ways that academia is currently under assault, especially when baseless ideologies are promoted by some academics in their writing and research, as well as the fallout on those who seek to counter such dangerous trends. Under the guise of free speech, malevolent and misinformed people have attacked critical academics and students, doxxed them, threatened, harassed, abused, and defamed them, all for their using scholarly knowledge and insights to challenge poor scholarship and racist ideologies by some academics who promote systemic racism and provide fodder for far-right hate groups. Academic

¹⁰ For instance, Jordan Peterson of University of Toronto, about whom there are numerous publications (e.g. <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2018/feb/07/how-dangerous-is-jordan-b-peterson-the-rightwing-professor-who-hit-a-hornets-nest>)

publishing has become another battleground where all these problems are also playing out and this needs greater attention, as I discuss below.

Academic Publishing as a Battleground

While most reports and concerns have been raised on broader issues of politically-motivated non-academics and a small minority of academics posing a threat to academic freedom and free speech, there is a dearth of focus on how this is also happening in academic publishing and in the work by some academics themselves through their writing and projects. There is an expectation that all academic publications benefit from thorough research, from a critical review by a group of peers who are also experts in the field through the peer-review process, that each publication engages with existing scholarship in its field in meaningful and adequate ways, and that it has followed established epistemologies and methodologies of its field of analysis. This is generally what happens and is the bedrock of academic freedom. However, what happens when this system, which is the hallmark of academic rigor and scholarly productivity, fails to do what is precisely set up to do? My encounter with the academic freedom versus free speech debates took place quite unexpectedly in September 2017 on exactly such issues, when I made a public plea to an academic journal and its publisher to uphold academic publishing standards, integrity, and ethics.

A controversial piece titled 'A Case for Colonialism' was published in early September 2017 by the *Third World Quarterly (TWQ)*, a well-respected journal of postcolonial development studies. The piece advocated the recolonization of the so-called Third World (or global South) by European countries and argued that the benefits of colonization outweighed the costs, making the discredited and incendiary claim that European colonialism was generally beneficial for the colonized, without addressing the centuries of atrocities and brutalities of colonialism (such as slavery, genocide, etc.). The piece immediately drew global condemnation from scholars, students, journalists, and citizens. Many scholars and experts on the topic of colonialism and imperialism found that the piece downplayed or overlooked colonialism's legacies, cherry-picked data, was full of historical inaccuracies and misrepresentations, poorly researched, and distorted truths. It lacked in scholarly rigor, did not engage with the vast body of post-colonial scholarship on these topics, ignored empirical evidence, and was methodologically unsound. The benefits of European colonization have been thoroughly critiqued and debunked in a large body of interdisciplinary scholarship with which the author did not engage. There is considerable research and documentation that the negative outcomes of colonialism far outweigh any positives for those who were colonized (e.g. Labouchère, 1899; Fanon, 1952, 1963; Césaire, 1972; Rodney, 1972; Said, 1979; Blaut, 1993; Mamdani, 1996; Hochschild, 1998; Davis, 2002; Chakrabarty, 2007; Tharoor, 2017, to name just a few). The underpinnings of Eurocentric racism that drove imperialist domination consisted of rape, pillage, plunder, slavery, torture, massacres, genocide, famines, conflicts, wars, and all sorts of horrors whereby colonialism continues to

have wide-reaching and devastating legacies to this day in the so-called Third World. The false claims that colonialism led to a host of advantages for the colonized are regularly presented by colonial apologists to intentionally obfuscate colonialism's real objectives: to subjugate others for gains of the colonizers and to justify wealth accumulation through scientific racism. The *TWQ* piece was essentially promoting imperialist racialized domination, the White Man's Burden, and colonial nostalgia under the guise of academic scholarship. It was undertaking a historical negationism that extolled the purported benefits of colonialism and called for the return of European supremacy over non-white Others through active recolonization. Such colonial nostalgia is akin to Holocaust denialism in the minds of most scholars and post-colonial citizens.¹¹

Colonialism is a political-economic system based upon the subjugation of peoples by a colonizer, and, as such, it is widely recognized as a violation of basic human rights and fundamental freedoms. Indeed, the United Nations Resolution of 1960 states the following: "The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation" (*UN Resolution 1514/XV*, United Nations 1960). Thus, to advocate for the recolonization of the Third World, as the *TWQ* piece did, is essentially to call for the violation of human rights of billions of people. It is thus not only illegal under international protocols but also morally and ethically wrong. The *TWQ* piece thus lacked both scholarly merit *and* ethical standing.

What is most relevant about this case is that the piece had failed to pass the peer review process (three out of four reviewers rejected the piece), but it was published by the editor-in-chief of *TWQ* as a 'viewpoint' piece in order to generate 'debate.' It was quickly pointed out by many scholars that a journal devoted to post-colonial scholarship was in violation of not only its own ethos but that it had failed to uphold academic publishing standards as the peer review process ensures that

¹¹ As a scholar with expertise in postcolonial development studies who is originally from a former colony in the so-called 'Third World', I agreed with the many critiques of the *TWQ* piece based on both my academic knowledge and professional experience. Colonialism was never a benevolent process, but rather entirely about greed, looting, plundering, and the advancement of European hegemony. It also led to the destruction of existing democratic systems, creation of artificial boundaries, stoked tensions between groups, generated wars, and enacted brutalities such as massacres, genocide, slavery, bonded labor, and disappearances. Much of the current crises in the so-called Third World are a direct product of colonial and imperial domination and control over centuries (there is a large body of scholarship and evidence on this in development studies and related disciplines, e.g. Blaut 1993, Ferguson 1994, Escobar 1995). Indeed, some scholars argue that colonialism never really ended, but took on a different form, through development interventions, as well as through its ongoing geopolitical legacies and socio-ecological crises. Thus, the frequent invocations that colonization brought everything that is good to the developing world, from the railroads to democracy to hygiene, is incorrect. It represents racist and infantilizing tropes of peoples of the so-called Third World, and such tropes have been around for centuries. It also ignores colonialism's responsibilities for being the root cause of many current crises and problems.

academic rigor is upheld in academia.¹² Academic inquiry is subject to scrutiny through peer review so that discriminatory opinions are not passed off as academic knowledge. Some scholars argued that the piece was published as click-bait by the journal in order to increase download traffic and called the piece a “travesty, the academic equivalent of a Trump tweet, clickbait with footnotes” (Roelofs and Gallien 2017).

