

# Shadow Work: Witnessing Latinx Crossings in Rhetoric and Composition

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As the rhetorical performances of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work continue to proliferate and sell a movement towards more equitable institutions, the authors challenge this rhetoric as merely a new mode of epistemological and territorial expropriation. Instead, the authors put forth the concept of shadow work, which happens as a result of the failures of DEI work. Through a dialogue among the three authors, they parse where, how, and why shadow work happens to compose collective understandings of shadow work. Through collaborative storytelling, the authors invite readers to begin a practice of bearing witness to the structural work that must be done in the shadows, quietly and collaboratively, to remain on this “side” of the profession’s gated faculty community. The authors invite readers to engage in their own critiques of the academic assembly line reproducing dominant rhetorics of diversity.

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## Preface

Shadow work emerges wherever there are haunting circumstances. It may seem odd, at first, to encounter these two concepts in the same breath. By shadows, we mean places wounded by and imagined as death-spaces and people relegated to or thrown into the shadow zones of non-being (see Fanon; Taussig). Perhaps the greatest irony here in the union of these two words is that work occurs at all from the absences and silences produced in and by relations codified through power. Shadow work, as we conceive of it in this essay, is not about bootstrapping or making it on one’s own. “Rarely,” bell hooks claims, “are any of us healed in isolation” (215). Echoing hooks’s sentiment that healing is an act of communion, Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty remind us that when we work towards freeing ourselves from the spaces and places of domination, it’s always already done “within the context of a collective or communal process” (506). In the face of haunting circumstances that force assent, shadow work is carried out for another person in the name of care, love, and healing without certainty or guarantee for what that work might yield. Shadow work is not carried out evenly across space and time, and this essay makes no attempt to try to smoothly weave our inherited, lived, and fragmented experiences together.

Dear reader: we call on you to bear witness to this impossible condition. Shadow work is a symptom of a problem—it is not something to be mythologized. Therefore, in this essay, we are not advocating for the dedicated work of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) on behalf of the institution of higher education, which sometimes assumes that hiring BIPOC scholar-teachers will fix the problem DEI discourse was deployed to solve, for this myth imposes upon BIPOC scholar-teachers the responsibility to fix problems they did not create. It also places BIPOC scholar-teachers into situations where the likelihood of harm is high. For those reasons, we'd like to draw a distinction between the kind of DEI work that appears on brochures—the kind of DEI work that maintains the appearance of social justice without actually doing anything to uproot itself from its grounding in white supremacy—and a different kind of infra-DEI work that takes place in the shadows. We, the co-authors of this essay, attempt to outline the latter, and we ask our readers to think about shadow work as something that is neither scalable nor romanticized—as, dare we say, the care for the other “without the mandate for conquest” (Morrison). Shadow work amounts to an act of care with no certainty of what it might yield, no promise that it will fix that which is broken, and no guarantee of how it will be valued for tenure and/or promotion. Shadow work happens despite DEI—not because of it—so to ask how shadow work could serve as a model for DEI is the wrong question to be asking. We will not offer yet another plan of action for preserving white supremacy under the sigil of “diversity,” for we do not assume you are entitled to diversity (as some commodity or body to be added to fix your program) in the first place. To further elaborate on how we've come to understand and undertake shadow work in our everyday lives and the everyday work we carry out in our local institutions, we first turn to stories from our communities.

### **San Marcos, Texas, 2011—Sonia**

San Marcos, Texas, used to be known mostly for Texas State University (where I went to graduate school) and the outlet mall. It's about 30 minutes south of Austin and 30 minutes north of San Antonio. I would drive down to San Marcos from Austin to visit my mentor and professor at Texas State, Jaime Armin Mejía, whenever I had a chance. I still do when I go back home. Jaime has a way about him that ensures quality time. We usually meet at his house, and then we drive together to the Palm Café II, a small Mexican restaurant that is ordinary, yet delicious. It's the kind of place that has mediocre coffee and wonderfully greasy barbacoa tacos. Jaime knows all the waitstaff, and we inevitably run into someone from the local community that he knows.

Usually, after breakfast, he suggests an outing—sometimes to a quilt store or a bookstore, but often, he suggests the outlet mall. Jaime likes to integrate

a trip to the outlet mall by claiming that he just wants to look around, but inevitably it becomes a gift-giving opportunity for him.

One particular day right before I moved to Arizona to begin my PhD program, we went to the outlet mall after breakfast, and he bought me a very nice set of quality cutlery. It was like his contribution to my big transition and his way of saying, “Good luck out there in the world.” The next year, I received a call from Cruz Medina, a fellow scholar in the field who, at the time, was completing a pre-doc fellowship at Texas State University. Cruz asked, “Hey uh, what kind of laptop bag do you think Casie would like for graduation?” Jaime took Cruz to the outlet mall, and they were shopping for a laptop bag for Casie Moreland, a fellow scholar from Texas State who was going to a PhD program in Arizona as well.

Casie, Cruz, and I were all Jaime’s former students and mentees, and we are all now colleagues and friends. These seemingly mundane activities—going to breakfast and the outlet mall—are what I see as shadow work. Jaime takes this time to sit and talk with us to understand what support we need professionally and personally. Through this generous shadow work of material support and quality time, Jaime has continued to cultivate many young scholars in our field. The development of our relationship from teacher/student to mentor/mentee to friends and colleagues has significantly influenced how I perceive shadow work and what calls me to do that very work.

