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Ethan Trinh  
*Georgia State University*

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#### Recommended Citation

Trinh, Ethan, "Still You Resist: An Autohistoria-teoria of a Vietnamese Queer Teacher to Meditate, Teach, and Love in the Coatlicue State" (2020). *Middle and Secondary Education Faculty Publications*. 140. doi: [10.1080/09518398.2020.1747662](https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1747662).

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“Still You Resist”: An Autohistoria-teoria of a Vietnamese queer teacher to meditate, teach, and

love in the Coatlicue state

Ethan Trinh

Georgia State University

## Abstract

This piece will be walking, writing, meditating in in-between spaces with me. I call this act queer walking meditation, which blended autohistoria, the Coatlicue State, and meditation to examine my own queer self. This queer walking meditation helps me move between stories, initiates dialogues with a self, recognizes my self's confusion, and leads to a series of actions to fight against the struggles and complicatedness in my identities. As a result, I learned how to mediate and take actions for myself and with my students from the standpoint of a Vietnamese queer, accented, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teacher and Chicana-feminist writer. This walk witnesses the cathartic process through which I came to understand intersectional identities and how I used them into teaching, researching, and writing in a white gay world. I came up with another question, *Is that the feeling of intersectionality?*, at the end of this walk in order to open another walk in the future.

*Keywords:* Gloria Anzaldúa, autohistoria-teoria, meditation, intersectionality, ESOL

“Still You Resist”: An Autohistoria-teoria of a Vietnamese queer teacher to meditate, teach, and  
love in the Coatlicue state

I am walking in the cold weather in Canada where the snow has covered its whiteness on leaves and benches on the street. The branches are gearing toward the ground. I am wondering how these trees survive and resist the harshness of cold weather. Some people are holding cups of Tim Hortons, a popular Canadian coffee, rushing to their destinations while others are waiting for the next bus. I am walking toward a bus stop to go to the airport. Simultaneously, I am sipping half-cream, half-sugar Tim Horton’s, and walking peacefully under a Canadian sky. I am breathing deeply, listening to vivid sounds of my breath, staying focused on the present moment, and reflecting on journeys since I immigrated to the United States from Vietnam in 2015.

While walking meditatively on Canadian soil, I asked myself: “What does it mean for me as a queer, immigrant, teacher of color, to be in love? In love with whom? Being in love is a luxury that I would probably never have. Or worse, do I deserve a pure love in a western gay/queer world where I do not see myself fitting in? Or worst, will I be another victim who is being fetishized by another white gay male for my Asian feminine fat look (Eguchi & Long, 2019; Han, 2015; Nguyen, 2014)? Or more painfully, will I be isolated, unwelcomed within an Asian queer community due to racialized hierarchy (Han, 2015)? However, if I do not love and appreciate this Asian queer fat body, who is going to love and appreciate it? The more I dismantle my intersectional identities, the deeper I fall into a vicious circle of being sexually, mentally, linguistically, and racially oppressed in a queer world where I could not find *either* an exit *or* an entry (Trinh, 2020c). I have been stuck in-between-ness space (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). I thought about suicide due to multiple oppressions of oppressions in the western queer world (Trinh, 2020c). Therefore, the acts of writing, walking, and meditating in this in-between

space helped me release my rage, hopelessness, and anxiety in order that I can come back and appreciate the crossroads of intersectionality (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). As Hill Collins & Bilge define, “intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. [...] It as an analytic tool gives people better access to the complexity of the world and of themselves” (p. 2). Therefore, this piece is to see the complexities of my own identities to connect with people who might have shared the same experiences.

While walking meditatively, I notice the nature around me. The whiteness of snow across the street is covering them. Like the snow, the white heteronormative cultures are functioning similarly, preventing me and other queer writers and teachers of color from writing our stories. We, queer writers, teachers, researchers, educators of color, are marginalized and silenced in the queer mainstreams’ discussions; the beauty of our interconnectedness in terms of race, gender, sexualities, and class are neglected (Alimahomed, 2010). Our queer stories are restricted in teaching and learning practices due to the pressure of heteronormative and sexist curriculum (Lange, Duran, & Jackson, 2019; Mayo, 2007). In fact, queer researchers of color (Brockenbrough, 2015; Ford, 2017; Hayes, 2014; Lange et al., 2019; McCready, 2013) have continuously called for research to examine cross-epistemological stories of queer teachers of color. By doing so, we can challenge and disrupt the perpetuation of silencing and marginalizing queer communities of color in Eurocentric heteronormative research and academia.

