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Chapter 4

(Critical) Love is a Battlefield

Implications for a Critical Intercultural Pedagogical Approach

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A particular thing has started happening in my graduate classes in culture and communication: students have been appropriating the discourse of love to attack one another. I have started to expect it much like Kanye West's, "Yo Taylor, I'm gonna let you finish, but . . ." However, the difference is I agree with Kanye and respect what he said (Calafell, 2015). At any moment in a classroom that is centered on culture and difference, there is the possibility of conflict—it can feel like a battlefield. We know this as instructors of intercultural communication and as instructors committed to a critical performance pedagogy. Given the possibilities and implications that exist in an intercultural classroom, in this chapter we explore the tensions of pedagogically performing critical love as a guiding theoretical framework and praxis that is central to critical intercultural communication pedagogy. We argue that critical love must be undergirded by a queerness that keeps it queerly accountable to intersectional power and cultural nuance.

To explore these issues, we draw on performative writing to enact multiple interactions or narratives from our varied experiences in the intercultural classroom and beyond. Bernadette, as a full professor with 18 years of teaching experience at four different universities, and Robert, as an assistant professor with eight years of teaching experience at three different universities, blend our narratives together in points of convergence that perform the nexus of our queer Chicana experiences in the academy. Though our experiences have differences, our naming the similar points of oppression we encounter is important. Thus, you may read our narratives and immediately know who is who, other times, you may wonder, and we welcome this ambiguity and invite you to grapple with this performative writing choice. The narratives we provide are not meant to be drawn from or indicative of any one

classroom or class, rather they are demonstrative of each of our experiences across our time in academia.

Based on this, we argue critical love in the academy must be queer, and furthermore, it must be driven by a queer politics that holds it accountable to being intersectional, non-binary, and non-hierarchical. Holman Jones (2016) writes, "Queer theory and queering practices show us the 'critical' in critical autoethnography by putting theory into action" (p. 231). Thus, we take Holman Jones's (2016) words as a call to action in this chapter as we use performative writing to theorize through the body. Performative writing, like theories in the flesh, allows us to embody our Other experiences on the page. They implicate the reader through what we hope is an affective and "evocative" response (Pollock, 1998). Performative writing does something in the world; it is "consequential" (Pollock, 1998). Pelias (2005) further argues, "Performative writing turns the personal into the political and the political into the personal" (p. 420). By utilizing a critical and queer approach to love, we write the political implications of those who dare to love in the battlefield of academia, focusing especially on the bodies of those deemed monstrous (Calafell, 2015).

More than 10 years ago I came across bell hooks's (2001) book *All About Love: New Visions*. It came to me in a moment when I desperately needed it. I was trapped in a tenure track position that was literally killing me through daily assaults of racialized sexual harassment (Calafell, 2014; Calafell, 2015; Faulkner, Calafell, & Grimes, 2009). hooks (2001) inspired me to find spaces of refuge or homeplace, even in a space that was incredibly hostile (Calafell, 2007a). The mentoring relationships with my undergraduate and graduate students of color were my saving grace as I theorized the possibility and politics of love as an important and necessary part of the critical reciprocal relationship between faculty of color and students of color in the academy (Calafell, 2007a). These spaces, which became our homeplaces, were central to our survival in an academy not made for us. At the heart of my discussion of love and mentoring was vulnerability (Calafell, 2007a). As Oliver (2001) argues, "Opening a public space of love and generosity is crucial to opening space beyond domination" (p. 221). In the academy, a place that often reviles emotion, the act of love is revolutionary and resistive (Calafell, 2007a). In my essay, "Mentoring and Love: An Open Letter" (Calafell, 2007a), I quoted Oliver (2001) who writes, "Falling in love, the otherness of the other, is the greatest joy; and vulnerability in the face of the other is a sweet surrender, a gift rather than a sacrifice" (p. 224) (Calafell, 2007a, p. 438). I augmented Oliver (2001) by offering, "Given all I know now, I believe that falling in love with the Otherness not only of others *but of ourselves* is a sweet surrender" (Calafell, 2007a, p. 438). While I still believe this, I am aware of the naivety and hope that undergirded the writing at this time. I still have hope. I refuse to give up hope. However, it is more tempered and my trust is more guarded.