### **Tucson, Arizona 2015—José**

In early February, I wake late in the afternoon, and I’m in a hospital room. My throat hurts. It makes this bubbling sound when I try to breathe in. An oncologist has just spent a few hours removing adenomas from my parathyroid gland. As I regain consciousness, I regain that stubborn self-pity. I’m pissed because I’ve just passed my comprehensive exams, and I’m feeling the heat of graduate school and the job market and. . . I’m not worried about my own body.

In June, I wake late in the afternoon, and again I’m in a hospital room. This time, my leg hurts. It has a Taylor Spatial Frame on it. Self-pity has leveled up. So has the anxiety about work. My partner tells me that my adviser texted her. “He sent these pretty, white flowers,” she tells me.

It’s September, and I go see one of my mentors. The Taylor Spatial Frame doesn’t come off until November. I’ve been pissed and self-pitying since January. I’m taking a lot of oxycodone because my leg is skewered with six metal rods that hold it in place as it grows bone. I’m a mess.

“I want to quit. I don’t think I can do this.”

She tells me a story. It's not about resilience or overcoming some huge obstacle. There are no lessons to be learned here. No bootstrapping. Just space to exist, even for a little while.

"There is a place for you here, and I believe in you. I will be here when and if you come back," she says. "But you're not ready yet. Your health is more important."

I've never shared these stories because I've always tried to cover up my disability. I've spent a lot of time agonizing over what other people have said to me, even in benevolence. I believed for too long that I could hide it. I made similar mistakes as someone of mixed ethnicity. Sometimes, I pass for white, in a passive way. But I've also, in an active way, made efforts to pass as white. I know now that I've never been successful in passing off either. Let's be honest here: I'm 5'3"—I'm short, even for a Mexican-American. I'm not fooling anyone.

Someone, somewhat like me, gave me the space to just exist.

### **Harlingen, Texas, 2009—Romeo**

In "Memoria," Victor Villanueva writes that memory "calls" and "pushes us forward." A memory of home continues to call. And so, I return home. But not out of some nostalgic impulse, nor for the sake of mere recall. "No marginalized group," Kevin Browne reminds us, "has the luxury of doing anything for its own sake" (172). Why? As Frantz Fanon would say, "I"—which was already a "we" in *Black Skin, White Masks*—"was haunted" (129). And as the haunted and in the face of haunted/ing literacies, the memory that "calls" is not just as a reminder that hauntings are like a rhetorical trope in a book that returns unexpectedly or surreptitiously. Rather, the memory calls at the nexus of personal and collective memory, and stories-so-far, and the possibilities of new stories. A memory "calls" to remind us of an inheritance (that keeps its secret) and an epistemological framework (that has long pushed us forward).<sup>1</sup> "[L]et the dead—those already denied a sustainable subjectivity," Sharon Holland appeals to all, "speak from the places that is familiar to them" (4). And so, the dead return. I return home to a border(ed)land and community, which within the popular modern/colonial imagination is a "death-space in the land of the living" (Taussig 133) with people "at the company of death" (Maldonado-Torres 257). I return home—the place where one's "I am," always already tethered to "where I do and think," is constituted—to establish a critical stance both on hauntings (and its haunted/ing literacies that circulate there) and also the rhetorical practice of shadow work that developed in spite of being thrown into and forced to reside in spaces reserved for shadows. A return home is necessarily a return to a memory of shadow work, which has always had the potential to stand at the nexus of another's stories-so-far and possibilities of new stories.

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“Así son las cosas” | “¿Pues, ahora que?” These were the haunt/ed/ing literacies I grew up with. I heard them from my mom who would cry as she told me, “That is the way things are going to be.” In the face of haunting circumstances and a contemplation of why go on, one makes a choice to utter the words of assent as an-other option in the face of a forced choice, which is not a choice at all but a demand: *así son las cosas*.<sup>2</sup> I heard them from my grandma, who after being unable to hold in her cries for me would say, “Well, what now?” To linguists, *pues* is a filler word, meaningless and functional to the extent that it performs a pause or a hesitation. But here, *pues* rests on an epistemological and rhetorical framework constituted in the interplay of a singular affirmation and generational deliberation, of contradictions and tensions, of a forced choice and a responsibility. *Pues* is like an inquiry without warranty, a rhetoric without certainty, a hope without guaranteed predicate; it is a pause or a hesitation that forms in the choice to utter words of assent: *¿pues, ahora que?* But these haunted/ing literacies will never solely be mine, for they have circulated and continue to circulate amongst a people in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, who in the face of haunting circumstances make a choice to remain hopeful for that which may or may not arrive.

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2009. Before she was committed to the hospital, the doctors advised Grandma not to go outside and walk anymore. That day, she would betray that advice. A responsibility remained at work. There was still some shadow work to do, even in the face of one’s last breaths. Many of us in the family joke that we take after Grandma’s *terconess* (hard-headedness). Grandma ventured to walk from Jefferson Avenue to East Van Buren. Out of habit, she cut through the neighborhoods. From as far back as I could remember, Grandma liked to walk and cut through the neighborhoods. Friends would tell me at school sometimes, “I think I saw your grandma today.” She was like an ambivalent figure in the distance, a shadow at the threshold of presence and absence and sameness and otherness, a fleeting life vanishing and conforming in and with shadows. Grandma had known this space of shadows since arriving in the United States without citizenship. It was a space relegated to those who will never have arrived—for those who could not sign their name but with only an X.