As a result, I am choosing to use my personal experience to challenge and disrupt the perpetuation in this paper. Specifically, I share my perspective of a Vietnamese queer, immigrant, Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teacher of color, and first-generation doctoral student to connect with other students and teachers who might share similar

intersectional identities. I write this piece for other queer people of color, queer immigrants, queer Vietnamese teachers who are living and teaching in the U.S., in any countries, and/or in in-between spaces and worlds. More specifically, I write this piece to describe the cathartic process through which I came to understand the intersection of my identities and share how I used my own identities into teaching transnational immigrant students, meditating to see a queer self, and finding the meaning of love. I hope to reclaim my own voice to continue to challenge heteronormativity in this society.

Writing this piece is an excruciatingly painful process for me. However, if I do not find courage to expose my queer self and vulnerabilities, how can I inspire other queer educators and students of color to write about their identities and stories in the future? Writing this piece is an ongoing dialogue with a self, mixed with the past stories; therefore, I am going to use the present tense to meditate while writing so that I can concentrate on the present moments. Thầy Thích Nhất Hạnh (2015), a Vietnamese Zen master, advises us on how to walk meditatively,

We frequently walk with the sole purpose of getting from one place to another. But where are we in between? With every step, we can feel the miracle of walking on a solid ground. We can arrive in the present moment with every step. (p. 7)

Therefore, this piece is *walking* meditatively with me and is focusing on each moment of truth of my life in every step.

While I am walking, writing, meditating, Gloria Anzaldúa, a friend of mine whose spirit now is a free wind (Trinh, 2019d), is whispering in my ears, “Admitting your darker aspects allows you to break out of your self-imposed prison” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 553). I pause. Silence. “Which prison do I need to break?” I am wondering. Then, Anzaldúa (2012) continues to whisper to my ear, “When I write, I feel like I am carving bone. It feels like I’m creating my own face, my own heart” (p. 95). Likewise, I am carving pieces of my life so that I

can feel aches in my heart deeply as I am confronting my queer self at this intersectional road. My heart runs faster even though I am trying to walk mindfully. Let me slow down both the pace of my walking and the process in my head a bit.

I am taking a deep breath. I am being mindful of the steps. I am breathing in and out. Anzaldúa stays still, continuing to whisper to me, “But it will cost you. When you *woo el oscuro*, digging into it, sooner or later, you pay the consequences—the pain of personal growth” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 553). I want to understand what “the pain of personal growth” means and looks like in this walking meditation. I want to enter this pain so that I can grow from it. As such, I am falling into the *Coatlicue* state while walking and writing in this in-betweenness (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). In the next section, I will explain how the *Coatlicue* state as a theoretical framework that helps me “see through” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 554) and develop “perspectives from the cracks” (Keating, 2006, p. 9). I therefore ask for your patience, empathy, and understanding in this walking meditation so that I can be calm and brave to share my story of crossing the different borders of my life and my queerness.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Gloria Anzaldúa (2012), a Chicana feminist thinker, writer, lesbian, philosopher, activist, and above all, a free spirit, explains that *Coatlicue*, or “serpent skirt”, is an Earth goddess who “had a human skull or serpent for a head, a necklace of human hearts, a skirt of twisted serpents and taloned feet” (p. 49). Later, Anzaldúa further elaborates:

Goddess of birth and death, *Coatlicue* gives and takes away life; she is the incarnation of cosmic processes. Simultaneously, depending on the person, she represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective—something more than mere duality or a synthesis of duality. (p. 68)

In addition to her representation as the Goddess, Coatlicue is a state that “represents the resistance to new knowledge and other psychic states triggered by intense inner struggle, which can entail the juxtaposition and the transmutation of contrary forces, as well as paralysis and depression” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015, p. 242). Anzaldúa describes the Coatlicue state as “the hellish third phase of your journey” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 551), a process that helps a person to confront the struggles, the darkness, the pain in their souls. Anzaldúa employs meditation as a bridge from the Coatlicue state to face the reality: “The last thing you want is to meditate on your condition, bring awareness to the fore, but you’ve set it up so you must face reality. Still you resist” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 551). The outcome is a transcendence of your own self, your “perception shifts, emotion shifts—you gain a new understanding of your negative feelings” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 552).