Within a few days of the *TWQ* publication, over two dozen rebuttals had been written on various online platforms, blogs, and news outlets (including the *Washington Post*, *Al Jazeera*, *Current Affairs*, *Toronto Star*, *LSE Impact Blog*, *Cato Institute*, *The Conversation*, *Quartz*, among several others; see a list of criticisms, rebuttals, and media coverage at the end of this article). In response to the journal’s failures of publishing this unscholarly piece masquerading as scholarly work, academics from around the world also lodged their critiques and concerns via various social media platforms, letters to the editor of *TWQ* as well as newspapers, open statements, online discussion forums, media outlets, and blog posts. Collectively, these numerous responses critiqued the *TWQ* piece on scholarly grounds as well as its neo-colonial propositions, colonial nostalgia, and racist overtones. Since ‘A Case for Colonialism’ was essentially passing specific ideological overtures disguised as academic scholarship, the global condemnation was directed at both the piece and the journal *TWQ* for publishing it. *TWQ*’s actions were in violation of not just academic journal publication standards, ethics, and integrity, but also a threat to all of academia at large when sub-standard opinion pieces are published as ‘scholarship’ to drive up metrics by journals and thereby generate profit. This is highly problematic in an increasingly metricized academy, where scholarly integrity and ethics are undermined when academic journals do not adhere to scholarly rigor or established quality control procedures. Academics thus need to hold academic journals and each other accountable for maintaining scholarly rigor as well as having ethical standards in place.¹³

By failing to honor the established due processes in place to ensure academic rigor, *TWQ* had enacted a great disservice to academic scholarship, and thus the journal and the publisher were urged to reconsider publishing the piece. If sub-standard pieces are published and peer-review processes ignored, then it is a mockery of the very foundations of academic rigor and scholarship that forms the basis of academic freedom and academia writ large. Numerous established scholars believed the piece should be retracted by the journal as it did not meet the minimum standards of scholarly rigor and had failed the peer-review process, and it should never have been published in a scholarly journal, especially one with the stature of *TWQ*. Upon request from several academics, on September 12, 2017 I helped co-organize an online petition to appeal to the journal *TWQ* and its publisher Taylor and Francis

¹² This is not to fetishize the peer-review process but to recognize the processes in place in academic publishing to ensure scholarly quality.

¹³ This is particularly important given the rise of predatory academic journals in the last few years.

(T&F) to retract the piece because it failed to uphold academic publishing quality, integrity, and ethical standards.¹⁴ This was part of the broader set of critical responses to the piece, as identified above. While I took a leading role the petition, I was by far from being alone in seeking to hold the journal and publisher accountable for their failures. The petition was widely circulated via social media as well as various academic listservs, email groups, and discussion forums, all of which were further disseminated by other scholars and students. I and other academics also engaged in debates and discussions with scholars and the public on the issue. Within six days, this petition had over 10,000 signatures from people around the world; a second simultaneous Canadian petition had 6,000 signatures. The petition was submitted to the senior management of the publisher T&F, the journal *TWQ* and its staff, and all members of the editorial board via email on Monday September 18, 2017.

In a shock to many, fifteen esteemed members of the Editorial Board resigned *en masse* on September 19, 2017 in protest of the *TWQ* editor-in-chief's failures to uphold scholarly standards and academic publishing procedures, as well as problematic actions both before and after the publication of the piece. They detailed what exactly happened and the rationale for mass resignations in their public resignation letter.¹⁵ While some people argued that an academic journal can publish whatever it wants, all academic journals have a duty of care to ensure academic rigor and publishing ethics, which *TWQ* failed to demonstrate. Furthermore, if a journal would reject publications advocating genocide, for instance, it should not publish its equivalent in promoting colonialism.¹⁶ The need for ethical decision-making by journals is thus critically important.

Another peculiarity in the case of the *TWQ* debacle is that the editor-in-chief currently owns the journal, draws a salary from it, and thus has financial reasons to promote website traffic and more downloads as this generates profit. The pecuniary aspect of the case may explain why the editor-in-chief initially ignored requests from editorial board members as well as academics from around the world to respond to the range of critiques and appeals. His actions in first publishing the piece and failing to uphold protocols and ethics, then his irresponsiveness, and finally stone-walling all led to the concerned editorial board members to resign.¹⁷ On September 21, 2017

¹⁴ The petition can be found online at: <https://www.change.org/p/editors-of-the-third-world-quarterly-retract-the-case-for-colonialism>

¹⁵ Resignation letter made public at:

https://www.facebook.com/vijay.prashad.5/posts/10214329816989010?hc_location=ufi

¹⁶ See one scholar's exercise to prove this very point vis-à-vis *TWQ* here with a spoof publication proposal on 'The Case for Genocide' to journal editors who argued that *TWQ* should be able to publish anything, but were against publishing on genocide. But colonialism resulted in numerous genocides, thereby they contradicted their own position that journals have no ethical obligations to decide what should be published or not and that promoting colonialism was ok. The hypocrisy is rather telling: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1qaliiiJGTSX8-GlertIEOnSE5mvP2OK6JkKy8lLeL9BQ/edit#gid=0>

¹⁷ Communications from former editorial board members.

the editor-in-chief of *TWQ* announced via a statement on the journal's website that he was standing by the decision to publish the piece for 'debate' but that the author had asked for it to be retracted after the editorial board resignations. On September 22, 2017, my co-organizer and I received an email from T&F senior management, copied to all editorial board members and other senior management personnel at T&F as well as *TWQ* editor-in-chief and staff, stating the following: "In the last 24 hours the author of this Viewpoint has requested that it be withdrawn. Our role will now be to work with the author and editor-in-chief on this request, ensuring the same fair and transparent standards are applied in this case as we would do in all others." We welcomed this move, as academic journals routinely retract articles for various reasons.