“¿Te asuste?” she asked me jokingly, as I opened the door and hugged her. I had just spoken with Grandma an hour before, letting her know I had just got into town (from college) and that I would visit her shortly. Quickly, she

stated, “Estoy listo.” She was always brutally honest with me. “Pero, queria verte,” she continued. “Vamonos,” Grandma said suddenly. I knew what that meant, though we had not walked together for some time. The last time was before I left for college. Unlike before, this time she asked me, “¿a donde quieres ir?” This last time, she would follow me. We cut through the neighborhoods as we had done when I was younger. “Te lo dije,” Grandma tells me, breaking the silence of our walk. “¿No te recuerdas?” she asks as I remain confused. Suddenly, a memory called, both of a boy on the verge of dropping out of high school and of a mother who on the last day of high school came by to give him an apology letter. “Te lo dije,” which were words uttered during the shadow work of walking and platicandole together, emerged as words of hope that the actions one takes for another has the potential to stand at the nexus of another’s stories-so-far and possibilities of new stories.

In the process of walking, another memory called, of a Grandma walking with her *neito* to offer hope amidst struggle, “¿Así son las cosas! ¿Ahora que?”; to teach him how to listen in ways that could create sound from silence, “¿qué oyes? escucha con tus oidos”; to teach him how to see in ways that could create presence from absence, “¿qué ves? mira con tus ojos”; to teach him how to walk in ways that could cut through the appearance of only one path, “siempre hay otra/una manera”; to teach him that even in the face of hauntings and personas con malas intenciones, one must keep their dignity, “no te dejes.” Google can only translate “no te dejes” into a dangling modifier: “don’t let you.” What it has and continues to mean is that our bodies are not at will to be treated however—“no me voy a dejar.” As we returned back home, Grandma refused to come inside the house. Instead, she left me with a final memory that continues to call: “¿Entiendes porque siempre te pedí que camanaras conmigo?” She grabbed my hand and held it tightly, as she had always done. “¿Entiendes? ¿Entiendes!” she stated. The former of *entiendes* was always already a question that merged with other words, “Te digo esto para que sepas y aprendes.” The latter of *entiendes* has and continues to be a reminder that even with revelation of something like a secret, what is formalizable must necessarily remain unsettled and in an intermediary stage.

When I first read William Wordsworth’s words in college (2009), “The world is too much with us,” I first thought of home and my community, and a possible correlative (“The haunt...our history...is too much with us”). Haunting, in this way, is more than a nebulous concept. Derrida understood that hauntings belonged to the “structure of every hegemony” (46). But hegemony does not unfold evenly. And thus, hauntings—vis-a-vis a memory that “calls”—ground the question: where are hauntings and how do they work in general and on us?<sup>3</sup> For many of us in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, we know the haunt is too much with us, as we are forced to mitigate a precarious subject

position between being a subject of and becoming a subject in hauntings. This situates us squarely on the relationship between hauntings and literacies. And a memory so often calls, one that has also pushed us forward. Is it a coincidence that, for the minoritized and racialized, it is our moms and grandmas who made the choice to utter the words of assent (*así son las cosas*) to us as an-other option? Is it happenstance that from them, we learned both how to maintain hope in the face of hauntings (and its haunt/ed/ing literacies that circulate in and around us) and how to keep our dignity (*no te dejes*) despite hauntings? No! My last memory of Grandma was of her saying to me, “¿Ahora entiendes? ¡Entiendes mi’jo!” I/we return to these memories not out of some nostalgic impulse nor for the sake of it, but because we always already speak from the places familiar to us—home, homeplaces, shadow work. Because a memory of home, for better or for worse, calls and pushes us forward.

Shadow work is not synonymous here with resistance or subversion. This is not to say that hauntings do not demand resistance or that the actions one takes result in resistance. Rather, shadow work, like hauntings, situates both an inheritance that is our burden to bear and also an epistemological framework at the nexus of personal and collective memory, selves and others, and stories-so-far and the possibilities of new stories for standing somewhere with another. In “Argument as Emergence,” Jim Corder understood the somewhere as both connected to histories and as the possibility of and for an ethos and praxis of being present with, seeing, embracing, knowing, and holding another in mind (23). What we learn from home, from our communities that make up home, is that in the face of hauntings and haunt/ed/ing circumstances, an ethos and praxis of love, care, and healing is carried out for another, just like us (myself, Sonia, José), because of the choice one makes to somewhere with another—shadow work.

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As discussed in these opening vignettes, academia and the work we do in academia is guided by the lessons learned from and care demonstrated by people who care for us. The motivation of shadow work comes from elsewhere, which is where we begin this article. We first center those who came before us and made it possible for us to do the work ahead of us. By providing our own experiences of shadow work, we intend to convey the foundation for our own understandings of shadow work. Additionally, we conclude this article with vignettes of our experiences as faculty that demonstrate the failings of DEI. Through these personal stories, our goal is not simply to register more stories about systemic racism in the profession, neither will we make reservations about what administrators “should” or “can” do about DEI because that

type of work is extant across institutions. Instead, we advance a theory and practice of witnessing through a method of collaborative storytelling.

In addition to scholarly writing that supports our main claims, we discuss shadow work through a dialogue among the three authors, and we discuss shadow work as the practice of building community and friendship despite unfulfilled DEI promises. We invite readers to begin a practice of bearing witness, to contemplate what it means to witness systemic racism in the profession, and to consider the failures in our stories. We ask readers to consider the work that structurally must be done in the shadows, quietly and collaboratively, to remain on this “side” of the profession’s gated faculty community. Ultimately, we challenge readers to do the reflective work and consider and address DEI failures in their own context. We encourage readers to engage in their own critiques of the academic assembly line reproducing dominant rhetorics of diversity.

