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9 October, 2011

Professor Martin McQuillan, Dean
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Kingston University
Penrhyn Road
Kingston upon Thames
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Dear Professor McQuillan:

I am writing to bring a complaint against one of your faculty members, Marko Attila Hoare, a Reader in History at Kingston University.

My complaint concerns four postings that Dr. Hoare presented on his own website, called ‘Greater Surbiton,’ as well as a series of comments on another site called ‘Modernityblog,’ which is directed by an anonymous blogger, all during December 2010 and January 2011. In these postings, Hoare advances an extended attack on my scholarly work; these posting contain false statements, fake quotes, and personalized smears. And Hoare not only impugns my academic research; he impugns my moral character as well. Taken as a whole, Hoare’s methods violate basic norms of academic conduct.

The four postings that appear on Greater Surbiton all note that Hoare is ‘a Reader at Kingston University, London.’ Hoare repeatedly invokes his Kingston University credentials to burnish his credibility. Accordingly, Hoare’s conduct has a direct impact on your institution, and I therefore believe that my complaint requires your involvement.

I realize that the topic of my academic writings, on the breakup of Yugoslavia, is a politically charged issue. And the position I argue – that external intervention helped cause the national breakup and then worsened its effects – is a controversial one, which elicits strong views from multiple sides. My Yugoslavia research has nevertheless been praised by such prominent figures as Charles Simic (in the *New York Review of Books*), David Bromwich (*Huffington Post*), and Doug Bandow (*Washington Times*); as well as Bruce Cumings, head of the history department at the University of Chicago; and the late Chalmers Johnson, who headed the political science department at UC-Berkeley, among many others. My arguments form part of a larger body of literature on the Balkans associated with a diverse group of scholars, including Robert Hayden (University of Pittsburgh), Susan Woodward (City University of New York), Kees Van Der Pijl (University of Sussex), Katherine Southwick (Yale Law School), William Schabas (National University of Ireland), and John Schindler (US Naval War College).

Throughout my career, I have welcomed debate, including the forceful language that often accompanies debate. In the case of Hoare, however, reasonable rules of debate have been breached by his repeated falsehoods.

Note that Hoare’s postings are extraordinarily lengthy. The four critiques of my work that Hoare placed on his own website run to twenty six single-spaced pages, when printed out; and this is in addition to dozens of attack posts sent to Modernityblog. In responding to these posts, I seek to make my points as briefly as possible. What follows thus constitutes the proverbial tip of the iceberg, in terms of cataloguing Hoare’s misconduct. I could easily have provided many more examples.

If you wish to check the facts in this letter: The various internet-based sources are all currently available, and the quoted sections can be found easily, by executing full text searches of the sites. And if requested, I will supply more specific citation information or scanned pages. I can also send you a copy of my book.

In the remainder of this letter, I will describe specific instances of misconduct by Dr. Hoare. In doing so, I will refer back to his writings in Greater Surbiton and Modernityblog, as well as my own writings, most notably my 2009 book, *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Vanderbilt University Press); and also my 2010 article, ‘The Srebrenica Massacre after Fifteen Years,’ which appeared on the internet site *Foreign Policy in* *Focus* (20 July). In all cases where I quote a source, the italics have been added by me.

**Hoare’s Use of Innuendos and Smear Tactics**

One of Hoare’s techniques is to use innuendos, in order to smear his opponents, especially in cases where he lacks evidence to back up his claims. In one of his Greater Surbiton attacks on my work, for example, Hoare begins as follows:

Those who are sufficiently ideologically driven will readily and tenaciously believe a myth that upholds their own ideology, no matter how completely the myth has been exposed and discredited. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion have been used by anti-Semites from the Nazis to today’s Islamists*, despite the fact that they were exposed as a forgery a century ago. *German anti-Semites sought to explain away Germany’s defeat in World War I in 1918 by a supposed ‘stab in the back’ by the Jews*, shifting the ignominy for the murderous Imperial German regime’s military collapse onto an innocent third party. In much the same way, apologists for the former regime of Slobodan Milosevic have for twenty years tried to blame the ignominious break-up of Yugoslavia – which the Milosevic regime deliberately engineered – on democratic Germany’s supposed ‘encouragement of Croatian secessionism’. They have done this despite a complete failure to uncover any evidence to support their thesis.
*David N. Gibbs in First do no Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (Vanderbilt University Press, Nashville, 2009) is the latest author to attempt to breathe life into the corpse of this myth…