However, the author withdrew his request for retraction the following week when T&F and its lawyers got involved in handling the case in response to the enormous pushback from the scholarly community, journalists, citizens, students, and research institutions, as well as a rapidly growing public relations crisis. T&F put out a statement that they had carried out an investigation and did not find anything wrong with the quality control procedures, which the former members of the editorial board contested vigorously with evidence. However, on October 6, 2017, the piece was suddenly retracted from the website by T&F citing threats to the journal's editor-in-chief. They replaced the piece on the journal's website with a statement to this effect. This maneuver prompted the former Editorial Board members to issue another public statement on October 9, 2017 further clarifying the issues and contradicting prior statements made by the journal and the publisher, countering some of the claims made by both.¹⁸

The bizarre and dubious circumstances of the retraction were immediately debated by scholars and editors of other journals. T&F had set a dangerous precedent that a retraction can result from threats (alleged or real, which should have been investigated and addressed instead).¹⁹ T&F's claims seemed to also hint that anti-colonial scholars are irrational or violent. It also did not address the peaceful democratic protests via petitions, numerous letters, emails, or write-ups pointing out the failures in quality control by the journal. Given that the retraction decision was made by lawyers of T&F and not the editor-in-chief of *TWQ* is also telling. All this raises broader issues about the political economy of publishing in academia, but the concern in this instance is also that neither scholarly rigor or ethical standards were of concern to the journal or the publisher. A piece advocating for the violation of

¹⁸ The public statement is available at:

https://www.academia.edu/34809715/STATEMENT_FROM_FORMER_EDITORIAL_BOARD_MEMBERS_OF_THIRD_WORLD_QUARTERLY_Oct_9_2017.pdf

¹⁹ Apparently, T&F lawyers hinted that threats to the editor-in-chief could be a reason for retraction of the piece, and then there was news of such a threat, followed by the subsequent retraction. It has been speculated that this was probably done to save face and salvage the journal's reputation. However, all threats should be taken seriously and addressed, and I condemn all threats. I too received many as a result of my involvement in this case.

fundamental human rights should never have been published at all as academic journals should have ethical standards. Several higher education articles and blogs were thus written about this particular case and the problematic nature of the way it was handled in September, October and November 2017 (e.g. *Inside Higher Ed*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Times Higher Ed*). Due to the failures of *TWQ*, the International Studies Association suspended relationship with the journal in November 2017. Several scholars have also withdrawn their publications from the journal in protest.

During this entire process, the author of the piece claimed victimhood, focusing on unfounded complaints of free speech violations rather than address the actual case of failures in publishing procedure, academic rigor or proper scholarly practice, let alone any interest in ethical standards. As a result, the far-right outrage machine found a case to focus on, with the assistance of some like-minded academics. Some conservative academics and various far-right outlets wilfully misrepresented the goal of the petition, calling it censorship, whereas the text of the petition stated clearly that this was not about curtailing free speech but about upholding academic publishing standards and ethics. Authors are entirely free to publish their opinions, but non-scholarly opinions do not have place in an academic journal. As noted by several scholars, academic journals are not blogs. Academic journals have a duty of care to the academic community to ensure scholarly rigor and follow ethical protocols/standards. It was the journal's failure that was being pointed out and that is why the petition was submitted to the journal and its publisher. There was no attacking or targeting of the author's right to free speech whatsoever, although that is how he and the outrage machine framed it. The centrality of academic integrity was sidestepped by recasting it as a free-speech fight and rallying the alt-right. Masquerading of discriminatory and discredited opinions as academic knowledge or giving it some veneer of scholarliness should have been caught by a reputable journal, but instead, the journal participated in the erosion of academic publishing integrity and standards by publishing the piece for attention, downloads, website traffic, financial profit, and thus manufactured a controversy.²⁰

A point completely missed by the attackers is that free speech does not equate to an absolute right to publish any and all opinions in peer-reviewed academic journals. This woeful ignorance of academic publishing processes and scholarly rigor was abetted by pro-colonial and conservative academics who fanned the flames of the outrage machine. Academic critique is not an assault on free speech. In the

²⁰ It should be noted that the now-retracted 'A Case for Colonialism' is still drawing views as the piece is still advertised by T&F across its various journals' websites as a suggested reading but brings readers to the page which contains the retraction statement from T&F where the piece once was. What is also notable is that the piece obtained far greater clicks and downloads than any other *TWQ* article, which is why democratic dissent was not enough to remove the piece and T&F still promotes it. The author and several far-right websites have archived the piece for access by the public and also actively circulates it in their networks.

end, their goal appeared to be to curtail scholars' rights to academic freedom to critique the *TWQ* piece and the journal on the grounds of the failures on academic rigor, scholarly findings, and due process, as well as our right to free speech. Targeted harassment is the current standard operating procedure of the far-right outrage machine, which is exactly what ensued.

Since the start of the online petition in September 2017, I was the subject of intense targeted harassment, where I received hate mail, threats, abuse, and false information published on numerous right-wing online platforms and blogs in the US. The far-right community also used my social media material out of context, distorted information, constructed false narratives, wrote defamatory articles, and stoked a hate campaign against me.²¹ These ad hominem attacks and activities also collectively maligned me, my scholarly work, and my reputation. This was the far-right outrage machine in the US at work with threats and malicious intent.²² The coordinated and organized attacks are how the far-right operationalizes acts of violence, silencing, and oppression. While academic freedom means the right to scholarly inquiry, I was attacked by those who apparently wish to stifle my freedom to pursue legitimate academic inquiry and scholarly critique as well as enact peaceful democratic protest via a petition to request that a journal uphold academic publishing ethics and standards. The perpetrators and attackers were joined by those who are already waging battles on college campuses to promote far-right ideologies. My experience is not an isolated case as scholars at other institutions and disciplines have been subjected to similar treatment for a variety of different reasons.²³ Unfortunately, the incidences of organized and systemic harassment of academic scholars, particularly faculty of color, has substantially increased in recent years.

While I have been vilified, attacked, and threatened, I have also experienced a great deal of support globally. Academics, students, practitioners, and the public who learnt of my battle to protect academic integrity and ethics have sent me hundreds of messages of gratitude, solidarity, and support. Many have noted that my actions were a public service to all of academia in that it demonstrated that academics can and should ask for accountability and ethics in academia. Academic colleagues also created a solidarity statement for me, which was signed by over 1,300 scholars from around the world. This statement has been hosted by the AAUP's *Academe Blog* since early November 2017.²⁴ While I am incredibly appreciative of all the

²¹ Some of the promoters and mobilizers of harassment/hate/attacks are identified in the piece by Wilson (2018); they include university colleagues and students of the *TWQ* author as well as other conservative allies elsewhere in the US, in addition to other members of the far-right outrage machine and media sources worldwide.