### **DEI Is Coloniality-lite**

The last 30 years have coincided with the full-blown consolidation of the neoliberal corporate university in the United States, during which rhetoric and composition has entered into to the false authority of questions like “What do we need to do about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)?” and “What should be done about DEI?” We ask, “For whom?” We see these phrases proliferating across genres like diversity statements (required as addenda in job application dossiers), land acknowledgements (prefacing scholarly presentations at conferences), and anti-racist statements (pasted on writing program websites). Even as these performances propagate a profession without borders, and even as writing programs claim to decolonize their curricula, there doesn’t yet appear to be an institution or a writing program interested in relinquishing its occupied territory. And if, as folks often like to mention, “decolonization is not a metaphor,” then what is at stake in DEI work that makes the projects of epistemological and territorial expropriation more inclusive (Tuck & Yang)? If the rhetoric of DEI is to be something otherwise than just a more-inclusive project of epistemological and territorial expropriation, then we will have to take seriously the question of *whom* the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion is for.

The university as a civic institution, at least as it has historically flourished within the context of the Americas and the U.S., cannot be separated from the idea of and the institution that is the Americas. Words and ideas matter. They make an argument. “Ideas,” Lewis Gordon noted, “dwell across the ages in the concepts and institutions human beings have built” (137). What we can discern from this understanding is that ideas require a foundation, infrastructure, and/or institution to appear and become consequential (123). Let us situate the



idea of and the institution that is the Americas in the destruction of indigenous populations, appropriation of lands, ideas of race, and the racial distribution and exploitation of labor. What was institutionalized via ideal representations of knowledge, understanding, and humanity was the idea people were without proper letters and writing, language, history, culture, and spirit (Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*). And this idea of a people without (or those who lacked and/or deficient of) became an institution in itself that allowed for another idea to appear and become consequential: a people less knowing could be at the same time, the Spanish reasoned, a less human people (e.g., epistemic and ontological difference). Specifically, the Spanish, in colonizing the Americas, invoked the word police, which in the context of the idea of and the institution that is the Americas meant that which constituted the other. The Spanish could be understood, in this context, as the police policing police. There were problems in the world that only one civilization was capable of resolving. The idea of the university cannot be separated from this history overcome by such words, ideas, and institutions.

A central question emerges in following the line of inquiry laid out above. If the university cannot be separated from the idea of and the institution that is the Americas, we must ask: What is the university if not an integral institution made and left behind to promote and reproduce ideals, support and defend a certain posterity, and expand the police policing police apparatus? That the university thrived in the periods of nation- and empire-building in the Americas and Europe only necessarily demands that we be attentive to the ways in which ideal representations of knowledge, understanding, and humanity enunciated from the colonial and imperial center became networked by an association of social and cultural interests (see Mignolo “The Role of the Humanities”). Recognizing and acknowledging both the Americas and the university in this way, which remain wound/ed/ing place (see Brasher et al.; Till), we must also ask: What are writing and rhetorical studies if not the manifestation of the police policing the police of others? Is that not what CUNY’s Open Admissions era demonstrated to us? The arrival of the other or stranger at the doorsteps of the university, and the university unable to meet the demands and needs of said students. In the Kantian-Humboldtian model of the university, the university was theologically and secularly structured for the policing of national languages, ideology, citizenship, democracy, and history, amongst other modern/colonial modes of knowledge production. Though the university would undergo changes, it remained committed to and carried out territorial and epistemological projects (see Mignolo “Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity”). Perhaps for no other reason does DEI, on behalf of the institution, fail by design. DEI is another form of policing.

The university cannot solve the colonial problem to which it was always already tethered. DEI, on behalf of the institution, amounts to the maintenance of structural whiteness precisely because it is founded to expand the police-policing-police apparatus. Because the university was not intended for BIPOC faculty, hiring such faculty threatens not only the position of white, cisgendered men, but also traditional concepts of what counts as knowledge and who count as knowledge producers. When threatened, the institution and those who adamantly defend its traditions express what Sarita Echavez See calls “white settler colonial rage, the intense resentment generated by the buried knowledge that white presence in the academy is not a result of meritocratic achievement but rather a history of illegitimate incursion and occupation” (154). This manifests as hostile work environments, denial of tenure, and various microaggressions against BIPOC faculty.

A main argument of ours is that DEI work, on behalf of the institution, is insufficient, and therefore, we turn to shadow work. Although the rhetoric of DEI presents such work with a positive connotation, as Sara Ahmed claims, inclusivity is a technology for bringing in the stranger and making them into a subject (163). Walter Mignolo reminds us that “Inclusion is a one-way street,” precisely because “[he/she] who includes and [she/he] who is welcomed to be included stand in codified power relations” (*The Darker Side* xv). He sees the rhetoric of inclusion as an extension of the other-as-same, human rights, and citizenship rhetoric. Therefore, it’s important that we consider who is doing the work of DEI, and why. Once we ask questions about the charge and function of DEI work, as Ahmed does throughout *On Being Included*, we may consider the lackluster appearance of DEI to BIPOC scholars. Departments and units must understand that they are not entitled to diversity; diversity must be earned. To think that way will require infrastructural changes that cultivate communities of thinkers, teachers, and friends. So long as departments continue to hire BIPOC faculty and maintain institutional whiteness in policies and practices, they confirm that they do not actually value BIPOC scholars.