Notice how Hoare proceeds: He does not *explicitly* compare my book to the notorious Protocols of the Elders of Zion – but he strongly implies this comparison. In essence, he is saying that my book is the equivalent of classical anti-Semitism and Nazi propaganda. And he does all this without a shred of evidence. Hoare’s posts are an extended exercise in McCarthy-style smear tactics.

These smears appear highly personalized and vindictive, especially the insinuations that my writings are similar to those of Nazis and anti-Semites. In fact, I am a practicing Jew, and my father was born in Germany (he became a refugee in 1938). I also have served on the editorial advisory board of the Jewish political magazine *Tikkun.* Hoare is well aware of my Jewish background, since it was repeatedly mentioned in our debate in Modernityblog. It seems likely that it was because of my background that Hoare made his scurrilous insinuations regarding anti-Semitism.

**False Statements**

Another of Dr. Hoare’s objectionable practices is the use of false statements, which misrepresent my work in clear and unambiguous ways. Whether these false statements are used deliberately or not is something that only Hoare himself can clarify. Note that I have already pointed out many of these false statements, on Modernityblog and elsewhere, yet Hoare has failed to correct his errors or retract his falsehoods.

Several examples of false statements follow: In Greater Surbiton, for example, Hoare claims that Gibbs ‘hasn’t bothered to engage with the existing literature, but simply ignored all the existing works that undermine his thesis.’ He then lists five specific authors that I supposedly failed to cite (Michael Libal, Richard Caplan, Daniele Conversi, Brendan Simms, and Hoare himself). This is a false claim. In fact my book cited four of these authors, each several times, and also included them in the bibliography. Hoare’s own writings were cited in five separate endnotes (pp. 252, 264, 274, 280, 305).

Then, in Modernityblog, Hoare claims that my book ‘suppresses the history of Serb mass-killings of Bosniaks in east Bosnia in 1992.’ This claim is again false. Here is what my book actually said (p. 122):

As war began [in 1992], Serb forces launched a major offensive in northeast Bosnia, taking over a series of villages of mixed ethnicity, and then expelling most of the non-Serb inhabitants by force. By the end of 1992, Serb forces had overrun large portions of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and they controlled approximately 70 percent of the whole area of the country. The process of ethnic cleansing, for which the war became famous, had begun… The Bosnia conflict quickly became notorious for the scale of atrocities, especially those perpetrated by Serb forces against Muslim civilians. The widespread practice of ethnic cleansing was often associated with the killing of noncombatants, and also the raping of women and girls.

Clearly, I did not suppress the history of Serb mass killings in east Bosnia, and Hoare’s claims to the contrary are false.

Later in Modernityblog, Hoare makes a sensational accusation regarding my book:

in your sections on Srebrenica (pp. 153-154, 161-162), *you falsely portray the Srebrenica Muslims as the ones principally guilty of the violence in the Srebrenica region*, and of ‘creating the hatred’ there – despite the fact that most of the killing in the region was the work of the Serb forces.

There are two problems here. First, Hoare cites the phrase ‘creating the hatred,’ and presents this as a direct quote from me. In fact, this is a fake quote, which appears nowhere in any of my writings.

Second, Hoare’s principal substantive claim is false, since there is nothing in my writing that portrays the Muslims as being ‘the ones principally guilty of the violence in the Srebrenica region.’ Here is what my book actually stated on the topic of Srebrenica (p. 161):

the capture of Srebrenica led to atrocities that were far larger in scale than anything that had occurred during three years of fighting… the Serb armies began by expelling the town’s women and children, producing yet another act of ethnic cleansing. And then *the Serbs*

*proceeded to murder some eight thousand military-age Muslim males*. According to the Dutch investigation of the massacre: ‘Muslims were slaughtered like beasts.’
The Srebrenica massacre was *the worst war crime in Europe since the 1940s*…

Hoare neglects to mention the above, which directly contradicts his claims about my writings.

