

Education Review

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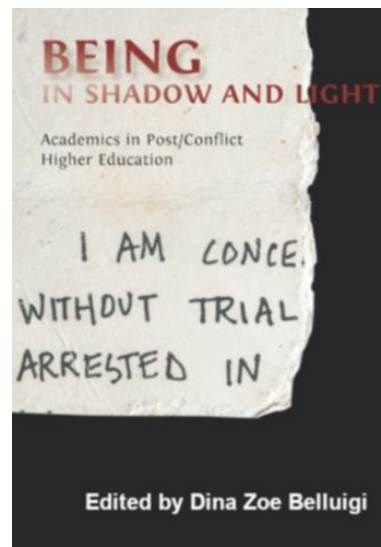
Belluigi, D. Z. (Ed.). (2025). *Being in shadow and light: Academics in post/conflict higher education*. Open Book Publishers.¹ <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0427>

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Higher education in societies affected by conflict and post-conflict conditions is frequently examined through themes such as institutional rebuilding, access expansion, curriculum reform, and student activism. *Being in Shadow and Light: Academics in Post/Conflict Higher Education* redirects this discussion toward academics themselves, emphasizing their intellectual work, vulnerability, memory practices, and pedagogical agency in contexts shaped by state power, violence, displacement, censorship, and historical trauma. Edited by Dina Zoe Belluigi, the volume is ambitious in its intellectual breadth and representational approach. It invites readers to consider how academics live, teach, remember, resist, and produce knowledge within universities marked by unresolved historical legacies.



The editor is well positioned to lead this project. Her scholarship explores inequality, representation, authorship, and transformation within and through universities, with a particular focus on academics and artists from Majority World contexts. The contributors broaden this perspective through diverse geographical and methodological engagements. The volume includes academics, artists, and memory activists whose work addresses Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, England, Mexico, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Palestine, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Venezuela. This scope gives the collection strong comparative value while allowing each conflict history to retain its specificity.

¹ This open access book is available (for no cost) at <https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0427.pdf>. This review was translated by Prof. Dr. Suyatno, M.Pd. and Darni Polii, both lecturers at Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia.

The book consists of a foreword, an introduction, and 10 substantive chapters. The introduction builds the conceptual foundation of the volume by presenting shadow and light as interpretive conditions rather than simple metaphors. Shadow refers to inherited violence, institutional silence, state surveillance, and epistemic injustice, while light represents testimony, creative practice, repair, and pedagogical possibility. The chapters then develop these ideas through conversations, vignettes, case studies, critical ethnographies, oral life histories, interviews, poetry, collage, and archival reflection. This methodological plurality is one of the volume's major contributions because it frames conflict as lived, affective, institutional, historical, and semiotic, extending beyond a narrowly political or state-centered interpretation.

Several chapters clearly demonstrate the distinctive contribution of the volume. The opening chapter on Colombia analyzes the role of the higher education sector in the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-repetition, showing how universities may serve as spaces for testimony, documentation, and transitional justice. Brent Arthur Mestre's chapter, "The Whiteboard," draws on a personal archive of apartheid-era security police objects to show how ordinary materials can carry dense pedagogical and political meanings. Chapters on Sri Lanka, Syria, Northern Ireland, Nigeria, and Palestine further show how academic identity is shaped by displacement, professional risk, inherited silence, institutional complicity, and the everyday effort of sustaining intellectual work under pressure.

The collection is best understood as a textured account of academic life at the intersection of memory, authority, and educational responsibility rather than a conventional policy-oriented book. Its strongest chapters move beyond reporting conflict by examining how conflict reshapes the conditions in which academics know, speak, teach, and belong. In this sense, the volume challenges a common assumption in higher education studies that universities can be treated as stable institutions once political violence has formally ended. The cases indicate that universities often carry conflict into their archives, classrooms, appointment systems, disciplinary boundaries, and institutional silences.