### ¿Pues, ahora que? Shadow Work Definitions, Origins, and Impetuses

Hauntings are the condition of shadow work and the reason why shadow work continues today. “The explosion will not happen today,” Frantz Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (7). A state of being—an internalization... of an inferiority complex... of a disassociation with being. “It is too soon,” Fanon contemplates. Or perhaps, he continues, it is “too late” (7). Too soon, or too late, for what? A new humanism. Will it ever have arrived? An “extrication” and self-discovery. Will the haunt ever relinquish its “rights” to its “artifact”? “Haunting,” Derrida claims, “belongs to the structure of every hegemony” (37). Hegemony. It seeks to take and extract—land, resources,

people's histories...rights...dignity. Ideal representations of humanity. A state of being, Fanon writes, in a zone of nonbeing (Fanon). The place where the "prohibited and forbidden" live, Gloria Anzaldúa notes—"the half-dead" (25). For centuries, racialized people have been relegated to the spaces reserved for shadows so that shadow work takes place as an assent and emerges in the places of an awaiting.

**Sonia:** Where does shadow work come from?

**Romeo:** Shadow work, because it emerges in the face of hauntings and haunting circumstances, always already constitutes an ethos that stands at the nexus of personal and collective memories and stories-so-far and the possibilities of new stories. As Sonia notes, shadow work is not a choice. Take, for instance, the following two phrases: "así son las cosas" and "¿ahora que?" The former is the haunting words of those haunted (Gordon; Garcia), while the latter signals an assent in the form of an awaiting—"a hope that one makes a choice to live another day, with an-other option, in the face of a forced choice, which is not a choice at all but a demand" (García and Cortez 105-106). "No me voy a dejar." So, shadow work happens in and with the recognition and acknowledgement, "que así son las cosas." It comes out of a love, care, and hope for oneself and others, a reminder to oneself and others, that while life is the way it is, "siempre hay otra/una manera." It comes from a sentimiento, a demand really, that even in the face of hauntings and haunting circumstances, dignity cannot be forfeited, but instead must be maintained and fostered in and with others. We, too, are humans—"no te dejes." We, too, have dignity—"no te dejes." We are much more than what hauntings have made of us—"no te dejes." Now, once more, Google Translate cannot know the context in which "no te dejes" is used. That is why it cannot translate it effectively; just like academics cannot effectively know and translate the deaths at the U.S.-Mexico Border nor the effects colonization has had on people's consciousness. Google Translate leaves us with a dangling modifier (i.e. don't let you). In many ways, I find this is emblematic of how certain knowledge productions and knowledge making practices such as shadow work cannot be archived. What "No me voy a dejar" means, again, is that even in the face of hauntings and personas con mal intenciones, our bodies are ours.

Shadow work comes from a space that should not have to exist, from a people relegated and forced to spaces reserved for shadows, from those who have had their histories, rights, and dignity stripped

of them and who have been forced to mitigate a precarious position subject position between being a subject of and becoming a subject in hauntings. It comes from a practice, centuries old, which should not have had to be practiced, of bearing witness to hauntings in unsettling ways in order to see an-other option and an-other way—“Siempre hay una/otra manera.” Shadow work comes from an ethos of perseverance that continues to live within the bones of the minoritized and racialized, which should not have had to be constituted, one that refuses to tell the story of just hauntings—“I may be what hauntings have made of me, but I am so much more.” And by no coincidence does this structure echo Stuart Hall and James Badlwin; It comes from a praxis of being forced to cut through, as an-other option, one that in the face of a proper arrival or recognition cuts through the binaries of absence and presence and otherness and sameness.

Shadow work continues to happen, near and far, in academia and outside, because democracy, equity, diversity, inclusion, and decoloniality cannot and have not delivered on their promises. I am often reminded of Grandma, because she was showing me and taking me on paths “we” have been walking together all along, those slowly made and carved out in the shadows by cutting through the spatial organization of the city. Shadow work is not about bootstrapping, about making it on one’s own. As Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty argued, people think themselves out of the “spaces of domination” always “within the context of a collective or communal process” (506). Shadow work is about care and love, the actions one takes then and now for another, unselfishly, not for oneself, but for another. It is about hope without guaranteed predicate, a hope that the actions one takes today for another may bring about possibilities of new stories for them tomorrow. Shadow work is always already about learning how to re-exist, in the face of hauntings and haunting circumstances, in and with dignity.

**José:** There is a politics of display, or spectacle, at work in dominant rhetorics of diversity. As we were writing this essay together, Sonia used the word curate to describe how universities tend to approach the recruitment and acquisition of BIPOC folks for so-called diversity hires. This reminded me of the history of putting people on display, which is an old cultural practice of colonialism. Coco Fusco writes about this in her essay, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” where she argues that performance art in the West began 500 years ago, when colonialists brought people and samples from the Americas to Europe for

“aesthetic contemplation, scientific analysis, and entertainment” (146). “These people,” Fusco writes, “were forced first to take the place that Europeans had already created for the savages of their own Medieval mythology” (146). This is one part of the historical context for the contemporary practices of diversity in universities.

I sometimes feel like I’m on display, part of a collection in a cabinet of curiosities. There are nice events for diversity hires, like me: lunches with very good food, workshops, speakers. There is a good deal of diversity programming. Still, it’s not the work of this programming that makes me feel like I belong to something greater than myself. And I sincerely appreciate the efforts of those who have moved mountains to make diversity programming happen. But it’s the work of my mentors and my peers that has made me feel like I belong to something.