From my emerging understanding of Gloria Anzaldúa’s philosophy and her scholarly work, the Coatlicue state is complex. It describes interconnectedness of life and death, of pain, wounds, and healing, of negativity and positivity. In other words, it is an intertwining of contradictions to help transform a self. As Anzaldúa reiterates, “You can’t change the reality, but you can change your attitude toward it, your interpretation of it” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 552). This state thus witnesses a self’s resistance from/with the dark, from/with inner and outer struggles of “self-division, cultural confusion, and shame” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009, p. 330), from/with the hellish phase of one’s life in order to lead to a positive change *in* a self.

To be honest, it is not the first time I experienced the Coatlicue state. Last time, when I was sitting in a Coatlicue circle with a queer Latinx student, we both felt this transmutation in terms of emotion, physique, psyche, language, skin color, race, and class (Trinh, 2019a). In that circle, my student and I faced the reality of truth and sadness together when we confronted the



sexism in a traditional school (i.e.: in Vietnam and in the U.S. school systems) as we performed our roles in a heteronormative culture and classroom (Butler, 2006). In that space, we faced shamefulness, opposition and duality as dealing with identity and differences:

Our tongues are cut, frozen and replaced to fit in the crowd. We are sweating; we are doubting; we are afraid of judging eyes; we are hating ourselves; we are hating others for hating us; we are rolling back to our regime; we are continuing to hide; we are seizing ourselves in a closet again. We are handcuffing the whole body—to harm ourselves, to cut ourselves, to disappear. Because we are ashamed. (Trinh, 2019a, para. 12)

Even though I did not make any revolution to completely change heteronormativity in schools, my students and I wanted to use love through an act of hugging to each other before the class ended, so that we could continue to love and support each other during the learning process.

In another time and space, I was walking around in the Coatlicue state, anxiously sharing a story of my mom and myself surviving domestic violence (Trinh, 2018). I did not have a concept of the Coatlicue then, but I used the power of meditation to share the story. There is a connection between meditation and the Coatlicue state, I acknowledge. During that walk, I asked myself to return to *tĩnh tâm* (zero-ness), a Vietnamese Buddhist's meditation, to share the different meanings of an act of hugging in different stages of my life and my mom's when we were in Vietnam. However, through an act of hugging, I have learned how to seek a transparent conversation with my dad, acknowledge him as part of my life, and learn how to let go of my *thù hận* (the hatred) and *cố chấp* (not letting go) toward him at the end of the walking meditation.

Coming back to this walking, writing, and meditating space, I am asking myself to do similarly: coming back to *tĩnh tâm*, to meditation in order to help me navigate through the Coatlicue state so that I can see through the struggles and the roots of my own hatred for my sexuality. I want to continue to resist and face the reality of oppression and marginalization in a western queer world toward queer communities of color. In order to do so, as Anzaldúa reminds

me, “I have to trust and believe in myself as a speaker, as a voice for the images. I have to believe that I can communicate with images and words and that I can do it well” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 95). I will thus need to trust my voice, my own story, which is a powerful account to sustain this walk. Therefore, in the next section, I will describe how I use *autohistoria-teoria* as a method to continue to “creating my own face, my own heart” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 95) as engaging in writing, walking, meditating in the Coatlicue state.

### **Autohistoria-teoria as Method**

In footnote in her 2002 essay, *now let us shift ... the path of conocimiento ... inner works ... public acts*, Anzaldúa describes “autohistoria is a personal essay that theorizes” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 578). Then, AnnaLouise Keating (2009), a professor who co-writes and co-edits with Gloria Anzaldúa, provides the following definition:

Autohistoria-teoria describe a relational form of autobiographical writing that includes both life story and self-reflection on the storytelling process. Writers of autohistoria-teoria blend their cultural and personal biographies with memoir, history, storytelling, myth, and/or other forms of theorizing. By so doing, they create interwoven individual and collective identities. (pp. 241-242)

Further, Andrea Pitts Pitts (2016) characterized important key points in autohistoria-teoria as “collaborative, sensuously embodied, and productive of critical self-reflection, which can be both harmful and enabling” (p. 357). In her essay, Pitts stated that autohistoria-teoria is “performatively demonstrated throughout [Anzaldúa’s] writing” (p. 358). As a queer writer of color who is inspired by Chicana feminism, i.e.: Gloria Anzaldúa’s philosophy and scholarly works, I employ autohistoria-teoria in this waking meditation to go through the Coatlicue state. I employ autohistoria-teoria as a form of autoethnography (Chang, 2008) to dismantle my queer story to challenge the whiteness, the power, and the privilege of western white queer males in queer communities and culture. Through this personal essay, I continue to build a bridge of love

(Trinh, 2019b) with queer teachers of color, queer immigrants, those who think they do not deserve a pure love in a western gay world or those who are standing at the crossroad of intersectionality (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). For me, if we want to relate and make a change in someone's life, we need to understand and change ourselves first, as Anzaldúa consistently state in her work: "I change myself, I change the world" (Anzaldúa, 2012; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Anzaldúa & Keating, 2009). Further, this autohistoria-teoria, a form of research oneself "as an act of intervention" (Han, 2015, p. 11), helps heal the racialized and sexualized wounds *in* me caused by multiple oppressions that I am about to share. This paper is thus research of my life. I bring my life into research, and research *self* is part of my life.

