



INWASCON

ISSN: 2710-5873 (Online)

CODEN: ITMNBH



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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A RAINBOW AT DUSK: A REFLECTION ON HOPE, WORK, AND THE QUIET MEANING OF RECOGNITION

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History:

Received 15 February 2026
Revised 19 March 2026
Accepted 24 April 2026
Available online 12 May 2026

ABSTRACT

The following reflective essay looks at the significance of the emotion felt after witnessing the rainbow on 9 May 2021 at 7.16 PM and the recollection of that event in connection with 30 June 2021 when I got the news of my promotion to full professorship in my university. In this reflection, there is a correlation between the symbolism of nature, the power of endurance, and the experience of academic labor for several years. The aim of this reflection is to determine how one natural phenomenon, along with the dissemination of information regarding a positive change in life, influenced my feeling of hope, resilience, and recognition as an academic scholar. Moreover, this reflection includes a concise narration about a conversation held via messaging app with a colleague who informed me about my promotion and congratulated me with it. In this narrative, I look at how natural events and the words of congratulations may be interpreted as psychological anchors during difficult times, and recognition is usually silent after a long season of hard work that goes unrecognized.

KEYWORDS

Rainbow at dusk; Full professorship; Academic recognition; Resilience; Reflective narrative.

1. INTRODUCTION

On 8th April 2026, I spotted one of the most beautiful expressions of mother nature, as shown in Figure 1. This sight immediately reminded me of another unforgettable moment when a complete rainbow emerged on 9th May 2021 at exactly 7.16 PM, stretching across the evening sky above the rooftops of my residential area (Figure 2). It had been a very busy day, and daylight was gradually yielding to darkness when this sudden arc of colours appeared. The rainbow seemed to arise precisely at the threshold between day and night, transforming an ordinary evening into a moment of reflection. Studies have often associated rainbows with symbolic meanings of hope, emotional renewal, and positive collective sentiment (Jin & Kim, 2019). In psychology, hope has similarly been described as a guiding mental force that helps individuals interpret challenges with optimism and purpose, metaphorically framed as "rainbows in the mind" (Snyder, 2002). The colours were delicate and almost shy, yet remarkably clear. In that instant, I felt as though I was witnessing the completion of something perfect, a brief harmony between light, atmosphere, and inner emotion.

Similar observations have been linked to resilience, where symbols such as rainbows help individuals recover perspective during periods of stress or uncertainty (Putri et al., 2024). Even within therapeutic contexts, imagery involving rainbows has been discussed as representing movement from tears toward healing, from despair toward renewed possibility (Jenmorri, 2006). Thus, what appeared before me was more than a meteorological event. It became a quiet reminder that beauty can emerge exactly when darkness begins to fall. The evening scene with its gentle blend of light, cloudiness, and fading sky had created a sense of quiet tranquility within me. It wasn't anything spectacular but there were some feelings that arose out of it – a sense of movement and change that somehow left room for hope. Every time that I observe a rainbow in action, my mind automatically goes back to the works of Professor P. S. Rainbow. His scientific contributions have always been an intrinsic part of my career life ever since I became a research student until now when I have reached my full academic potential. Something about the name Rainbow seems significant in this case. The name Rainbow in and of itself conveys something unique and distinct, something that suggests continuity, clarity, and purpose. Interacting with his work related to metal accumulation by

marine invertebrates has greatly influenced the way I conduct research, particularly through his analysis of zinc, copper, and cadmium concentrations in crabs and barnacles, his study of heavy metal concentration trends, and the crustacean metal accumulation process (Rainbow, 1985) (Rainbow, 1990) (Rainbow and White, 1989). Even his focus on studying trace metals via painstaking lab tests serves as a reminder that there are no quick fixes in the world of scientific inquiry (Rainbow et al., 1990). I can hardly articulate why he has such an impact on me, but each time I delve into his theories, I am reminded once again of why I chose this career path, how much it means to me, and that it keeps evolving with me. As in a rainbow, a combination of elements results in one magnificent display – light and rain, darkness and brightness. This was also true of my life at the time. I had too many things to do and never enough sleep. There was always something to be done, someone to talk to, and someplace to go. Sometimes, I even felt like a *kerbau* (water buffalo) – plodding on and on, hauling my burdensome load.



Figure 1: A delicate even though incomplete rainbow arched gracefully over the shoplots at Melawati at 7:12 PM on April 8, 2026, captured without any manipulation from AI applications, at the precise moment when daylight transitioned into dusk.



Figure 2: A delicate yet complete rainbow arched gracefully over the residential rooftops at 7:16 PM on May 9, 2021, captured without any manipulation from AI applications, at the precise moment when daylight transitioned into dusk.