Shadow work is a symptom of a problem—it is not something to be mythologized. Bram Acosta and Maritza Cárdenas, two of my mentors at the University of Arizona, put in countless hours behind the scenes, carving out a space for me to exist at UA. They once hired a babysitter so they could meet me and field my questions at 6pm on a Tuesday evening at a coffee shop—and this was before I really knew them. As a parent now, I know what kind of sacrifice that was for them. They gave space for me to ask questions that I could not ask elsewhere, questions like: Did you see what happened in there? What the hell was that?

This labor was visible and recognizable to me. It makes more sense to think about it as happening in the shadows of diversity programming. This is a kind of work, if you will, that can’t “count” or be accounted for. It’s not something that should be counted precisely because it’s not work that should be happening in the first place. We shouldn’t have to seek each other out because there are so few of us.

**Sonia:** Both Jose and Romeo mention that shadow work emerges in the face of hauntings and mistreatment that BIPOC scholars have always experienced. Shadow work is a symptom and response to larger problems that the academic institution faces in attracting and retaining BIPOC scholars. Perhaps, though, the most important point they make is that shadow work also comes from places of love, belonging, and friendship. While I agree that shadow work is neither something to be mythologized nor valorized, I also find the impetus for shadow work powerful because it comes from the empathy that others have cultivated in us, as shown in our narratives.

Jose and Romeo's narratives perfectly picture where shadow work comes from: Romeo's grandmother demonstrated how shadow work comes from love of her community and the relationships she cultivated and valued there, which she in turn instilled in Romeo; Jose's mentors thoughtfully took the time to counter negative experiences so that he knew he belonged in this community with people who care about him, which facilitated his well being and success in spite of diversity programming. Similarly, I engage in shadow work because I care about others who are also trying to survive in an institution that wasn't built for them. I am of the mindset that because it was/is so hard for me, I'm going to do everything possible to ease that burden for others. And for me, doing shadow work is trying to support others so we can survive and also thrive. I appreciate the acknowledgement that although shadow work should not have to exist, *pero asi son las cosas*; therefore, what impetus could be more powerful than love, friendship, and belonging?

**Romeo:** What kind of work are you doing, and how is it hidden?

**Sonia:** Shadow work calls on me, and when students reach out needing help, I am more than willing to do what I can to help them. The majority of shadow work I do is with students, and because of the nature of it, I can't tell much about it here.

I could tell you about the "Florida Mental Health Act" also known as the "Baker Act," which intends to help people with mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders by providing "temporary detention," "involuntary placement," and "use of restraint" only when necessary or as a safety measure (Florida). Although the language of the act suggests that involuntary placement and restraint are only in particular situations, this is not the case.

Perhaps most importantly, I could tell you that the stories students have shared with me of "being Baker-acted" involved the following: students reported as experiencing suicidal ideation are involuntarily handcuffed and publicly put in a police car on campus; students are admitted to a treatment facility where they are called by a deadname and incorrect pronouns; and students are left alone in a facility with no family nearby.

I could tell you the shadow work I engage in here is being present for students before, during, and after "being Baker-acted," something I've not reported myself, but would think very carefully before doing so—because it can be damaging. This is the type of emotional support I am called to do for students.

I could tell you that in an attempt to help faculty “identify the signs of students in distress,” our state Board of Governors required faculty to complete an online simulation. As well intentioned as the Board of Governors may be, by imposing this simulation training on faculty they demonstrated that they actually have no clue about the types of shadow work faculty—particularly marginalized faculty—do in order to support students in distress. This is the labor put on BIPOC women that no DEI initiative nor simulation training could address.

Unfortunately, shadow work is the type of work we aren’t trained for and work that doesn’t “count,” that is not visible on a CV and not praised by the institution. This type of work is simultaneously the most laborious and most rewarding. In fact, this work can often result in secondary trauma or re-experiencing our own trauma.

**José:** My teaching is focused on creating communities of learners as much as it is focused on the content. In a similar way, I see campus community as an important condition of possibility for learning. When I was at the University of Utah in 2017, a student told me about a taco truck on campus called “Taco Cartel.” Its tagline: “Tacos so good, they should be illegal.” This student and I spent the better part of the academic year working with multiple offices on campus to get the truck to rebrand. I remember trying to talk with the owner about why his truck made it difficult for students to learn, students who themselves had witnessed and experienced the violence of being subjected as “an illegal.” Or who had witnessed and experienced the horrors of human trafficking.

It’s hard to think about how this labor should be named on a CV. Why it should—or should not—be named on a CV. It’s not scholarship, teaching, or service, really. It’s not committee work. I think of it as the shadow work of student retention, though. There are diversity offices and diversity committees that do a great deal of programming to retain students from underrepresented backgrounds. But campus climate is infrastructural and infrapolitical—exclusion is baked into not just the built environment of a campus but the discursive environment.

My efforts are aimed at the infrapolitical part of campus community. Another example: until protestors pulled it down on June 13, 2020, there was a statue on my campus called *The Pioneer*. It was a 13-foot tall bronze sculpture, made in 1919 by Alexander Phimister Proctor. It used to stand facing south, toward another of Proctor’s statues called *The Pioneer Mother*, which faced north toward *The Pioneer*. The pioneer mother and father grounded Oregon’s own Adam and Eve narrative,

and served as monuments to a whitewashed, incomplete history of Oregon. Proctor created other statues, like the one standing on a golf course in Texas called *Robert E. Lee on Traveller* and the one depicting a naked Indigenous woman called *Indian Maiden and Fawn*.