### **Face the Reality**

I am boarding the airplane to fly back to the States. I find myself a space to settle down between two aisles. This boarding reminds me of a flight that I took in December 2015. Back then, I decided to leave Vietnam to the U.S. with my parents. They have always been the first and foremost priority of my life, regardless. Even though I did not 100% believe in meritocracy (McIntosh, 1990), the so-called "American Dreams," I heard about freedom in the U.S.; freedom of speech, sexual freedom to be specific, and open-minded perspectives through different stories from my relatives who had lived in the U.S.. I then dreamt about a land of freedom, acceptance, equality for all, especially for those who are struggling with sexual identities like myself.

During my five-years teaching and living in the U.S., I have been using intersectional layers of my identities as a Vietnamese queer, immigrant, writer, TESOL teacher of color, to support other marginalized populations in different spaces. Specifically, I created a circle of healing to break down different layers of shame for myself as a queer teacher of color and my student, a queer Latinx middle-schooler, to escape the regime of isolation due to our sexual

orientations (Trinh, 2019a). Next, I built a foundation of love, trust, and support for graduate students of color in academia to overcome the enough-ness, a self-doubtfulness of our own self and identities, in a competitive academia (Trinh, 2019b). Further, I used the power of writing to confront the rigidity of academics that oppressed my creativity in writing (Trinh, 2019c), and used it as a tool of rebellion to reclaim my distinctiveness as a first-generation immigrant, queer doctoral student in academia and in teaching (Trinh, 2020b; Trinh & Merino, in press; Trinh & Pentón Herrera, forthcoming). Although I have worked and expanded myself in multiple educational spaces, I could not escape the feeling of being sexually oppressed due to my sexual minority status as a Vietnamese queer immigrant in a western gay world (Eguchi & Long, 2019; Han, 2015; Nguyen, 2014)

Reflecting on my intersectional identities, I came to recognize that I belong to *nowhere* in a gay community; I do not belong to either western gay world or Asian gay community (Han, 2015). In *Geisha a Different Kind*, C. Winter Han (2015) described a contemporary gay life that “masculinity is rewarded while feminity is discouraged” (p. 4). Then, Han further explained a hierarchical structure of gay culture, “Gay white men are often constructed to be masculine, thus, universally desirable. More important, gay Asian men are socially conditioned to not question white male supremacy within the white-centered gay community” (p. 55). As a queer Asian accented immigrant of color navigating through the western gay world, I am *expected* to be “submissive, quiet, non-confrontational, and feminine” (Han, 2015, p. 55). As a *new* queer Asian immigrant to this country, I am a sexual object “preferred” by a gay white male because “Asian men who have been [in the U.S.] longer tended to be more loud, demanding, and aggressive” (Han, 2015, p. 110). In addition, the white gay males can exert the power and make love *on* marginalized Asian queer men by using their racial and sexual white privilege (Nguyen, 2014).

Therefore, Asian queer men belong to sexual minorities, “a subcultural category referencing the racialized fetishes of an older white male for the diminutive and effeminized Asian male” (Lim, 2014, p. 27), myself included. Due to the “white-is-the-best-mentality” (Han, 2015, p. 55) and the perpetuation of media platforms which continue to discount the values of gay Asian men (see more Han, 2015; Nguyen, 2014), I was asked to be penetrated by a white gay male when we first talked on a social media platform. The white privilege had suppressed and invisibilized my body, my identities, turning me to a passive and submissive object in a sexual and racial game.

Sexually, I was asked to be bottomed by a white gay male. Socially, I was being racialized and suppressed to the bottom of the hierarchy of the society. More painfully, due to the privilege and dominance of white gay males in gay culture, a new queer Asian immigrant like me continue to suffer from racialized hierarchy within gay Asian community for “a competition” because it is such a “success” or is “better than the other Asians” as one has a white partner or catch white male attention (Han, 2015, pp. 106-107)

As a minority within minority within gay community,

I screamed in silence, in pain, in hopelessness.

