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Sent: Sunday, June 28, 2020 9:03:20 PM

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Subject: Sent Without Permission: A Farewell from an Unwelcome Hire

Dear Middlebury People,

By writing these lines, I take the risk of institutional backlash and retaliation. I mean, we all faculty and administrators remember that time Professor Murray Dry expressed during a meeting in the 2017 Fall, or should I say threatened us nonwhite people, that challenging white privilege will bring worse consequences. However, some things need to be said. I am sharing my stories because once again, Middlebury College has, like many institutions in the US, jumped on the bandwagon of diversity and allyship.

I came to Middlebury College in 2017 with a positive attitude, and within a month here, my opinion shifted to survival mode. A sense of powerlessness and marginalization took over my perspective of my place here. I am an outsider. I was hired, but never accepted, nor welcomed. In three years, the institution has shown no interest in learning from the people of color they hire, nor interest in incorporating the ideas these people bring to the College. It is as if the College is saying, "do not get too comfortable here." The institution pushes racialized people to assimilate and accept to their hostile culture and they are not interested in whether these people grow professionally or their wellbeing. On the contrary, Middlebury College's expectation is that these people of color are simply grateful to have been invited to be part of their exclusive club. And when they take a risk and express their discontent, the institution simply ignores those complaints and expect you to be quiet and disappear.

The College claims to support Black and Brown and PoC faculty, staff, and students, but at the same time, there is a strong contingent of mainly tenured faculty that fight for the continued and uninterrogated comfort of privilege under the guise of "free speech." They argue vociferously for members of the Middlebury community to be able to spew problematic, if not unabashedly bigoted, ideas. As a black woman, there is no way any other black or brown faculty, staff, or student, can merge unless the institution accepts the urgency of a change this culture. It is not enough to bring more diversity and implement programs such as the Black Studies when your black professors are leaving because is not safe. Perhaps there should be a mandatory study group. Here is one book to start: "How to be an antiracist" by Ibram X. Kendi. Then follow your reading with the following book "White Fragility" by Robin DiAngelo.

While Middlebury has, on the surface, increased the number of people of color, in the case of faculty members, most of these are temporary positions. I am one of them, and I am leaving this June 2020. The institution has a huge problem with racism. Just think that six black professors out of thirteen decided to pursue opportunities in other institutions that may provide a safer environment. This exodus puts into evidence that the institution is not ready to integrate/adopt a cultural change. Middlebury is creating the illusion of a safe, diverse, and inclusive environment, but the reality is that Middlebury College is hesitant to create the conditions that foster the safety of black and brown people. As academic and activist Rachel E. Cargel says "unless the racism is addressed and eradicated in the places you are looking to make 'diverse' you are simply bringing people of color into violent and unsafe spaces". A shift towards an anti-racist culture is necessary to demonstrate commitment.

Early in the 2018 Spring semester, one of my department colleagues, Laura Lesta García, an European white woman, held me accountable for all the micro and macroaggressions I have experienced and continued to experience until my last days here at Middlebury College by saying in a supposedly inoffensive and straightforward way “por fin estás tranquila” (finally, you are calm). This phrase, “por fin estás tranquila” was another reminder of my place here. How dare I denounce “rumors?” as the Chief of Diversity, Miguel Fernández, told me in a meeting. Yes, this is how the Chief of Diversity responded in a meeting when asked why the institution does not send a crime alert for racist events as they do with other situations such the time the word racist was tagged in Mead Chapel.

Sadly, my colleague, is somehow right. I am calmer, but that calmness is due to the cultural, social, and professional alienation I experienced from my department, Luso-Hispanic Studies, to the institution. But do not feel sorry for me, I was able to build artificial relations with my colleagues who always question my credentials and, in some cases, suggest I am an affirmative action hire. In their eyes, I do not deserve to be here; remember when you said that to me, Patricia Saldarriaga? I do remember. Or that time, professor Marcos Rohena called me “pendeja” in front of a candidate, and two other male professors white passing, Enrique García and David Miranda, found it funny and inoffensive; When I confronted prof. Rohena, and asked if he would call other white female professors in the department such as he firmly said: “no, never.” I wonder why then he felt he could call me that. Or that moment administration decided to create a problem between Darien Davis and I when there was none by trying to force me and convince me that he was harassing me when I was actually trying to make a complaint against the chair of my department, Mario Higa, under Title VII --, but hey let’s go after the black professor. Dear Darien, I never said anything, and I can forward you the notes of the meetings where I clearly state that I never felt harassed by you and that their actions seemed like a witch hunt. That was the moment the institution finally shut me down. I was finally calm and utterly alone. Imagine experiencing these aggressions, there are more stories, every week for three years. But kudos to me for having survived this racist hell.

I am saying goodbye, hoping that you take my experiences told here to reflect on them and change. I am leaving Middlebury physically and emotionally exhausted; systemic racism has a very harmful consequence on the person that experiences it and you all, from administration to faculty, to staff and students, are responsible. I am leaving Middlebury without even been reach for an exit interview. I encourage all the BPoC staying, students, staff, and faculty, to share your stories without fear and held the institution accountable for their systemic racism. Create a record of all these events, that are not rumors, but real traumatic experience. Make noise. Enough of hiding these events, enough of being off the record.

Sincerely

Marissel Hernández-Romero, Ph.D.

Unwelcome Hire at Middlebury College

Former Visiting Assistant Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Dept. of Luso-Hispanic Studies

Former Advisor ALIANZA