In addition to my commitment to love, I must also own and understand the productivity of anger as a source of strength and resilience.

The essay that came from that experience (Calafell, 2007a) has been by far the one that has received the most feedback, and it has been overwhelmingly positive. I wrote that essay during my first few years as an assistant professor, working solely with undergraduate and master's students. Now more than 10 years later, as a full professor having advised 12 doctoral students to completion, currently serving as the advisor for several others, and acting as a committee member and informal mentor in many cases, my views have been altered, as I have wondered at times if I was naive. Griffin (2012) extends my work (Calafell, 2007a) on love in the academy through her discussion of critical love. She argues that critical intercultural communication work demands what she terms "soul work" that requires practitioners to put themselves "out there in vulnerable, nerve-racking, and downright terrifying ways" (Griffin, 2012, p. 214). Griffin (2012) further states that the demands of soul work changes us. Undergirded by generosity, critical love is the act of practicing a critical intercultural communication identity that understands that "the validation of identity differences and the humanization of people is what swings the balance in the balance between love and apathy" (Griffin, 2012, p. 217). At its heart, critical love is about coalition building with students across difference (Griffin, 2012).

QUEERING CRITICAL LOVE

While jogging on the walking trail behind my house, I glimpse a peek of a white cottontail on the right side of the cement path that winds up a steep hill. I slow my pace as I gaze at the cottontail's feet facing toward me and the bunny ears facing the sounds of the high desert meadow. The cottontail is not white like the stereotypical illusion ingrained in us to represent innocence; no, this cottontail rabbit is black, brown, and grey to survive in his watershed mountain environment. His hue is marked with generations of experience and sacrifice, and like his ancestors before him, blood marks are on his neck. I can still see it oozing like syrup in my mind's eye. As if he *knows* that I *know* what is happening to him, the cottontail opens his eyes and *sees* me—we are connected. I am the only witness to his death. This is his homeplace, yet he is never safe. A part of me died with this cottontail in this moment. Is this queer? Is this critical love? Critical intercultural communication pedagogy must work to create homeplaces for queer people of color by building spaces of belonging that embrace and foster queer utopian politics.

Homeplaces are often not safe spaces for queer people of color in this historical and political moment. Whether looking at statistics that note LGBT

Latina/o youth's fears of familial abandonment because of their sexuality (Human Rights Campaign, 2012) or the public "is he" or "isn't he" dance in media reports of LGBT Latina/o celebrities (Calafell, 2007b; Sowards, 2000), being a queer Xicano in the face of a Trump presidency, or a queer Chicana in the face of unrelenting pressure from the modern/colonial gender system, our hearts begin to bleed and blur. Multiple layers of woundings and strivings have led to our *conocimiento* (understanding) that love in the academy is queer. Prompted by our queerness as an embodied experience and a (neo) colonial condition of our multiple interconnected communities, we cannot hide our anger "to spare your guilt, nor hurt feelings, nor empowering anger; for to do so insults and trivializes all our efforts" (Lorde, 2007, p. 130). Utilizing love and anger as an affective stylization is a conscious move to not hide from or within identity politics. Rather we believe that affect is a useful tool within the performative writer's tool belt to flesh out a theory from everyday lived experiences of monstrosity and marginalization.

We understand that critical love must not be driven by a yearning for spaces of belonging that are focused only on desires for racial connection. They must be undergirded by queerness. Love in the academy is itself queer. This queerness holds critical love accountable to an intersectional ethics that refuses to prioritize race over queerness. What we have witnessed is that critical love fails when it is tied to simplistic understandings of identities that demand others negate part of who they are at the service of coalition. This is certainly not a new critique. However, within the context of pedagogies of culture, power, mentoring, and classroom dynamics, we must find spaces of critical love that are driven by queerness and intersectionality. Lorde (2007) argues that any discussion of racism must include a discussion of anger. We agree, and suggest that any discussion of heteronormativity, must include a discussion of anger. Lorde's (2007) argument about the productive/generative power of anger guides us as it underscores our theorization of love. Critical love can be driven by a generative anger that demands better; a utopic politics that is always reaching for something more (Muñoz, 2009; Calafell, 2015). We want something better because we are tired of being treated like monsters.