At another point in the Modernityblog debate, Hoare makes the following statement, which contains additional falsehoods:

Your account of the background to the Srebrenica massacre presents the Muslims/Bosnian army as the ones principally guilty of the atrocities in the region, and of having *‘created the hatred’* there (pp. 153-154).
You then claim ‘The origin of the Srebrenica massacre lay in a series of Muslim attacks that began in the spring of 1995.’ (p. 160)
So while you do not deny that the massacre occurred, you a) deny that it was genocide, and b) *blame the victims for it*.

There are multiple problems with Hoare’s claims. First, he quotes me as using the phrase ‘created the hatred,’ yet this phrase appears nowhere in my book, neither in the pages he cites nor in any of my writings. The quote is fake.

Second, Hoare’s main point is that I supposedly ‘blame the victims’ for the Srebrenica massacre. This is a false claim, since there is nothing in my writing that in any way blames the Muslim victims for the massacre. In fact, I place the primary blame on *Serb forces*, as stated below:

Without question, *the Bosnian Serb army and their political and military leaders must bear the overwhelming burden of guilt* for having orchestrated this calamity [the Srebrenica massacre]. However, the Muslim leader Alija Izetbegović must bear some of the blame as well. Contrary to popular belief, Bosnia’s Muslim-led government was in fact quite ruthless and some of its actions helped lay the groundwork for the massacre. Specifically, the Izetbegović government followed a clear policy that aimed to maximize casualties of its own civilians, a strategy adopted to elicit the outrage of international public opinion, and thus leading to Western military intervention against the Serbs and in favor of the Muslims.

Note that the above quote was drawn from my 2010 article; Hoare certainly should have been aware of this article since it was sent to the Modernityblog debate, in two separate postings.

In short, I never state that the 8,000 Muslim victims were responsible for the Srebrenica massacre. On the contrary, I place primary blame on the Serb military and secondary blame on the Muslim *government* (which is not the same as the Muslim massacre victims). Hoare’s inflammatory claim that I ‘blame the victims’ for the massacre is false.

Hoare is of course entitled to criticize my book, but by using false claims he debases academic standards.

**Fake Quotations**

A closely related problem is Hoare’s repeated use of fake quotations, in making his criticisms against my work. Once again, I do not know whether Hoare has used these fake quotes intentionally or due to exceptional sloppiness; either way, the practice is unacceptable.

As noted above, Hoare attributes to me the phrases ‘creating the hatred’ and ‘created the hatred,’ i.e. I supposedly claim that the Bosnian Muslims created the hatred in the Srebrenica area. But in reality, these phrases do not appear in any of my writings.

And there is additional fakery. One of Hoare’s extended reviews of my book (which appears in Greater Surbiton) contains a fake quotation in the very *title* of the review:

First Check Their Sources 2: The Myth that ‘Most of Bosnia was Owned by the Serbs Before the War.’

Please note that this title introduces a review that focuses almost exclusively on my book. The first part of the title (‘First Check Their Sources’) is a play on words from the title of my book, which is *First Do No Harm.* The embedded phrase in Hoare’s title (‘Most of Bosnia was Owned…’) is presented as a direct quote, with quotation marks. Yet the quoted phrase appears nowhere in any of my writings.

I can well understand Dr. Hoare’s strong feelings about the issue of Yugoslavia’s breakup, given his Balkan family background. Many people from the former Yugoslavia have similarly strong feelings, and I respect that. But Hoare’s family background cannot justify his repeated use of fake quotations.