I thought about suicide

because of bullsh!t and oppressions.

Who gives who the power of judging others

while we all are getting stuck

in a circle of normativity?

Who gives who the privilege of silencing others

while we are enduring the confusion

of our own racialized and sexualized identities?

Who gives who the freedom of choosing others  
while we also belong to others to be chosen?

Who gives who the voices?

Who gives us the voices?

Who gives me the voice?

I lost my voice

...

..

As a result of being racialized and sexualized within a western gay culture, I swore to myself that I would never fall in love again, especially for a white gay man. I do not have the privilege of a white gay male to *access* to love. I do not have the privilege of being a “native” English speaker that was born and raised in the U.S. I do have the privilege of speaking perfect English. My positionality as a new accented Vietnamese queer immigrant rejects and erases my visibility, my queerness, my Vietnamese-ness. My positionality thus becomes political. My sexuality thus becomes political. But,

If my sexuality is politicized,

Who am I in this game of politics?

If sexuality is a hideous seek-and-hide,

Who am I in this game to be found and seen?

If sexuality is dangerous and bloody,

Who am I in this game to take a risk?

If sexuality is illegitimate,

Who am I to break a chain?

A *chain* is the chain of stereotypes, biases, and use of power and privilege of western queer culture and communities toward queer people of color and Asian queer immigrants. To break the chain I come back to my position as a TESOL teacher and use teaching as a critical and rebellious tool to disrupt the western gay male culture with immigrant ESOL students. As Anzaldúa (2002) describes Coatlicue state process,

As you begin to know and accept the self uncovered by the trauma, you pull the blinders off, take in the new landscape in brief glances. Gradually, you arouse the agent in this drama, begin to act, to dis-identify with the fear and the isolation. (p. 552)

As a result, I turn my fears into teaching to seek for understanding, empathy, and increase of awareness to the queer communities of color in ESOL classrooms. In the next crossing of this writing and walking meditation, I share how I use my intersectional identities as part of inclusive curriculum to teach my immigrant students in the U.S. at a local college in Georgia.

### **Challenge Heteronormative ESOL Curricula**

As a queer, accented, immigrant and TESOL teacher of color in a western white academy, I have struggled to find a way to teach immigrant ESOL students to challenge their mindset toward whiteness and privilege in the U.S. Due to the impact of postcolonialism in English Language Teaching (Motha, 2014) and in research (Smith, 1999), the darker-skinned people's values are discounted whereas the whiter-skinned, Eurocentric standards are centered and appreciated. In order to re-imagine a possible new way of teaching, I decided to weave my intersectional identities as critical praxis to teach ESOL students to challenge the post-colonialism. As Hill Collins and Bilge Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) suggest, critical praxis perspective "does not merely apply scholarly knowledge to a social problem or set of experiences but rather uses the knowledge learned within everyday life to reflect on those

experiences as well as on a scholarly knowledge” (p. 42). It is also essential to emphasize critical praxis is “an important analytical strategy for doing social justice work” (p. 42). They suggest,

College faculty who teach students are also frontline practitioners for intersectionality as critical praxis. Their practices entail multiple courses of action in different but interrelated areas of pedagogy, epistemology, theory, and methodology. They raise important questions about and negotiate tensions between disciplinary knowledge practices ... and what a critical praxis of intersectionality might need to keep its transformative potential. (p. 47)

As a result of understanding an important work of creating critical praxis in ESOL classrooms, I took courage to think about creating a critical and inclusive curriculum to challenge social issues with my transnational immigrant ESOL adult students.

### **What would you do?**

In an assigned ESOL textbook, I was asked to teach a grammar unit that focused on “If-clause” structure. In that unit, we explored “the type II conditional sentence” which refers to an unlikely or hypothetical condition with probable results. Grammatically, the simple past goes with the If-clause, and the main clause goes with “would/could plus verb infinitive.” Here is an example in the textbook, “I would be happy if she bought me a diamond ring.” The ESOL students were required to practice the structure by filling in the blank in the practice section. In the ESOL textbook, there was no evidence or examples that show the inclusion of gender, races, immigration, or power structure. I thus recognized that the content presented in the ESOL textbook perpetuates the colonization and heteronormativity in the classroom. I could not stand with its colonized, systematic mainstream English standard ideologies. As such, I came up with a different way to teach. I inquired of myself, “What would I do differently to teach to disrupt this trend in a heteronormative and sexist system? What would I do differently to teach my students to think critically to challenge the norms? What would I do differently to teach my students to take actions after the lesson?” I attempted to explore possible teaching practices to challenge this



approach to instruction and create an anti-racist, anti-homophobic pedagogy in my classroom, even though I had to re-teach the structure and language of the colonizers in my lesson plan.