Conceptually, the book resonates with major traditions in postcolonial theory and critical pedagogy. Readers familiar with Bhabha's (1994) discussion of hybridity, Freire's (1970/2000) emancipatory pedagogy, Giroux's (2011) critical theory of education, and Loomba's (2015) analysis of colonial discourse will recognize related concerns about voice, power, representation, resistance, and the politics of knowledge. However, the book's contribution extends beyond the application of these theories. Its stronger achievement lies in showing how academic lives become spaces where such theoretical issues are actively experienced and negotiated. The chapters reveal the ethical and epistemic demands placed on academics who teach, research, archive, and speak in contexts where public memory remains contested.

The first major strength of the volume is its humanistic depth. Academics are presented as individuals negotiating risk, loyalty, uncertainty, grief, and responsibility rather than as abstract institutional actors. This perspective gives the study of post/conflict higher education a moral and affective seriousness

that managerial accounts of university reform sometimes overlook. A second strength is its multimodal and interdisciplinary method. The use of interviews, autobiographical writing, archival objects, poetry, visual materials, and reflective essays broadens the meaning of evidence in higher education research. A third strength is the coherence of the editorial design. Although the chapters differ in genre and location, they remain connected through shared concerns with subjectivity, academic freedom, memory, and knowledge production under constraint.

Another important strength is the book's integration of pedagogy and history. The academics represented in the volume appear as professionals, witnesses, interpreters, survivors, archivists, and, in some cases, targets of the same forces they study. This orientation gives the book particular relevance for readers interested in academic freedom. It suggests that academic freedom is more than a legal or institutional condition; it is also a lived capacity shaped by fear, displacement, institutional recognition, access to archives, and the possibility of being heard. The volume also widens the meaning of educational repair by connecting it to memory, representation, and public testimony.

The book also presents certain limitations. Because the chapters are deliberately qualitative, situated, and expressive, readers seeking comparative measurement, generalizable findings, or practical intervention models may find limited direct guidance. Its broad geographical coverage is a strength, although it also produces some unevenness. Certain chapters offer rich contextual grounding, while others require readers to infer more of the local political and institutional background. The conceptual vocabulary may also challenge readers who are less familiar with postcolonial theory, critical pedagogy, semiotics, or creative research methodologies. These features clarify the book's intended readership and intellectual purpose. The volume is best read as a critical, interpretive, and ethically engaged contribution to understanding academic subjectivity under pressure, rather than as a technical guide for post-conflict university administration.

The most suitable audience includes researchers in higher education studies, comparative and international education, postcolonial studies, academic freedom, peace and conflict studies, and critical pedagogy. Graduate students can use the volume as a model for writing with methodological plurality while maintaining theoretical rigor. Policy-oriented readers may also benefit from the book, especially when they are willing to move beyond institutional metrics and attend to the lived consequences of conflict for academics who sustain teaching, research, and public memory. For teacher educators and university leaders, the book offers an important reminder that pedagogical work is always connected to history and carried by individuals whose identities and institutions are shaped by political conditions.

Overall, *Being in Shadow and Light* is a significant and timely contribution to the study of higher education in contexts of conflict and transition. Its value lies in repositioning academics as knowledge workers, witnesses, artists, teachers, and subjects whose lives reveal the unfinished work of justice. The book is strongest when approached as an invitation to slow down and listen to forms of evidence

that conventional academic writing often overlooks. It deserves attention from scholars and practitioners seeking to understand how universities inherit conflict, how academics carry its traces, and how pedagogy can still become a practice of memory, critique, and hope.

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About the Reviewer

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Dina Zoe Belluigi is the Professor of Authorship, Representation and Transformation in Academia, at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work (SSESW) at Queen's University Belfast; and is affiliated with collaborators and institutional hubs across the world raising questions about the university and its critical function. She supervises and externally examines internationally at the master's and PhD level in the transdisciplinary area of higher education studies, producing research in that field, in addition to critical university studies and creative arts higher education. Prior to relocating to

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