²² Ongoing harassment has displayed a mix of sexism, racism, xenophobia, and Islamophobia.

²³ These include Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (Princeton), Johnny Williams (Trinity), Dorothy Kim (Vassar), Saida Grundy (Boston), George Ciccariello-Maher (Drexel), Priyamvada Gopal (Cambridge), among numerous others (mostly in the US).

²⁴ The statement is available at: <https://academeblog.org/2017/11/10/statement-in-support-of-dr-farhana-sultana/>

support (especially as a minority faculty in the current climate in the US), I want to reiterate that this is not about me but about the fact that all academics can and should seek accountability, integrity, and ethics in academia from fellow academics, universities, and publishers. The hijacking of academic publishing and knowledge dissemination are grave threats to academia overall. Responsibility, accountability, and integrity are important in academic publishing. Academic journal quality control measures were established to act as safeguards against not only unscholarly work but also unethical arguments that promote subjugation of peoples, violation of human rights, dispossessions, and structural violence. The propagation or legitimization of discriminatory and erroneous arguments through the written word can and does cause harm. Decolonizing academia thus has to account for what is published and disseminated, and how academics are either complicit or engaged in these processes.

Colonial Apologists, Imperial Nostalgia and Threats to Academic Rigor

Unfortunately, the fallout from the *TWQ* debacle did not remain in the US, as the situation quickly gained traction in British academia. Racism and colonial nostalgia have been making a comeback there for some time, aided by the mis-education of the public in Britain about the brutalities of British colonialism and imperialism. The most conspicuous case has been an Oxford theologian's project titled 'Ethics and Empire' and his support of the *TWQ* piece's author as he too believes that colonialism was mostly beneficial to the colonized. The Oxford theologian published an op-ed in *The Times of London* on November 30, 2017 where he paid homage to the *TWQ* author, defending his right to publish pro-colonial views, and attacked the tens of thousands of scholars who have critiqued and deconstructed the problematic claims as well as the failures of an academic journal.²⁵ In response, I organized a letter to the editor of the newspaper that was published in *The Times of London* on December 8, 2017 signed by 183 scholars.²⁶ This was to counter not only his problematic claims but also to respond to a letter from a group of supporters of both his project as well as *TWQ*'s actions; this band of supporters was mostly led by majority white male academics in the UK who were able to garner 82 signatures for their letter after over a month of petitioning scholars to support their position that a journal can publish whatever it wants without concerns for ethics or integrity. Through all this, the Oxford theologian came under scrutiny by British and other post-colonial scholars who rigorously critiqued the project and Oxford's role in it;

²⁵ The op-ed is available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/don-t-feel-guilty-about-our-colonial-history-ghvstdhmj>. It should be noted that *The Times of London* is increasingly considered to be a far-right leaning paper in the UK.

²⁶ The text of the letter with full list of signatories is available at: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdVU5fa3O8yn9-10TsM1aH2n0sFsAQrcSyimxsYyN0zzRQksQ/viewform>. However, I remained invisible while doing the labor and I did not sign my own name for fear of greater retribution at the time.

this included a scathing letter from Oxford historians.²⁷ In this regard, I also helped promote and obtain more signatures for an additional letter organized by leading British post-colonial scholars critiquing the project, which was published in the *Medium* on December 21, 2017.²⁸

While accountability in the Oxford case has been taken up in a collective way by many anti-colonial and progressive academics in Britain, there are no such sustained coordinated efforts to set the record straight on the *TWQ* case beyond the initial rebuttals and critiques.²⁹ The two main academics in the *TWQ* case and the Oxford case here are now in alliance in promoting their disingenuous work, along with other colonial apologists, in concerted efforts to present their ideologies as academic scholarship at various workshops, the media, and otherwise.³⁰ But as historians Wagner and McDougall (2018) rightly point out, “efforts to reclaim imperial history from so-called ‘politically correct’ professors have little to do with genuine academic debate.” Indeed, such efforts are intentional distortions of historical and contemporary truths to both promote blatant falsification that colonialism was better for the colonized than the colonizer as well as lend support to ongoing colonialisms and imperial geopolitics that maintain white capitalist hegemony.

Together, ‘A Case for Colonialism’ and ‘Ethics and Empire’ have had the effect of resurrecting white supremacy in academic scholarship and academia more broadly. They are both attempting to produce a rewriting of history that expounds the benefits of colonialism while ignoring its massively destructive consequences and human rights violations, both historical and contemporary. While all this may be a theoretical exercise in the minds of wealthy white men, it is little more than an ideological rationalization of imperial conquest, colonial domination, and racialized subjugation. Such discourses embolden white nationalists and racist ideologues as it helps to justify their beliefs of white superiority over non-white bodies, cultures, and lives. These academics refuse to engage with the vast body of scholarly work on colonialism, attempt to whitewash (literally and figuratively) what imperialism and colonialism were, and thereby attempt to negate historical evidence. In the process, they also provide legitimacy to the baseless narratives of the far-right and white

²⁷ Oxford historians’ letter is available at: <https://theconversation.com/ethics-and-empire-an-open-letter-from-oxford-scholars-89333>

²⁸ The collective letter is available at: <https://medium.com/oxfordempireletter/a-collective-statement-on-ethics-and-empire-19c2477871a0>

²⁹ However, for a recent fallout on a scholar who has been at the forefront of the efforts in Britain see: <https://medium.com/@zen.catgirl/my-heartfelt-thanks-to-the-hundreds-of-people-who-have-sent-their-solidarity-and-support-via-email-5f9739ec5dba>

³⁰ It could be that broader challenges from changing demographics and progressive politics in higher education make these people feel threatened (e.g. renaming of buildings, removal of racist/colonialist monuments, decolonization of curricula, etc.). But it is also reflective of current social realities where Empire is being enacted and enlivened through both geopolitics and the desires of white supremacists and allies to go back in time to the heyday of European imperialism.

supremacists who believe in the subjugation of Othered peoples and minorities with facile and discredited claims of European racial superiority. Such historical racist ideologies are resurgent in the contemporary moment and such scholars only provide more fuel to these ideologies. Colonial apologists, imperial nostalgists, and racists within academia are now simultaneously abetted by *and* abet such groups by providing a scholarly veneer to the abhorrent ideologies. Such unholy alliances pose grave dangers to people both inside and outside of academia. It also undermines academia writ large.