### **Critical Praxis**

The whole class was sitting in a small classroom as usual. We started our class by responding to a prompt, *What made you happy yesterday?*, on the board. We followed the community guidelines which we co-created at the beginning of the course. My pronouns are they/them. We had a discussion about what personal pronouns were at the beginning of the course and why that mattered. We discussed the importance of respecting other people's choice on their pronouns and emphasized on disrupting an assumption about other people's genders to create an inclusive classroom for everyone. Tonight, we again came together and were excited to learn something new together after a hard-working day.

After an introduction to using the formula for the conditional sentence, I transitioned to playing a video in the *What would you do* series. This show sets up a scenario that looks for reactions of people toward a situation in public. As the content of the video served the lesson and the grammatical unit I taught, I decided to include a video to spark a discussion with my class who were at the intermediate level of English proficiency. The video described discrimination of a bilingual person of color in public due to his skin color and sexual identities. After we watched the video, I paused for a second for students to think and reflect on the prompt, *What would you do if you witnessed the situation?*. First, the students reflected in their papers. Then, I had two volunteers do a role play that mimicked the scene and had other students respond directly to the actor and actress. The discourse was more interesting and surprising than I expected. The students expressed their feelings, rage, and empathy about the situation. Specifically, a student publicly shared out her personal story as she had a gay brother who experienced the negation and

neglect of the family when he came out. Next, a female student who comes from a Middle Eastern country expressed her feeling that she did not understand what queerness and homosexuality meant because these terms were banned in public discourses in her country. Further, the terms were new to her since they did not exist in her generation. Then, a young man urged the class to look at the aspects of human-ness of a person rather than looking at sexualities as a taboo in a traditional society. After an intense conversation, I quickly had students share with their peers about a reflection they wrote about the video a while ago. Then, we came to the whole-class discussion to question why these topics such as racism and homophobia had not been discussed in our ESOL textbook. During our discourse about homophobia and racism toward people of color and immigrants, I purposely included my identities to share with my students how I related with the actor in a video.

Standing in front of class, I shared, “A denial of a self is a sin. Being a queer is not sinful, but a self’s rejection is sinful to myself and my family” (Trinh, personal communication, August 27, 2018). I enthusiastically shared with my students about my positionality as a queer immigrant TESOL teacher of color and my struggles with my own sexualities as I first came to the U.S.. I stated, “If we do not love ourselves; if we hurt ourselves; if we reject ourselves; we are hurting the ones we love. In fact, love will challenge and change hatred” (Trinh, personal communication, August 27, 2018). Love, I emphasized, would help us heal from our own oppression and to students that love to me is manifested in a way I could see my family every day. Love to me is the moment when my family are sitting at a table and having dinners together. Love is the moment when my mom and I are laying down next to my work corner to look at the pictures of an old me which I dressed beautifully as a princess. Love is the moment when I

randomly open the door and talk to my dad when he is finishing off his cigarette in a yard. Those are the moments that I take as an inspiration to continue this life and be a happy queer child.

In fact, the act of love is a powerful and healing way for me to overcome my own shame and hatred. Specifically, hugging is a powerful and healing act for all of us, marginalized populations, to confront with the cultural hegemony and heteronormative society in schools, research, and academia (Kasun, Trinh, & Caldwell, 2019; Trinh, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020c). I closed out the discussion by having students give a group hug to the actor and actress who volunteered to do a role play, but surprisingly, the students gave me a hug as well. A student told me, “Thank you teacher for sharing us your story.” (Trinh, personal communication, August 27, 2018). I then thanked each of them for a beautiful act and re-directed their attention to the question that I raised at the beginning, *What made you happy?* I proudly shared with students that seeing them expressing love and empathy to each other, myself included, and our discussion of homophobia and racism in an ESOL classroom made my night because that discourse cultivated hope in me to develop an inclusive curriculum in the future. I found tears on my face when I was sharing with them. The bell suddenly rang, breaking the moments of silence and discussion of our class.

### **Is Love Political?**

The temperature in the plane is cold. I am awakened by a public address (PA) system that is announcing that we are halfway to Georgia. The flight has been up in the air for two hours, but I feel it has taken forever. After sipping a cup of Tim Hortons, I was laying down, thinking. I guess I had left something precious on Canadian soil before I took off.