And yet, there it stood, the rainbow, calmly and almost gently, amidst all that fatigue. I was reminded that beauty never avoids difficulty but emerges from it. At the time, I had no idea just how significant the experience would become, how closely it would be tied to what would transpire in my personal life within mere weeks.

This meditation reflects on the connections made possible through the encounter between the natural experience and my own academic life culminating in my advancement to full professor status in late April 2021. Ultimately, it reflects on the power that can lie in the mundane coupled with simple human awareness.

2. THE RAINBOW AND ITS FIRST MEANING (9 MAY 2021)

The rainbow seen on 9 May 2021 occurred after a long, difficult day. The sky was undergoing rapid changes, with daylight gradually receding towards dusk. The roofscapes created a tranquil backdrop, giving the impression that the rainbow was peacefully settling over the buildings. My state of mind at that time can be described as relaxed and contemplative while also being burdened by a sense of heaviness. Although the day was winding down, I could feel that the next day would come with its challenges. Yet, there was an underlying message in that gentle arch across the heavens – that of continuity, perseverance, and the belief that darkness will always be temporary. At that instant, I sensed the subtle message of the rainbow as if it was assuring me that my work was not going unnoticed. As academics, most of our work takes place away from the spotlight. We conduct literature reviews, advise students, analyse data, and revise manuscripts several times until we reach the 50th or even 100th revision. There is no applause for these efforts, but they are what sustain our careers. The rainbow, in its quiet way, seemed to tell me that persistence is not wasted, and that careful, steady work will eventually lead to clarity. I held onto that image without fully understanding why it felt so important.

3. THE MOMENT OF RECOGNITION (30 JUNE 2021)

This was on 30 June 2021 at 9:04 AM, when I received a straightforward message from Mr. J saying, “Congratulations Prof. Dr. Yap.” My immediate response was one of shock. This was followed by a reply at 9:56 AM saying, “What do you mean?? I have not received my professorship yet.” At this stage, I did not receive any official notification. Having applied for many years, gone through several rounds of evaluation, and having waited for quite some time, getting congratulated without any notification seemed somewhat surreal. However, as the day progressed, its significance became more apparent. At 18:24 PM, after confirming from my head of department, I sent another message back to Mr. J, thanking him for being the first person to break the news to me. The message sent by Mr. J did not come out of nowhere. He was one of those who attended the meeting with the Dean when I got my promotion announced. The few moments were a reward after several years of perseverance and hard work. It was the last step in a long journey towards being a professor.

It carried an additional meaning when Mr. J added the fact that I could have got my promotion years earlier. It was not merely a matter of delivering some news to me. There was also a recognition of the journey that preceded it.

This is what made it so profoundly human. Besides being a committee’s decision, it became also a recognition of what I had achieved over the years.

4. SEEING A FULL RAINBOW AS HOPE, RESILIENCE, AND SELF - REFLECTION

Now when I look back at the rainbow, I find that it means a lot of things to me. The table provided below summarises the various meanings that the rainbow holds for people. In many religious traditions, the rainbow is associated with unity and harmony, and the idea of rebirth and regeneration after struggles emerges from this (Laderman, 2018) (Bonfil and Bonfil, 2025).

In literature and mythology, it has been used to signify transformation and transition into other forms of existence (Carbó, 2025). For me, it symbolises prolonged efforts resulting in eventual recognition, which aligns well with concepts of hope and resilience explored in various academic writings (Newman et al., 2017) (Lee, 2015).

Additionally, the image of the rainbow allowed me to reflect upon my personal experiences. According to researcher basic images and symbols are usually used to organise and structure our feelings (Gao et al., 2020). That experience, in particular, has helped me to see a bigger picture and realize what fatigue, endurance, and identity mean in terms of my academic career. Moreover, the rainbow is quite a tangible phenomenon that is determined not only by my mood but also by environmental circumstances such as moisture, sunshine, and clouds (Carlson et al., 2022). In this way, the rainbow brings everything together. On the one hand, the rainbow represents the connection between the personal and the environmental, between the emotions and science. On the other hand, it is the result of my experiences and discoveries and becomes my way of looking at reality.

Table 1: Symbolic and Scientific Interpretations of the Rainbow.

Theme	Key Idea	Explanation / Interpretation	References
Spiritual and Religious Symbolism	Rainbow as divine communication	Represents a connection between heaven and earth, symbolizing divine promise after catastrophe and assurance of protection	(Laderman 2018) (Bonfil and Bonfil 2025)
Mythological and Artistic Meaning	Rainbow as transformation	Linked to the Indo-Tibetan “rainbow body,” symbolizing transition from material to subtle existence and transformation between states	(Carbó, 2025)
Personal Academic Journey	Rainbow as recognition and transition	Reflects progression from associate to full professor, symbolizing culmination of long-term effort and acknowledgment	Present reflection
Hope and Resilience	Rainbow as post-crisis optimism	Represents resilience and the ability to envision constructive futures despite adversity, similar to post-storm emergence	(Newman et al., 2017) (Lee, 2015)
Psychological and Reflective Tool	Rainbow as metaphor for introspection	Serves as a framework to organize emotions such as fatigue, identity, and achievement through metaphorical understanding	(Gao et al., 2020)

Table 1 (Cont): Symbolic and Scientific Interpretations of the Rainbow.