What all this shows is that academic freedom can and is being abused and misused by some academics themselves, through multiple mechanisms, such as commentaries in public (social media, news articles, and blogs), writing and publishing unscholarly and disreputable articles, and promoting unethical projects. Such actions by these academics themselves erode academic rigor from within and play into the hands of those who wish to promote white supremacy and anti-intellectualism. Such actions also make it harder to fight the hate speech brigade and outrage machine when these kinds of academics provide validity to their racist ideologies from within the academy. When a small number of academics and their allies legitimize the far-right and supremacist ideologies, as well as collaborate with them, all of academia becomes at risk. When academic journals also give into corporatized profit-seeking and metricized mania and do not prohibit the circulation of unscholarly and racist diatribes, then the threats to academia are further compounded.

The free speech clamor that had ensued after both the above-mentioned cases was used to substantiate the claim that any academic author should be able to do whatever he likes – even if his opinion is not academically rigorous and thus cannot count as academic work in an academic journal, or that his research project is spurious and ethically questionable that shouldn't be supported by a university. While everyone may be entitled to their own opinions and free speech rights, discredited and disproved colonialist ideologies have no place in peer-reviewed journals of repute nor should they receive any support from universities, especially when academic integrity is undermined. As stated earlier, free speech does not equate to free rights to publish in academic journals, which are supposed to have safeguards and due processes in place. By retracting the piece under problematic pretenses, *TWQ* and its publisher T&F have set up a dangerous precedent that retraction is possible when there are threats to the editors and not from valid critique. The far-right has used this maneuver to further contend that the author's free speech was being violated, when free speech rights were never the issue. By first publishing a sub-par piece and then retracting it under strange pretexts, *TWQ* and T&F have unfortunately demonstrated that neither academic rigor nor publishing ethics matter to the journal or the publisher.

These incidences have thus enabled some conservative academics to appeal to both white nationalists and colonial apologists whereby personal opinions are being asked to count more than rigorous and thorough scholarship or historical facts

as the basis of academic publications. The *TWQ* author has claimed in various media interviews that ‘totalitarian ideologues’ are attacking him, which is far from the truth, as scholars of different disciplinary training and backgrounds have rebutted and critiqued his argumentation on *scholarly* grounds, not ideological ones. Similar issues have arisen with the Oxford theologian, who has claimed that his free speech rights are being violated by scholars who question his project, methods, and goals. He too also complained that his academic freedom is being threatened when it is not. This is because academic freedom is entirely about debate and pursuit of the truth, *not* ideological positioning based on personal biases of colonial apologia, imperial nostalgia, supremacist desires, or distortions and denial of historical facts and empirical evidence. Misrepresentations of history and blatantly wrong narratives are instead undermining academic freedom and scholarly rigor as well as being used to justify the perpetuation of inequities and injustices. Such maneuvers undermine academia, they don’t contribute to it.

Not surprisingly, the script in both instances were similar in how they played out. It went somewhat like this: an Academic makes unethical and unscholarly claims, then critical scholars critique it on academic grounds, but the Academic cries suppression of their free speech, this dog-whistles the far-right to attack critical scholars with their outrage machine of ad hominem threats, harassment, falsifications, while the Academic claims victimhood and persecution, and continues to use the far-right to garner support, and the far-right finds an ally in academia to help them destroy academia and promote ideological positions. The marriage of persecutory delusions, white hegemony, and anti-intellectualism only intensify more unbridled hate and prejudice. What has unfolded here are real and present dangers to academia writ large, happening in multiple ways in multiple places and across disciplines. Challenging these maneuvers and discourses are essential for scholars and institutions going forward.

The abovementioned cases highlight the different ways that academia is already being undermined by some academics. Academics should not try to pass off oppressive or violent ideologies or historical negationism under misguided notions of free speech or academic freedom. Neither should they promote prejudice under claims of ‘viewpoint diversity’ without accounting for relations of power and oppression that are structural, historical, and geographical, or the material consequences of their proclamations on Othered peoples. Not all viewpoints are valid. Indeed, ‘viewpoint diversity’ is often a codeword for intolerance and a tactic to maintain white masculine conservative hegemony in academia (Harriott 2018; Patrice 2017). What is also worrying is how mainstream media has also propagated the claims of these academics and their supporters, thereby assisting the outrage machine, without sufficient fact-checking or thorough research of the background of the cases, the issues at stake, or the details of the matter.³¹ Contrary to claims, there

³¹ In the US, both *Chronicle of Higher Education* and *NPR (National Public Radio)* published problematic reports on the *TWQ* case in March and April 2018 respectively, giving the author a

is no organized Left attacking these academics the way there is a well-organized and well-funded Right that attacks progressive scholars routinely and viciously in a coordinated manner, especially in the US.

All these events also raise important questions of the ways the outrage machine attacks critical scholars who become visible. There is tension in that academics and activists can choose to remain invisible (which may keep one unnoticed but lets the far-right win) or become visible (which enables one to act on ethics and principles but opens one up for attacks). This is why more academic scholars need to participate in speaking out to protect academic integrity and scholarship, otherwise the few who speak up in public and become visible will keep being targeted and attacked, and the broader threats to academia and to academic scholars will only worsen. Collectivizing is necessary to protect academia. More academics need to do the labor of safeguarding academic integrity, academic freedom, and scholarly rigor, as discussed at the beginning of this paper. We need to build instruments and systems to deal with the multiple threats to academic freedom and academics under attack. We need collective action to support scholars who come under attack and abuse for doing scholarly work or take leadership roles to promote accountability and true academic freedom. We need an organized response mechanism to save academia from being undermined by various actors and processes occurring right now and likely to worsen over time. Thus, those with various forms of privilege should do more with those who are frequently silenced or attacked. More people need to speak truth to power and create greater solidarities across places and disciplines. What is perhaps ironic is that a woman of color from the post-colonial world had to undertake the labor and leadership in the instances discussed here, and as a result, faced the backlash of white supremacists, the far-right outrage machine, and colonial nostalgists insistent on mispresenting the situation with the dog whistle of free speech censorship. During the critical months of these instances unfolding and the attacks, I felt silenced but compelled to do the important work and still do.³²

megaphone to tell his version of things without gathering sufficient information on the situation or verifying details. The *CHE* also misquoted one of the former editorial board members in the report and refused to correct it. In the process, these media sources participated in poor reporting of the case, propagation of misinformation to a wider audience, and in the process, helped the far-right outrage machine's narratives, all under a misguided notion of 'balance' in reporting. In the UK, the *Daily Mail* newspaper published attacks to anti-colonial scholars in order to support the Oxford theologian.

