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Professor Robert DeRubeis  
Chair, Department of Psychology  
University of Pennsylvania

Dear Rob,

You have asked me for my impressions of Professor Francisco Gil-White's teaching and research in connection with your consideration of his reappointment. I was a member of the faculty of the Asch Center's Summer Institute four years ago when Francisco was a fellow. I was impressed by his sharp intellect and his deep and enthusiastic engagement with evolutionary psychology and memetics. I was also keenly interested in the evaluation, via field research, of hypotheses concerning "essentialist" modes of thinking that could play a role in the apparent power of ethnic identifications. This line of investigation was of particular interest to me since it was based on a fundamental acceptance of the principle of social constructivism.

I was very pleased when the Psychology Department hired Francisco as an Assistant Professor and looked forward eagerly to developing close and productive ties with him as a colleague at Penn and at the Asch Center.

I have read some of Francisco's published work and have listened to several lectures by him at the Asch Center. I had some questions about his research design, and did not share his confidence in his substantive conclusions, but still found his work interesting and inventive. But I must confess that I more or less stopped reading his work altogether about a year ago. He began lecturing (and hectoring) about topics well outside his professional training, first regarding what he has maintained as the thorough-going innocence of Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs in general in relation to events in the Balkans, and what he argues has been the fabrication of atrocities committed against Muslims in the former Yugoslavia. He then expanded his argument, emphasizing the role of large-scale conspiracies by NATO, the CIA, and others to (falsely) implicate Milosevic and other Serb leaders in war crimes, blaming instead the Muslims of Albania and the former Yugoslavia for, as near as I can tell, all of the horrors that have occurred there in recent years. More recently he has extended this type of argument to Sri Lanka and to Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Since these matters are of direct concern to work done by me and my colleagues at the Solomon Asch Center for Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict; since Francisco regularly made these arguments at meetings and seminars at the Asch Center; and since his arguments caused considerable distress among fellows and visitors there from the Balkans and the Middle East, I sought to respond professionally, with suggestions of background reading and efforts, in person



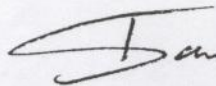
and over email, to engage in a dialogue with him. I was especially eager to do so in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian case, which is my main professional specialization. But I also believed that Francisco was laboring under some fundamental misapprehensions about the meaning of scientific investigation and the relationship between theories and evidence as that relationship is treated within communities of (social) scientists.

Sadly, however, I came to judge I could not engage in a productive dialogue with him. Indeed Francisco's mode of argument (e.g., if X wears a black hat, and if X said one thing that was not true, then nothing said by X is true), his extravagant claims, and his refusal to consider counter-evidence led me (perhaps wrongly) to discount the kind of scholarly work that appears on his vita so heavily that I have not thought it worth my while to read it.

I have not had a chance to see Francisco in a classroom, but upon receipt of your request for a review, I did look at his website and there was able to peruse the power point presentations he used in a course in the Spring of 2003 on "Biocultural Psychology." I was disappointed to see that the last lecture, on Propaganda, was fully devoted to a polemic against the western media, NATO, etc. for the "big lie" techniques they have used to frame Milosevic. Of course having not observed the class I cannot say whether this presentation was used as a foil for a broader discussion, and an example of propaganda itself, or whether it was accompanied by other examples. I do note that since I read that power point lecture, it has, along with the other lectures in that course, been removed from Francisco's website. However, that he had incorporated this material into an undergraduate course added to my concern that it would not be possible for me to evaluate Francisco's "professional work" as a teacher and researcher at Penn as wholly separate from the efforts he makes at what he is, on his website, pleased to call "investigative journalism."

It will be, I'm sure, only too easy to misunderstand this letter. I would be the last one to object to professors at Penn taking controversial stands and pushing their ideas hard against recalcitrant audiences. I think that Penn professors have every right to engage in political activity and advocacy in areas both inside and outside their professional competence. But aspects of Francisco's behavior have raised questions in my mind regarding his ability to contribute as a responsible member of our academic community, his respect for the rules of evidence, and his understanding of the difference between polemical disputation and scientific exchange. I would recommend that he be advised that his future at Penn will require him to remove such questions from the minds of his colleagues and I encourage all his colleagues in the Psychology Department to do what they can to help him harness his manifest talents for systematic scholarly work.

Sincerely,



Ian S. Lustick