

“In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have to believe it. It was inevitable that they should make the claim sooner or later: the logic of their position demanded it. Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by their philosophy.”

-G. Orwell, “1984”

Dear editor,

I’m writing to express my profound concern and chagrin about the fact that the piece called “Approaches to decolonising forensic curricula” by A.S. Chaussée et al. was accepted for publication in *Science & Justice* but also about the contents and the obviously ideological and activist rather than scientific intent and purpose of that article that is inappropriately categorized as “professional practice report” although it does not at all describe “collaborative work between professions that improve investigative or criminal justice outcomes; development and implementation of forensic and crime scene quality standards” nor “the impact of procedural, policy or cultural change on employees within operational forensic or policing environments” (as demanded by the journal).

It is, instead and quite blatantly even, advertising to insert postmodernist Theory (with capital T) and activism to deconstruct ‘the West’ into STEM subjects in general and forensic science teaching in particular for which I’m hereinafter taking up the mantle for forensic genetics and molecular biology only.

Firstly, it has to be stressed and a spotlight has to be put upon the authors’ or their ideology’s attempt to force postmodernist *epistemological relativism* derived from standpoint theory [1] upon their targets. Standpoint theory emerged from Marxist ideas and their postmodernist adaptations and proposes that authority is rooted in individuals’ personal knowledge and perspectives. Its proponents doubt that there is *an objective truth* which most scientists believe does indeed exist and science in little relentless steps, making errors and going astray once in a while but eventually correcting itself back on track, strives to ratchet itself ever closer towards. The authors, however, by stigmatizing scientifically proven or testable truths as “dominant, Western knowledge” or even “White systems of knowledge” seem to argue, that knowledge is provincial if not arbitrary and intrinsically political and that there is a thing like ‘my truth’ which is as good as ‘your truth’ (“co-existing different knowledge systems”), none of which gets to stand the trial of facts and evidence (ironically, this form of postmodern cultural masochism is a characteristically Western ideology, invented by Western thinkers, heavily drenched in Western philosophy). I cannot imagine something more devious, anti-scientific, anti-rational, as well as dangerous and corrosive for the public trust especially in forensic science.

This position is mirrored by Baron and Ejnes who wrote in a recent issue of the NEJM:

“In the era of social media and heavily politicized science, “truth” is increasingly crowdsourced: if enough people like, share, or choose to believe something, others will accept it as true. This way of determining “truth” doesn’t involve scientific methods [...] and it “may not be helpful in determining whether a building will collapse, whether your brakes will stop your car — or whether a medication or vaccine works.” [2]

or, in our case, whether the correct person is sentenced for a crime or not. It is obvious, that Chaussée et al. aim to politicize science and to subvert scientific epistemology following a fashionable fad of applied postmodernism that has spread through the humanities in countries like the USA and the UK and is now, as the authors state themselves, aiming for the STEM subjects.

They even talk of “Western statistics” as if there also was ‘non-Western statistics’ or instead of just calling it ‘statistics’; in fact, some proponents/activists of postmodernist Theory even go so far as to question the validity of and paint as ‘colonial’, ‘racist’ etc. *mathematics*, no less [3], stating that “White supremacy culture shows up in math classrooms when students are required to ‘show their work’” as this would “reinforce worship of the written word” [4]. Some won’t even stop at trying to “deconstruct” its axioms like $2 + 2 = 4$ as yet another ‘hegemonic narrative’. Hence, the Orwell citation at the beginning of my letter wasn’t just to set the mood, it was meant as a reminder that ‘1984’ is to be read as a cautionary rather than an instructive tale.

Consequently, the authors cite a source, that calls to “abolish the sciences entirely and start anew as the only legitimate way to decolonize”. And while they do acknowledge this position to be ‘extreme’ (not false, mind you!) they present, however, the simple rejection of this whole “decolonization” and “DtC” business as comparably extreme as the “abolition” of the sciences, which is of course preposterous and highly disingenuous.

From passages like this it becomes quite clear, that the position from which Chaussée et al. are advocating is not at all based on evidence but rooted in ideology and leaning on *idea laundering*¹ (“whiteness” etc.) instead: if asked if they had actual evidence for many of the explicit claims and implicit assumptions in their article, e.g. that science/STEM was somehow “colonial” or not “equitable” or an outgrowth of “dominant, Western knowledge” I would expect them to answer that they are not to be asked to produce any and that asking for evidence was itself “colonial” and just one more manifestation of “White establishment backlash” or ‘privilege preserving pushback’ instantiating ‘White Talk’ [5] and “cognitive injustice” and more of that Theory jargon. Of course, this renders their position not only unfalsifiable (what in Critical Theory is regarded more of an intellectual virtue than a vice) and undefeasible but betrays circular reasoning which would spell the end of an argument in reasonable and rational disputes.