³² I was interviewed by *Inside Higher Ed* several times in September/October 2017 for their coverage pertaining to the *TWQ* controversy as it was unfolding and there was considerable misinformation going around. I did these via email only to clarify points and the broader issues at stake. However, in order to reduce drawing attention to myself and being subjected to more harassment and threats, I declined interviews by other mainstream media outlets, such as CNN (USA), CBC (Canada), radio stations in the USA and New Zealand, as well as the problematic follow-up piece by the *Chronicles of Higher Education*. Nonetheless, I did provide information pertaining to the *TWQ* case to help the reporting in some of these cases. While I declined media requests and interviews in the past, I have decided to set the record straight now.

I thus urge more scholars to actively work towards overcoming the moral paralysis that afflicts academia, especially in the US (Dabashi 2017).

Conclusion

Colonial apologists, imperial nostalgists, dogmatists, and racists are more emboldened now given geopolitical realities and a global turn to the right. The cases discussed here both expounded the benefits of colonialism, promoted subjugation of peoples, advocated for greater dispossessions and violations, negated historical evidence, and provided 'scholarly' veneer to racist and Orientalist ideologies. Such actions are not just academically dishonest and historically inaccurate but also act as encouragement to the far-right's ideologies and actions, thereby working in conjunction to not only destroy academia and academic freedom but also perpetuate white supremacist ideologies that cause harm. The deliberate production of misleading information and perpetuation of misunderstandings by some academics need to be held accountable by a greater number of scholars who are committed to safeguarding academic rigor and integrity as well as historical facts and human rights. Otherwise we will see a tremendous erosion of knowledge production and societal wellbeing overall everywhere. This is because ensuring integrity in academia and academic scholarship is critically important not only for scholarly pursuits but also for the implications they hold in the everyday lives and realities of peoples around the world. Policies are informed by academic scholarship, and poor or outright wrong scholarship can and does hold grave consequences for billions of people globally. What is written, spoken, or taught end up becoming realities. We need to hold academic publishing and academics accountable because what is published and disseminated becomes what is taught and normalized. Academia already has colonial roots and legacies that need to be decolonized, not bolstered. Rhetoric that promotes racialized subjugation, historical erasure, or human rights violations have no place in academia. Our endeavors should thus not just be professional and scholarly, but also ethical and rigorous.

It is unfortunate that free speech has become the rallying cry for groups, both inside and outside of academia, who want to counter proper academic critique with their uninformed, biased or ideological opinions devoid of facts or scholarliness. Both the cases described here jeopardize what we academics all depend on: academic freedom embodying solid intellectual work, not personal prejudiced ideologies. No one is taking away the right to free speech of anyone despite the accusations levelled by the far-right, some academics, and their supporters, as everyone has the right to express their opinions. However, these opinions *cannot* be peddled as academic scholarship that deserve academic platforms. As detailed earlier, academic freedom is not the same as free speech. Rather, free speech discourses are being used to silence and threaten legitimate academic critiques of these problematic cases. Writing genuine rebuttals and critiques as well as requesting academic journal accountability are being wrongly framed as assaults on free speech and academic freedom. But academic freedom means the right to use scholarly rigor to counter

false and wrong narratives and lay bare the ideologies that undergird them, which is *exactly* what anti-colonial scholars have done in both cases.

In the instances when an academic publication or a research project either openly or indirectly promotes violent subjugation of Other peoples, utilizes flawed and dubious argumentation, or does not engage with existing scholarly work with any substance, all academics have the duty to critique and safeguard academic integrity. As detailed earlier, all problematic racist, Orientalist, and imperialist narratives, articles, and projects in academia only help bolster already well-funded and well-organized far-right outrage machines and legitimize their bigotry, racist hate, and violence. If the goal of academic pursuits is the production of scholarly knowledge, then these quasi-academic pursuits undermine academia as a whole, opening it up to corruption and the erosion of academic freedom from within. The linked but separate cases described here demonstrate a worrying trend in academia where it is under attack not only from the outside but is also being corroded from within by some academics, institutions, and academic publishing outlets. During a time when there are increasing calls to decolonize academia and curricula, it is all the more imperative to prevent the undermining of academia with racialized, discriminatory, and imperialistic ideologies.

At this current conjuncture, free speech of progressive and minority scholars as well as academic freedom overall are under attack. These will worsen unless more concerted efforts are undertaken by academics to remain vigilant and to resist and dissent. Thus, free speech that enables academic freedom is important to defend, rather than cede that ground to the far-right. For those who claim to operate under free speech within academia or in academic spaces, their political ideologies need to be exposed for any obfuscating maneuvers at play, whereby critique is enabled based on scholarly rigor and analytical engagement, not bigoted or violent ideologies. Systemic and institutional racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination are often maintained through acts of silencing and ad hominin attacks that suppress dissent or critiques, and basically prop up supremacist and discriminatory dogmas. We must work within and outside the academy to prevent this by asking for greater accountability from not just fellow academics but also academic publishers, funders, universities, and the media. Too much is at stake not to. I call upon academic colleagues to collectively work together to defend academia and promote scholarly rigor, integrity, standards, and ethics. Too many continue to remain silent or disengaged. I conclude with this prescient statement from famous black feminist scholar Audre Lorde (1984):

Your silence will not protect you. What are the words you do not yet have? What do you need to say? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence?

Acknowledgements

I thank the many scholars and friends for thoughtful discussions and support over several months since these incidences unfolded. I also thank thousands of people around the world for solidarity in fighting the rise of colonial nostalgia and racism in academia. For helpful feedback on this written piece, I am grateful to *ACME* journal editors (Simon Springer, Levi Gahman, and Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch) as well as several others who have commented on various iterations of this piece (Reuben Rose-Redwood, Jonathan Chowdhury, Gwen McCrea, Pranav Jani, Dorothy Kim, Julie Cupples, and Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt). The usual disclaimers apply.