Love is blind, isn't it? Love comes to us when we least expect it. The vibe of love came to me unexpectedly while I was in Canada. Admittedly, when I took off for the States, I left a

piece of my heart on Canadian soil. *I feel in love for a white queer man.* I do not particularly use the preposition “with” because that is a one-way sentiment. The preposition speaks it all when I again fell into a falling-for-a-white-gay-man circle. I should not have done that. A friend of mine told me that I am a pansexual. She explained that as a pansexual, I am attracted to wisdom and knowledge of a person regardless of their gender or sexual preferences. I am not sure if I understand its definition correctly. But I fell for him—his smile, his eloquence, his charm, and especially his acknowledgement of his white privilege as we were sitting in his Airbnb space, discussing queerness, classism, and sexism. I swore that I would never fall in love for a white queer man; but now I *feel* it. I feel love. Should I go with my heart to maintain this relationship? Or should I remind myself this is *just* another mercy from a white gay male? Love is a feeling, not a political game; am I understanding correctly?

Suddenly, I see myself falling in the Coatlicue state. I am again being jailed with my emotions, my thoughts, my positionality.

The Coatlicue States which disrupt the smooth flow (complacency) of life are exactly what propel the soul to do its work: make soul, increase consciousness of itself. Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences – if we can make meaning out of them—can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 68)

I do not understand what I am thinking.

I cannot make sense of this experience, this feeling, this confusion.

Is that sex(uality) all about love?

Am I wrong? Now, I am confused

I am writing in pain, in loneliness

Up            in            the            air

It's way far more than epistemological ways of knowing

It's way far more than ontological ways of understanding

“it” is unknown and unclear

I am politicized, I am changed

Am I changed?

Am I sterilized?

Although I am up in the air in this flight between Canadian and American sky, I am feeling that I am standing in front of the Coatlicue, the Aztec goddess of construction and destruction who “gives and takes away life, who is the incarnation of cosmic processes; represent[ing] duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 68). As a Chicana-feminist writer, I am developing the third perspective to see the confusion of racial boundaries between political commitment and him representing his white privilege. But through our extensive conversations at the Airbnb, he shared his empathy with minorities, to queer people of color. He was *with* me, with us at that moment. But, was he, is he, will he?

I am writing, I am meditating. I am fighting—against my feelings, the norms, the political games that I *do not* ask to be in. I am fighting with the thoughts inside me. I am critically examining my thoughts. As Anzaldúa reminds me while I am navigating through the Coatlicue state, “Depression is useful—it signals that you need to make changes in your life, it challenges your tendency to withdraw, it reminds you to take action.” (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 552). My depression, my paralysis, my fears, my confusion transform me to take action by writing this piece. My action is to write. The more I fight, the more I write. As I write, I get a step closer to the stage of nakedness of my true self to seek the meaning of (self)liberation in both heteronormative society and in white gay culture. Neither will I hide it, nor I feel ashamed to talk publicly about my own sexuality. In contrast, I position myself, question myself about sexuality

from a standpoint of a Vietnamese, queer immigrant, accented TESOL teacher, and a Chicana-feminist thinker. From this standpoint, I relate to other queer scholars of color in academia, social activists, human beings who commit to deconstructing the norms, and those who crave for a self's change to overcome the Coatlicue State. We, marginalized queer people of color, are going to find a way out of the duality of confusion; We are going to crash a shell of shame, of opposition, of self-hatred, so that we can be free to “come out of the closet, to be joyful in the light, to be out in the public, to overcome the Coatlicue State” (Trinh, 2019a, para. 13).

I should put on the blindfold to come back to sleep. Sleeping will comfort me and take me away from the confusion that I have. I hope when I wake up, I will be home. I can't wait.

### **Coatlicue State is a New Queer Home**

I am here, in front of my house.      Silently.      I am hesitated to walk in.

I have been walking, writing, meditating across the physical and spatial borders. I call it *queer walking meditation*, which blended autohistoria-teoria, the Coatlicue State and walking meditation. This walk helps me move between stories, initiates dialogues with a self, recognizes my self's confusion and complexity. Consequently, I learned how to mediate even though I am trapped in the prison of shame and self-hatred. This walk witnesses stories of confusion, hatred, love, hope, and actions. Because this is a walk of oneself. For queer people of color, this walk is meditative for us to think through, to write, to reason, to accept, to embrace, to reject, and to love ourselves and others compassionately, so that we can come back to home.