For instance, in their demands for the necessity of the decolonization of the history of forensic science, and to root out “White male supremacy” and to stop “celebrating the genius of individual White men” the authors remain rather vague, but they do hint at supposed colonialist sins, writings and attitudes of forensic science pioneers, or, as they would have it “‘fathers’ of forensic science who are blindly accepted as protagonists without presenting the degeneration movement that motivated much of their work”, like Francis Galton and Hans Gross. This, according to the authors, ought to be investigated or “dismantled” (in Theory jargon), but they do not explain and fail to produce evidence for how this would be of any relevance for the application of the principles formulated and methods developed by Galton and Gross and scientists like them.

I would argue that an idea, a concept, a thought is either correct or incorrect. Racist ideas, for instance, are not only incorrect but downright absurd because from a genetic point of view there are no races in *homo sapiens*, only different looks or externalities and to ascribe any “value” to externals or to derive prejudices from them is obviously ludicrous. However, what “colonial” concepts/“artifacts” are supposed to be remains in the dark. Are all concepts from colonial times “colonial”? And who gets to decide that and by which criteria and why should we grant the authors and other postcolonial Theorists interpretive sovereignty on that matter? Anyway, it remains to be stated, that ideas are to be valued independent of their producers and also that an idea of a person from colonial times, whether he thought colonialism was good or bad, *can only be right or wrong, i.e. it either works (e.g. STR profiling and calculus) or not (e.g. phrenology and homeopathy)* and for the forensic science curriculum and for the necessity of students to learn certain ideas and concepts in order to work as a forensic scientist *it*

¹ *idea laundering*: passing off ideas (some of which may contain bits of truth) as knowledge as if these terms described facts about the world and social reality with the aim of canonizing them. Idea laundering often starts with an activist scholar gathering like-minded peers who then create an academic journal centered on this idea. Other scholars publish in the journal or a similar journal, quoting each other in kind of an echo chamber. An idea like ‘whiteness’ then goes in on one side and comes out the other as ‘knowledge’. Activists can then point to series of ‘scholarly’ articles in ideologically homogeneous journals as justification to teach this ‘knowledge’ to students to have them further spread the laundered ideas.

does not matter in the least, who had the idea to be learned and what misdemeanors or character flaws of him/her excessive and petty offense archaeology may have brought to light.

Notably, the authors exhibit quite some measure of hypocrisy in that their own ideology and one central idea of Theory of everything being fixed in an imagined system of power relations goes back proximately to French philosopher Michel “power-knowledge” Foucault, whose postmodernist philosophy puts societal power structures and labels ahead of individuals and their endeavours, and ultimately to Karl Marx, two figures and decidedly white, Western men, of sorely ill repute, the latter being a racist [6] and anti-semitic [7,8] and the former having committed ‘colonialism inspired’ child rape, following in the footsteps of André Gide and others [9]. Both, however, have never been found in need of “decolonialization” by the proponents of Theory. It is discernable in such omissions and double standards that postmodern activism is not simply asserting of a new moral vision but attempting to impose a political vision on the West in which only specific figures (whom the West has celebrated) are brought down while those figures who have been the most critical of the Western traditions of culture are spared the same treatment.

Taken together, all that, from my view as a forensic science educator, is why, as the authors wonder, “forensic science is not engaging more in decolonizing debates”: we need to teach science not ideology and don't have time for such nonsense.

“It is usually futile to try to talk facts and analysis to people who are enjoying a sense of moral superiority in their ignorance.”

- Thomas Sowell

Disclaimer: It should (but nowadays cannot) go without saying that nothing of what I wrote is to deny that racism and vestiges of colonialism or better colonialist attitudes still exist, should still be regarded as a problem and should be called out, countered or neutralized applying *appropriate measures* where possible. However, there is no evidence that cynical postmodernism, critical XYZ theories, waging a war on the West and enlightenment ideas nor anything of that ilk are of any help in this and ample evidence in contrast that they have detrimental effects.

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