Bert Brown Barker, then-Vice-President of the University of Oregon, donated *The Pioneer Mother* to the university in memory of his own mother, Elvira Brown Barker, herself a pioneer of 1817. In his dedication, he said the point of the statue was “to emphasize the peace which came to the Pioneers after their struggles and hardships pioneering were past and they sat on the western slope of their lives reflecting on the results of their labors and contemplating what these results would mean to their children and their children’s children” (“Pioneer Statue Dedicated Here” 3).

What does the result of their labors mean to those of us who have inherited this institution? What did those statues mean to the BIPOC students on this campus? What kind of story did it tell them about the University of Oregon? What does it mean to BIPOC students that Deady Hall, the very first building constructed on the UO campus, was renamed in 1893 in honor of Matthew Deady, the politician and judge who “ran as a pro-slavery delegate” and “actively promoted the exclusion of free blacks and Chinese from Oregon at the Oregon Constitutional Convention in 1857” (Johnson, et al 3)? The University of Oregon Board of Trustees de-named the the building on June 24, 2020. The interim name for the building is University Hall.

Diversity programming is taking place in the shadow of University Hall. And so is the work of sitting with BIPOC students in my office, and now over Zoom, and sharing their struggle to fit into a place that tells them, through the stories it tells itself about its own history, they don’t belong.

So I tell them what someone told me when I thought I couldn’t do it: “There is a place for you here, and I believe in you.”

**Romeo:** Shadow work, I noted earlier, is about care—the actions one takes then and now, unselfishly and without expectation of reciprocity, for another. Some time back, and during some consulting work, I was asked the question, “How do we teach instructors and professors to be committed to their students?” It struck me as odd, because the first thing that came to mind was the question, “How do we teach white folks not to be racist?” I said then, as I will say now, we can’t teach someone to be committed to students the same way we can’t teach someone not to



be racist. I find that two things can be true at the same time. First, that no amount of diversity, equity, and inclusion and/or anti-racist and social-justice training or tool kits will teach someone not to be racist. Responsibility, Derrida reminds us, is both practical and performative insofar that it requires a “decision to get ‘caught up’” (116). In the case of the non-committed or racist individual, if they themselves have not selected, interpreted, and oriented themselves otherwise on their own accord, we can rest assured that any required workshop will not have a desired effect. If they have not chosen to get caught up on their own accord, to be responsible, no required workshop will change this. (Sonia and Jose exhibit an ethos of getting caught up, not as a choice, but a demand—one that stems from their previous experiences, experiences made all the different by shadow work).

Now, I am aware of Gayatri Spivak’s contention with the impatient academic and the ideal of academic responsibility (See “Responsibility”). Responsibility is an essential dogma in the academy. There is an automatic equation that endures in academia: because one is an educator, we are to assume they do and think responsibly; because one is rhetorically listening, we are to assume they have arrived. And yet, the very place in and from which responsibility is being proposed is so often left unquestioned with academics. We find such conversations through Sonia and José. They engage in a double movement I’d like to frame here with two scholarly pieces. Remember: Villanueva writes that memory both “calls” and “pushes us forward.” A memory of shadow work calls Sonia and José, pushing them forward to carry on such work, not for themselves, but for others. In “Responsibility,” Spivak notes that perhaps the most radical form of practicing and thinking responsibility is to remember “that whatever is formalizable remains in a sort of an intermediary stage” (22). A responsibility? Between an “ungraspable call” and a “setting-to-work” or “construction” and “deconstruction,” Sonia and José both exhibit an ethos of caring for others, unselfishly, responding to calls for help via shadow work. Here, community is not about production, but about friendship, and that makes community possible.

And this brings me to the second truth. I am reminded of Fanon here, once more, who did not ask, “How do I extricate myself?” but rather, “How do we extricate ourselves?” (12). First thing’s first: What exactly do we need to extricate ourselves from? From hauntings and its haunt/ed/ing literacies that have been a force—constituted differently—in all our everyday lives. Secondly, why is it important that

Fanon invoked the “we” over the “I”? “I was answerable,” he wrote, “in my body and in my heart for what was done” to another (122). Fanon imagined the possibility to love another, wherever they may be (231). The “cry” that echoes throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*, and over space and time, is always already wedded to the question of where one chooses to be with oneself and others.

### **Conclusion: On Friendship and Witnessing**

If there is a kind of work that can be said to exist beyond what one does for tenure and/or promotion, a kind of work surplus to “what counts” at the institution within which it occurs, then we might be tempted to see that work as a kind of recovery. To account for what is not included in the official count. To then make changes based upon what had been previously unaccounted for, what is now recovered. To do the work of diversity. However, this “recovery” will not work because the act of accounting is a matter of perception. It is not a matter of merely objectively “listening” or “seeing,” but one of how the acts of listening or seeing are themselves conditioned by something prior. After all, we have a history in this country of seeing BIPOC as anything but human. There is a kind of work happening in the wake of the rhetoric of DEI—occurring behind and below, attending to what DEI leaves behind. By definition, then, it is an unperceivable, uncountable labor in that if it came to be countable, it would no longer be the work of the shadow—it would be more DEI work leaving its own wake. Shadow work, then, is provisional and cannot be brought to bear on DEI—it can’t be made to serve the university’s mission of expropriation.