References

- AAUP. 1940. *Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure*. American Association of University Professors. <https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>
- AAUP. 2017a. *A Concerted Attack on Academic Freedom*. American Association of University Professors, January 17, 2017. https://www.aaup.org/news/concerted-attack-academic-freedom#.Wq_bZZPwYSJ
- AAUP. 2017b. *Targeted Online Harassment of Faculty*. American Association of University Professors, January 31, 2017. https://www.aaup.org/news/targeted-online-harassment-faculty#.Wq_cBpPwYSJ
- Ahmed, Sarah. 2017. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Asimov, Isaac. 1980. "A Cult of Ignorance" *Newsweek*, January 21, 1980, p. 19.
- Blaut, James. 1993. *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Butler, Judith. 2017. "Limits on Free Speech?" *Academe Blog*, December 7, 2017. <https://academeblog.org/2017/12/07/free-expression-or-harassment/>
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2007. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Césaire, Aimé. 1972. *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press.
- Clover, Joshua. 2017. "Free Speech Year" *Blarb – Blog of the Los Angeles Review of Books*. September 20, 2017. <https://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/essays/free-speech-year/>
- Cooper, Brittany. 2017. "How Free Speech Works for White Academics" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 16, 2017.

- Dabashi, Hamid. 2017. "Moral paralysis in American academia" *Al Jazeera*, 28 September 2017. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/moral-paralysis-american-academia-170928091638481.html>
- Daniels, Jessie. 2009. *Cyber Racism: White Supremacy Online and the New Attack on Civil Rights*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Davis, Mike. 2002. *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Origin of the Third World*. London: Verso.
- Dols, Monique. 2017. "Free speech and fighting the right on campus" *International Socialist Review*, Issue #106: Features. <https://isreview.org/issue/106/free-speech-and-fighting-right-campus>
- Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1952/2008. *Black Skin, White Masks*, Richard Philcox (trans.), New York, NY: Grove Press.
- Fanon, Frantz. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.
- Ferguson, James. 1994. *Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Figueroa, Meleiza and David Palumbo-Liu. 2017. "Why Berkeley's Battle Against White Supremacy is Not About Free Speech" *The Nation*, September 8, 2017. <https://www.thenation.com/article/why-berkeleys-battle-against-white-supremacy-is-not-about-free-speech/>
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated knowledges" *Feminist Studies* 14, 3, 575–99.
- Harriott, Michael. 2018. "'Diversity of Thought' Is Just a Euphemism for 'White Supremacy'" *The Root*. April 2, 2018. <https://www.theroot.com/diversity-of-thought-is-just-a-euphemism-for-white-supr-1825191839>
- Hofmann-Kuroda, Lisa and Beezer de Martelly. 2017. "The Home of Free Speech™ : A Critical Perspective on UC Berkeley's Coalition with the Far-Right" *Truthout*, May 17, 2017. <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/40608-the-home-of-free-speech-a-critical-perspective-on-uc-berkeley-s-coalition-with-the-far-right>
- Hochschild, Adam. 1998. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Labouchère, Henry. 1899. "The Brown Man's Burden," *Truth* (London); reprinted in *Literary Digest* 18, February 25, 1899.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. California: Crossing Press.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Manne, Kate and Jason Stanley. 2015. "When Free Speech Becomes a Political Weapon" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 13, 2015. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/When-Free-Speech-Becomes-a/234207>
- Palumbo-Liu, David. 2015. "Steven Salaita, Professor Fired for 'Uncivil' Tweets, Vindicated in Federal Court" *The Nation*, August 11, 2015. <https://www.thenation.com/article/steven-salaita-professor-fired-for-uncivil-tweets-vindicated-in-federal-court/>
- Patrice, Joe. 2017. "Conservative Law Profs Want 'Viewpoint Diversity,' Which Is Kinda Racist" *Above the Law*, May 2, 2017. <https://abovethelaw.com/2017/03/conservative-profs-want-viewpoint-diversity-which-is-kinda-racist/?rf=1>
- Picazo, Alheli. 2017. "How the alt-right weaponized free speech" *Macleans*, May 1, 2017. <http://www.macleans.ca/opinion/how-the-alt-right-weaponized-free-speech/>
- Quintana, Chris and Brock Read. 2017. "Signal Boost: How Conservative Media Outlets Turn Faculty Viewpoints Into National News." *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 22, 2017. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Signal-Boost-How-Conservative/240423?cid=rclink>
- Quintana, Chris. 2017. "If There's an Organized Outrage Machine, We Need an Organized Response" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, July 18, 2017. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/If-There-s-an-Organized/240683>
- Rodney, Walter. 1972. *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press.
- Roelofs, Portia and Max Gallien. 2017. "Clickbait and impact: how academia has been hacked" *LSE Impact Blog*, London School of Economics and Political Science, September 19, 2017. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2017/09/19/clickbait-and-impact-how-academia-has-been-hacked/>
- Said, Edward, 1979. *Orientalism*, New York, NY: Vintage
- Scott, Joan W. 2018. "How the Right Weaponized Free Speech" *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, January 7, 2018.
- Siegel, Dan. 2017. "Why Fascist Speech is Not Free Speech" *Counterpunch*, September 6, 2017 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/09/06/whyfascistspeechisnotfreespeech/>
- Smith, Linda. 2013. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Tharoor, Shashi. 2017. *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India*. London: Hurst.

United Nations. 1960. *Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples*. Adopted by General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960. <http://www.un.org/en/decolonization/declaration.shtml>

Wilson, Jason. 2018. "How to troll the left: understanding the rightwing outrage machine" *The Guardian*, March 18, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/mar/18/how-the-right-trolls-the-left-college-campus-outrage>

Wagner, Kim, and James McDougall. 2018. "Don't mistake nostalgia about the British Empire for scholarship" *Times Higher Education*, April 20, 2018. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/dont-mistake-nostalgia-about-british-empire-scholarship>

Other Relevant Publications (organized by Rebuttals/Critiques, Higher Education Website Articles, and Mainstream Media Coverage)

1. Rebuttals and Critiques:

Vijay Prashad, professor at Trinity College and one of the Editorial Board members who resigned, wrote about the broader context in *Quartz* entitled "Academic arguments backing white supremacy and colonialism are making an ominous comeback": <https://qz.com/1083767/academic-arguments-backing-white-supremacy-and-colonialism-are-making-an-ominous-comeback/>