I borrow a phrase from Anzaldúa to express my emotion right now: “Fear of going home: homophobia” (Anzaldúa, 2012). As a lesbian of color, she writes to rebel “two moral prohibitions: sexuality and homosexuality” (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 41). As a queer teacher of color, I write to rebel sexuality, homosexuality, to awake my instincts of self-love, and to take actions

with my immigrant students. I write with compassions toward people of color (Trinh, 2019b, 2019c). I write against the fear, loneliness, internalized homophobia, and hatred that grow inside me, and probably in you, queer scholars of color who are in the Coatlicue state, who are scared of going home due to queer identities, and who are not sure where home is.

The definition of *home* has changed. The Coatlicue state is now a new home-y space where queer, immigrants, scholars and people of color are residing, thinking, moving, teaching, learning, sharing, loving, supporting, being, and becoming. The Coatlicue state/ home space is now intersectional and political. Coming back home and exploring this Coatlicue state not only means to come back to a resilient, individual self, but also means to come back to resilient, collective selves to be reborn. As Anzaldúa (2002) reminds us,

In the deep fecund cave of gestation lies not only the source of your woundedness and your passion, but also the promise of inner knowledge, healing, and spiritual rebirth (the hidden treasures), waiting for you to bear them to the surface. (p. 554)

I therefore write this piece to bear my sexual identities to the surface of an academic paper. Why do I have to expose this vulnerability so that people will judge me, or worse, the search committee will not hire me if they run into this paper? Am I successful in arguing and dismantling whiteness and power in this piece? I have doubts about it. However, I am convinced that I successfully exposed myself clearly to the readers, that my sexuality is political, my teaching is political, my meditation is political, as well. My sexuality inquires and challenges whiteness and power. My teaching contributes to decolonizing ESOL classrooms. My meditation is setting a social justice path for myself and (hopefully) for other queer people of color at the intersectional roads. Am I successful in finding an exit to come out of the Coatlicue state? Probably not. However, I decided to stay in this state since it is my new home to write, to teach, to meditate. I hope you find this state as your new home, too.

### Cleaning Myself, Cleaning My Thoughts

Escaping the illusion of isolation, you prod yourself to get out of bed, clean your house, then yourself. You light la virgin de Guadalupe candle and copal, and with a bundle of yerbitas (ruda y yerba Buena), brush the smoke down your body, sweeping away the pain, grief, and fear of the past that's been stalking you, severing the cords binding you to it. (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002, p. 554)

Lights off. I stand in front of a mirror, looking at a naked self. Who am I?

I look at a person with blue hair, big eyes. They are smiling at me, welcoming me home.

Am I home yet?

I hear the running water in a sink. The sound of water goes from murmuring, bubbling, and now babbling. I see myself in a mirror, walking next to a river. I hear the flock of birds chirping. The sunflowers, my mom's favorite, are blossoming beautifully. The winter and the cold have gone. The spring has brought fresh, warm, sunlight on the ground. I am looking at running waters. I see the beauty of identity as a flow of water, running through the rocks, creating their own paths, their own wills, and their own power. Likewise, identities are crossing other paths, other wills, and other powers.

Unlike when I was walking in cold weather in Canada, I am walking slowly in the sun and asking myself a different question, *Is that the feeling of intersectionality?* Are our actions affirming who we are? Is the flow of thoughts fluid like water next to me, having a power of transforming us to become who we want to be in this world? Are our thoughts influenced by systematic power, cultural and heteronormative norms, and indoctrinations that push us closer to an edge of intersectionality? I do not have the answers right now, but I will find the answers in the next walk. Presently, I need to pause and meditate to heal from mental wounds as I crossed different borders—physically, metaphorically, and spiritually.



I do hope you found something useful through my stories; something that you are proud that you did better than me; something that you knew there is someone out there who shared your confusion, your differences, your emotions. I was there but not competent enough to argue and resist power and whiteness, but I write my story here, I make myself naked in this space, so you will know you are not the only one who feels that way. As Thầy Nhất Hạnh (1999) states,

A teacher cannot give you the truth. The truth is already in you. You only need to open yourself—body, mind, and heart—so that his or her teachings will penetrate your own seeds of understanding and enlightenment. If you let the words enter you, the soil and the seeds will do the rest of the work. (p. 25)

If you already found something connected to you, I am truly happy for you. We will take a queer walking meditation together next time to share with each other. For now, I need to go to the tub; the water is ready. I am cleaning myself; I am cleaning my thoughts. I am playing a Whitney Houston song and whispering her legendary music: “Share my life/ Take me for what I am/ 'Cause I'll never change/ all my colors for you” (Houston, 2009, 00:00-00:40).

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