Dear reader: we call on you to bear witness to this impossible condition. That’s all we can ask for. It’s what we have been doing for each other—making no promises or guarantees of what will happen next, but nevertheless making space to bear witness to each other. Annie Isabel Fukushima argues that witnessing is not about seeing but about perceiving: “unsettled witnessing is a commitment to witnessing without being settled with what is constituted as legible” (14). It is not about making what is illegible, legible. Witnessing, in an unsettled way, is about “traveling into each other’s worlds in ways that push against voyeurism and colonization” (14).

### **Orlando, Florida, 2020—Sonia**

Early in June of 2020, shortly after George Floyd’s death, our department’s Diversity and Inclusion Committee and program directors came together to draft a response statement. They wanted to draft and disperse the statement quickly because, as we all know, academia moves at glacial speed. The work

of quickly organizing to draft this statement was difficult considering faculty were no longer on contract (it was summer) and all coordination happened through email. Although I am part of the D&I Committee, I did not participate in the initial draft of the statement, only the revisions.

Now, we intended to circulate this statement within our own department listserv to demonstrate care for and solidarity with our Black faculty and Black students. The faculty of our department are predominantly White with three BIPOC women: myself and two Black women.

So the predominantly white faculty involved in writing the statement wanted to demonstrate their allyship. These caring and aware white colleagues did a great job drafting this statement with some important revisions suggested from one Black faculty member. The first draft of the statement indicted systems that uphold racism and police brutality and considered what White people could do to combat these systems.

When we consulted with the interim chair at the time (who was not a part of our department), he involved the director of marketing and communications in the dean's office, who said she must approve our statement before it was sent out. Again, all of this communication was happening over email and over the summer. Although we contemplated sending it out without approval, we followed the rules and sent it to the PR person. After some counterproductive back-and-forth with the dean's office, the statement we sent out was a watered-down version of what we originally penned. The title of the statement changed from "In Solidarity Against Systematic Police Brutality in Black Communities" to "First Actionable Steps for Local Anti-Racist Response to Systemic Police Brutality in Black Communities."

The final message was geared more towards what we can do as a department to combat systemic racism and engage anti-racist practices (that lead to seemingly empty actions), rather than using our words to carefully cut into the White supremacist system that is our country, our policing, and our universities. The suggested first steps as a response felt incommensurate with the continued deaths of Black people. I know our colleagues are genuine in wanting to show support, but this experience showed how even well-meaning White Colleagues are silenced and stifled by institutions. Our university has a robust branding and public relations apparatus that ensures every part of our public work is carefully curated. They demonstrated this power with a strong and swift response to our statement. The university apparatus made it clear that if the responses and actions of faculty do not fall under the purview of traditional, feckless DEI work (which the university champions in email after email), then they do not allow it. Period. And this is where DEI fails us. It is not radical because it aligns with interest convergence. The university cares

about DEI insofar as DEI facilitates the White supremacist ideologies that the university was founded upon.

### **Boulder, Colorado, 2017—José**

We're in Boulder for the Conference on Community Writing. We're at the conference center, and it's late. So, we order an Uber to take us to a fast food drive through. The driver engages in a conversation with us. Laughing. Chatting. Everything is good. We arrive at the drive thru: "Yes, can I order a taco, chalupa, and burrito." The driver turns towards one of us in surprise. He asks: "Are you Mexican or Hispanic?" We already knew what he meant by that question. He continues, "Because, just a little while ago, you were speaking perfect English, and then all of a sudden, you were like *chal-ú-pa* and *t-á-co*." He knew we were both different from the moment we got into the vehicle. Everything was alright up to the point we arrived at the drive through, though, because "perfect English" was being spoken. This means, we were both able to "pass" insofar that we did not exhibit our difference beyond skin tone. This, he was okay with. The driver understood us completely, from the moment we first chatted until the moment we ordered. This is clear as he himself repeats what was ordered: "and then all of a sudden, you were like *chalupa* and *taco*." It was at this point in time that he was no longer comfortable with our identity—"The Mexican."

### **Baltimore, Maryland, 2019—Romeo**

We are at the Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute. After listening to a keynote by Lisa Flores, who appealed to the audience to take up the much needed work of social justice and anti-racism, and concluding the final day of sessions, we decided to partake in an organized RSA event. It's one of those parties with the catered food and the drink tickets. It's the kind of thing you feel like you earn at the end of all the hard work. On the way to the event, we spoke about some of the themes of José's seminar on "Rhetoric, Migration, and Mobility" led by Lisa Flores and Leslie Harris: migration and diaspora and traces and politics of mobility. We debated some of those very terms. As we get in line, the limitations of the ways those ideas flesh out theoretically became actual. You see, our conversation continued in line, and was overheard by a white elderly woman who, presumably, was there for the same event. She slowly turned her head—not all the way, but enough to get our attention—and she said, "You don't look like you are supposed to be here." We had heard such comments before, experienced the feeling of them before. As a matter of habit, we smiled, holding in a reaction that would only ever confirm stereotypes of "brown" folks to them. In any case, we were outnumbered. She's persistent. She's asking questions. She's asking to see our

conference badges. We've been here before though, so we draw on a familiar practice. We assent to submit proof that we belong under conditions not of our own making.

### Notes:

1. Derrida reminds us that an inheritance “always keeps its secret” which asks, he says, “read me, will you ever be able to do so”? (*Specters of Marx* 18, 116)
2. Cf. García and Cortez, “The Trace of a Mark that Scatters” (106).
3. This has implications for those wanting to nuance coloniality: where is coloniality and how does it work in general and on us?

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