Environmental and Climate Context	Rainbow as atmospheric phenomenon	Formation depends on environmental conditions such as moisture, sunlight, and clouds, linking personal experience to climate systems	(Carlson et al., 2022)
Planetary and Ecological Connection	Rainbow as part of larger systems	Demonstrates how individual experiences are embedded within broader ecological and planetary processes	(Carlson et al., 2022)
Integrated Meaning	Rainbow as multidimensional symbol	Represents a convergence of spirituality, resilience, personal growth, and environmental science	(Laderman, 2018; Bonfil and Bonfil 2025; Carbó, 2025; Carlson et al., 2022)

The significance that I attach personally to the particular rainbow that I observed on 9th of May 2021 gains further meaning once we consider the cultural and spiritual significance of the phenomenon that is the rainbow throughout history. Specifically, across various religions, particularly in the Abrahamic tradition, the rainbow is a symbol of a bridge connecting the heavens and the earth (Laderman, 2018). Thus, after destruction, there is a continued existence marked by care and continuity. In this context, the bow in the clouds should be viewed not as a symbol of violence but rather as an instrument of restraint and renaissance.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of the rainbow is a subject of art and philosophy, where the rainbow takes the form of a transition from one state into another. Additionally, suggests that interpretations of Joan Miró’s paintings may include the interpretation of the rainbow as a sign for the phenomenon of "rainbow body" that refers to the Indo-Tibetan belief of transition from grosser to subtler levels of existence (Carbó, 2025).

My personal experience of transitioning from being an associate professor to becoming a full professor easily slots into this metaphorical narrative. Years of hard work and perseverance have been subtly highlighted through a single instance of acknowledgment. In all of this is hope. In addition, human beings exist “between cities of fear and cities of hope,” with resilience being dependent on one’s capacity to visualize a better future despite the uncertainties (Newman et al., 2017).

This metaphor is encapsulated beautifully in the imagery of a rainbow. It does not wipe out the storm preceding it but presents a new frame of reference. In line with this, characterizes hope as a vision that helps one see difficulty and possibility simultaneously (Lee, 2015). Through this lens, the rainbow has come to symbolize for me that years of unappreciated effort could very well form part of a bigger narrative.

Furthermore, the metaphor of the rainbow inspired me to think about my own life experience. Metaphors enable people to find meanings for their experiences and feelings and express something that cannot easily be put into words (Gao et al., 2020). In my case, the image of the complete rainbow seen on that evening became a means for making sense of my experience with work, fatigue, and recognition as an academic.

Finally, the idea of the rainbow can unite both the personal and the global aspects of the situation. According to scientific evidence, it is known that the phenomenon of the rainbow depends on very specific conditions—presence of moisture in the air, the angle at which the rays of the sun shine, the presence of certain types of clouds—which, in turn, is affected by climate change (Carlson et al., 2022). Not only does the photo I have taken capture my individual experience, but it also serves as a tiny document of one moment in an ever-changing landscape. By this logic, the rainbow becomes far more than just an interesting phenomenon in the atmosphere. It represents the concepts of transformation, hope, endurance, and even science. It embodies my own personal narrative—the story of hard work, patience, and recognition—that transcends the meaning of this moment for me as I stood in my neighborhood and stared up at that magnificent sight above me.

5. REFLECTING ON SYMBOLISM, WORK, AND MEANING

As shown in Table 2, the rainbow observed in May 2021 and the promotion announcement made in June 2021 are located in one timeline of emotions since both events occurred almost simultaneously. As such, the rainbow can be viewed retrospectively as a subtle indication of transition, which signifies an end to the extensive efforts made and the uncertainty that existed while, at the same time, suggesting the emergence of something new. From the perspective of hope as a positive and proactive emotion, the rainbow is perceived as a form of initial emotional preparation for resilience. It captures the state of mind of being receptive to any potential outcomes, even when faced with adversity (Lee, 2015). This corresponds with the dualism wherein fear coexists with hope, particularly in professional settings with delayed recognition (Newman et al., 2017).