Ben Anderson, graduate student at Harvard University, wrote in *Current Affairs* entitled "A quick reminder of why colonialism was bad": <https://www.currentaffairs.org/2017/09/a-quick-reminder-of-why-colonialism-was-bad>

Brandon Kendhammer, professor at Ohio University, wrote in the *Washington Post* entitled "A controversial article praises colonialism. But colonialism's real legacy was ugly": https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/09/19/colonialism-left-behind-a-long-legacy-most-of-it-bad/?utm_term=.e687df641f93

Hamid Dabashi, professor at Columbia University, wrote for *Aljazeera* entitled "Moral paralysis in American academia: On 'civilised' scholars and their liberal defense of immoral hate mongering": <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/moral-paralysis-american-academia-170928091638481.html>

Yannick Dupraz and Valeria Rueda, of the *LSE*, wrote thorough critique of the piece in an article entitled "There is No 'Case for Colonialism': insights from the colonial economic history": <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2017/10/17/there-is-no-case-for-colonialism-insights-from-the-colonial-economic-history/>

Sahar Khan, of the Cato Institute's Defense and Foreign Policy Department, published a piece for the *Cato Institute* entitled "The case against the 'Case for

Colonialism””: <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/case-against-case-colonialism>

Joseph McQuaide, Fellow at University of Toronto, wrote in *The Conversation* entitled “Colonialism was a disaster and the facts prove it”: <https://theconversation.com/colonialism-was-a-disaster-and-the-facts-prove-it-84496>

Kenan Malik, journalist and author, wrote in the *New York Review of Books*, an essay titled “The Great British Empire Debate”: <http://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/01/26/the-great-british-empire-debate/>

Shashi Tharoor, international scholar and Indian Member of Parliament, wrote a rebuttal to Biggar and Gilley in the *South China Morning Post*: <http://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/2127641/singapore-and-hong-kong-may-be-different-theres-no-debate-what>

Sandew Hira, director of the International Institute for Scientific Research, wrote for the *Decolonial Network* entitled “A decolonial critique of the racist case for colonialism”: <https://www.din.today/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/The-Racist-case-for-colonialism.pdf>

Savo Heleta, of the Nelson Mandela University, wrote at the news site *Africa is a Country* “The Third World Quarterly debacle”: <http://africasacountry.com/2017/09/the-third-world-quarterly-debacle/>

Many scholars of the Postcolonial Perspectives on and within Development (Studies) Working Group wrote an open letter to *TWQ*, available at *EADI*: <https://www.eadi.org/wg/postcolonial/>

Many European scholars wrote an open letter to *Third World Quarterly* that appears in *Open Democracy*: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/simon-dawes-co-signatories/open-letter-to-third-world-quarterly-on-publication-of-case-for-colonialism/>

Stanely Mushava wrote a satirical piece on the white supremacy of colonialism in the *Herald of South Africa*: <http://www.herald.co.zw/reply-to-the-case-for-colonialism/>

Anonymous write-up at *Leftword Blog* was entitled “Third World Quarterly and a False Case for Colonialism”: <http://mayday.leftword.com/blog/third-world-quarterly-and-a-false-case-for-colonialism/>

Simon Reichley of *Melville House* wrote on their website entitled “Experts agree, colonialism was a lark”: <https://www.mhpbooks.com/experts-agree-colonialism-was-a-lark/>

An anonymous graduate student wrote in his blog *Sooty Academic*: <http://sootyempiric.blogspot.co.za/2017/09/on-case-for-colonialism.html>

2. Some Higher Education News Sites:

Inside Higher Education. September 20, 2017. “Division, Resignations at 'Third World Quarterly’” <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/09/20/much-third-world-quarterlys-editorial-board-resigns-saying-controversial-article>

Inside Higher Education. September 22, 2017. “Author Asks Journal to Pull Pro-Colonial Essay” <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2017/09/22/author-asks-journal-pull-pro-colonial-essay>

Inside Higher Education. September 26, 2017. “‘Colonialism’ Article Flap Highlights Push for Transparency in Publishing” <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/09/26/author-third-world-quarterly-article-colonialism-wants-it-stricken-record-it-might>

Inside Higher Education. October 9, 2017. “A Dangerous Withdrawal” <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/10/09/pro-colonialism-article-has-been-withdrawn-over-threats-journal-editor>

The Chronicle of Higher Education. September 20, 2017. “15 Members of ‘Third World Quarterly’ Editorial Board Resign” <http://www.chronicle.com/blogs/ticker/editorial-board-of-third-world-quarterly-resigns/120188>

The Chronicle of Higher Education. September 25, 2017. “A Revolt at a Journal Puts Peer Review Under the Microscope” <http://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Revolt-at-a-Journal-Puts/241289>

Times Higher Education. September 22, 2017. “Pro-colonialism paper outcry prompts author to ‘request withdrawal’” <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/pro-colonialism-paper-outcry-prompts-author-request-withdrawal>

Grants for College covered the history of the case in an article: <http://www.grantsforcollege.info/pro-colonialism-article-has-been-withdrawn-over-threats-to-journal-editor/>

3. Some Mainstream Media Coverage:

Huffington Post: “Colonialism Was 'Beneficial And Legitimate', Argues Under-Fire Researcher” http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/2017/09/20/time-to-recolonise-the-third-world-but-only-with-their-consent-argues-researcher_a_23216041/

Toronto Star: “How an article defending colonialism was ever published is a mystery roiling academia” <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2017/09/21/how-an-article-defending-colonialism-was-ever-published-is-a-mystery-roiling-academia-paradkar.html>

Times of India: “Journal's editorial board resigns over colonialism essay”
<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/uk/journals-editorial-board-resigns-over-colonialism-essay/articleshow/60754617.cms>

Washington Post: “Just before Columbus Day, journal pulls controversial article defending colonialism”
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/10/09/just-before-columbus-day-journal-pulls-controversial-article-defending-colonialism/?utm_term=.c02df909da3a

News Africa: “African anger should be heard by apologists of empire”
<https://www.independent.ie/world-news/africa/african-anger-should-be-heard-by-apologists-of-empire-36763006.html>

Remezcla: “Portland State Professor Comes Under Fire After Advocating For Colonialism”
<http://remezcla.com/culture/bruce-gilley-colonization/>