**Damage to My Reputation**

There is no doubt that Hoare’s attacks have harmed my professional reputation. If one executes a Google search of ‘David N. Gibbs,’ Hoare’s attack postings appear among the very first hits. It is well known that internet postings become part of the permanent record, and Hoare’s smears will affect my reputation for many years to come. These smears will reduce the future possibility of external job offers, promotions to endowed chairs, and pay raises. They will damage me in other ways as well: I have had a substantial profile with the US and international mass media, but my reputation in this domain surely has been affected by the repeated smears.

And Hoare’s insinuation that I am an anti-Semite – though demented – has already caused me emotional distress, anxiety, and sleep loss. It may also cause me problems in my personal life.

Given the overall tenor of Hoare’s writings, it seems likely that Kingston University has received complaints from other faculty, who were similarly defamed.

In addition, Hoare has incited others who share his political views to besmirch my character, using even stronger language than Hoare himself does. A posting to the Srebrenica Genocide Blog is entitled: ‘David N. Gibbs – Genocide Denier.’ This posting prominently features my photograph. In making its attacks against me, the Srebrenica Genocide Blog repeatedly references – and emphasizes – Hoare’s own posts.

It appears that Dr. Hoare is coordinating his own blogging with a larger network of activists, who work collectively to defame writers who do not share their opinions; and that Hoare is playing a leadership role in this network. In one of Hoare’s attacks on me in Greater Surbiton, for example, he closes by referencing his anonymous assistants (“With thanks to DW and JG”). And Hoare has helped to disseminate (on Modernityblog) another attack written by his colleague Daniel Toljaga, which includes the following incendiary phrases:

*...Gibbs’ pernicious denial of genocide* calls into question not only his academic credibility, but his very qualifications to hold tenure at a university at all… [Gibbs] has made a *deliberate misinterpretation of facts*.

I will not even bother to comment on the above statements – but I do note that Hoare made a point of publicizing them.

**Creating a Climate of Intimidation and Fear**

The main effect of Dr. Hoare’s writing is to chill discussion on the issue of Yugoslavia’s breakup and to intimidate those who wish to debate points of this history (and he also associates Kingston University’s name with these activities). Anyone who challenges Hoare’s opinion risks the possibility that he will damage their reputations, with the same types of false statements, fake quotes, and smear techniques that he has used before. Note that I myself am a tenured full professor, and am protected to some degree. But I can well imagine the problems that a graduate student or young faculty member would encounter, if he or she were to take issue with Hoare’s opinions.

Dr. Hoare’s actions clearly violate the Kingston University code of conduct. Kingston’s online ‘Policies and Regulations’ affirm the following:

The University believes that *an atmosphere of free and open discussion is essential* to its life and work. Such an atmosphere can be achieved only if all concerned behave with necessary tolerance and *avoid needlessly offensive or provocative action and language*.

Hoare openly flouts this policy, and he even boasts of his destructive proclivities. In one of his Greater Surbiton postings, he states that writers who disagree with his positions are ‘like lambs to the slaughter,’ who will surely ‘sacrifice any reputations they might have.’ It is very unusual to see a faculty member publicly issue such blanket threats against colleagues. True, academic debate is often contentious. But Hoare has brought intellectual contention to an unacceptable level – one that violates the written policies of his home institution, as well as universally accepted standards of academic propriety.

I am reporting Hoare’s misconduct to you in order to prevent any further intimidation of scholarship. Being a research scholar yourself, I am sure you understand the importance of maintaining open debate, in an atmosphere that is free from intimidation.

In sum, Dr. Hoare has engaged in a pattern of unscholarly behavior, which was conducted on a systematic basis over a period of time, in multiple venues; and which directly impacts Kingston University and goes against its policies. I hope you will view this matter with the utmost seriousness.

I ask that you prevail upon Dr. Hoare to cease his misconduct in the future, so that others will not be damaged. I am also entitled to an apology from Kingston University, for the past misconduct of Dr. Hoare, and for the damage he has done to my reputation.

I look forward to your response.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely yours,

David N. Gibbs

Professor of History

Also sent to:

Professor Julius Weinberg, Vice Chancellor, Kingston University

Professor Penny Sparke, Pro Vice Chancellor for Research and Enterprise

Professor John Davis, Head of School of Social Sciences