The WhatsApp message sent by Mr. J provides yet another significant dimension. Here is the illustration of the fact that such recognition may not necessarily be formal in nature. At times, such recognition comes to us through small, informal, and sometimes personal means and carries an equal or even greater emotional significance. From all these incidents, one can see that it is very likely that recognition, perseverance, and justice may not necessarily occur in a dramatic fashion. However, their influence can be felt over the long term.

Table 2: Reflection on Symbolism, Work, and Meaning

Theme	Key Idea	Explanation / Interpretation	References
Temporal Connection	Alignment of events	The rainbow (May 2021) and promotion announcement (30 June 2021) together frame a transitional life phase	Present reflection
Transition and Closure	End of a prolonged journey	The rainbow symbolizes the culmination of years of effort, uncertainty, and internal striving before promotion	Present reflection
Hope as Orientation	Active engagement with uncertainty	Hope enables persistence despite challenges, with the rainbow acting as an early signal of this mindset	(Lee, 2015)
Emotional Landscape	Coexistence of fear and aspiration	Reflects tension between anxiety (delayed promotion, workload) and aspiration for progress	(Newman et al., 2017)
Symbolic Reinforcement	Rainbow as reassurance	The rainbow did not guarantee success but affirmed that efforts were meaningful and not wasted	(Lee, 2015) (Newman et al., 2017)
Relational Recognition	Informal validation through communication	WhatsApp message from Mr. J represents genuine, early acknowledgment beyond formal institutional processes	Present reflection
Forms of Affirmation	Visual and relational support	Rainbow provides symbolic hope, while messages provide emotional and social validation	Present reflection

Table 2 (Cont): Reflection on Symbolism, Work, and Meaning

Meaning-Making Process	Integration of ordinary experiences	Simple events (rainbow, message) become powerful symbols of endurance and achievement	Gao et al. (2020)
Recognition and Justice	Delayed but meaningful acknowledgment	Highlights that recognition can be subtle, informal, and deeply personal rather than institutional	Gao et al. (2020)
Integrated Reflection	Convergence of symbolism and lived experience	Demonstrates how natural phenomena and human interactions together shape meaningful life narratives	(Lee, 2015) (Gao et al., 2020)

The fact that these two critical points occurred one after another allowed me to associate more significance with the event. In retrospect, I now realize that I was close to making a crucial transition, even if I did not know it then. The rainbow became a symbol of the end of a difficult and prolonged journey within myself which had been accompanied by much hard work and uncertainty.

Receiving the promotion made it clear to me that this chapter of my life had come to an end and that a new one would begin. Studying about resilience and hope has contributed to my understanding of this episode in my life. If hope refers to an active process that enables us to look positively into our future despite our current problems then seeing that rainbow during dusk became a kind of prelude to that approach (Lee, 2015).

It happened at a moment when I was feeling various emotions: anxiety concerning delayed promotion, the challenges of teaching and research, and yet faith that something would happen eventually. This rainbow did not assure my success; however, it assured me that my work made an impact.

The WhatsApp messages sent by Mr. J represent the true meaning of recognition via even the most simple means. No elaborate ceremonies were required: all that was needed was for him to send a message through his phone. What made this message special was the fact that he believed in my abilities and that I should have received the promotion much earlier. The rainbow brought me a feeling of hope visually, whereas the WhatsApp messages provided validation.

It is not a question of the mystic nature of the rainbow or WhatsApp message but rather of our tendency to hold on to life experiences which have great personal significance to us. A rainbow is merely a physical occurrence while a WhatsApp message is simply a technological marvel. But for me, they were profound representations of culmination, tenacity, and much awaited validation.

Life does not always present its significant occurrences in dramatic forms; it can come quietly and inconspicuously, like the rainbow in the evening or the WhatsApp message prior to any formal letter being received. Such was my life experience as defined by Gao et al. (2020).

6. CONCLUSION

The rainbow that I observed on 9 May 2021 was not just a beautiful scene that was captured by my camera phone. It has gradually grown into a symbol of strength and dedication. My appointment to a full professorship that happened on 30 June 2021 via the message of Mr. J and later officially has tied up to the first occurrence in a kind of story. It is common knowledge that rainbows have historically been viewed as signs of transformation and connection among various civilizations, which makes my story even richer. This particular moment connects my life events with the perception of humans as a whole, who view rainbows as signs of hope following struggle.

The brief conversation that I had with Mr. J is significant in this case. Rainbows can dissipate quickly, while messages could be brief, yet their significance can last for many years to come. Being appointed a professor did not mean that my problems were solved, but it proved that perseverance comes with its own subtle reward.

The rainbow will continue to remind me of my struggles not only in the way it was displayed on 9 May 2021 but also when I recall it together with 30 June 2021 as a reminder of completeness, continuity, and the simple fact that even lengthy journeys reach their destination, at times with an encouraging note from a peer prior to official recognition.

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