Through mythos, imagination, art, and poetry, we are guided by Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2000, 2009, 2015) who spent a lifetime theorizing the queer, embodied, and spiritual experience ascribed to being *una nepantlera*. These monstrous mediators are known to have a tolerance for ambiguity, and they often experience some combination of public shaming, gas lighting, surveillance, online slander, derogatory language, and/or *chismé* on a daily basis (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2015; Calafell, 2015). Marked as hopeless and unrespectable, town leaders whisper about how we will infect others, how our queer theories and performances are worthless, and how we are so angry that the villagers should scapegoat our Other bodies (Calafell, 2015). As

a beginning assistant professor, I feel like hands are on the windows looking into my most private moments and thoughts, and I can't help but crack under the pressure. Glass breaking everywhere, *nepantlera* scholars take up our generative anger and dive into the traumas that are breaking down our door. To imagine through aesthetics how queer worldmaking is always in process, always just on the horizon even when our homeplaces are kicked in (Muñoz, 2009), we embrace our monstrosity as an act of survival. When our queer of color bodies are pulled out to be sacrificed in the town square—again—we transform and escape not through violence and hate but through a critical intercultural communication pedagogy guided by love and vulnerability.

A PEDAGOGY OF VULNERABILITY AND LOVE

Our stories are not alone. In the past when telling colleagues and friends about some of the challenges I have faced from/with graduate students of color studying culture and communication, they have wondered if part of it was because of my pedagogical-based approach toward vulnerability and love. At conference panels and in hushed whispers of offices other queer and/or faculty of color share similar stories. Mentors of color have told me horror stories that led them to move to institutions that do not have graduate programs. Others find ways to persist and survive despite the continual assaults and microaggressions from colleagues and graduate students alike. Stories of students who wanted to use them for their names or professional recognition, but not any of the academic guidance they might offer, are frequent. Sadly, their stories and our conversations bring me comfort. They also remind me that, "Vulnerability can be a liability" (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 310). The hurt and anger we have experienced by people we assumed would know better than to ask us to erase our queerness to solely focus on our race is at the center of this piece. Like Lorde (2007), I believe in the productivity of anger. She writes,

anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies. (Lorde, 2007, p.127)

These experiences and conversations have caused me to question this pedagogical approach and what happens when the language of critical love and feminist ethics become weapons.

I've often wondered if the changes I'm witnessing are generational. Elsewhere, I have written about the insulted narcissist or the *aggravated*

entitlement of some of the current generation of students (Calafell, 2015), which led me to question what happens when the millennial, me, or selfie generation goes to graduate school? As a former graduate student of yours, I must admit that one of the many issues worked out through *our* mentoring relationship has been my own performances of insulted narcissist and *aggravated* entitlement. Was it our queerness that allowed this to happen? There was conflict, anger, and love in our relationship too. Although dominant narratives of Latinxs would have the reader believe that the gap between Latina and Latino is a short hop and a skip, this piece is a testament to the many labors of love that have built the bridge between us plank by plank. We had to overcome so much to get to the moment of writing together. A pedagogy of vulnerability and love is about bridge-building, which is never easy or automatic. How can I show not tell the reader how to navigate this battlefield called love in academia?

BRIDGING DIFFERENCE/BURNING BRIDGES

The culture and communication classroom brings together students from diverse perspectives. Some are more versed in critical theory than others. Some are social scientists that employ quantitative methods. The class also brings together diverse bodies and identities. All of whom have come together to think intersectionally by centering the voices of (queer) women of color, transfeminists, and transnational feminists. However, recently what has emerged is a continual working against my pedagogical choices. In my sometime role as a rhetorical critic, I have argued for understanding rhetorical texts on their own terms (Calafell & Delgado, 2004). This sentiment also makes its way into my classroom. I do not expect performances of owning one's privilege overnight. Instead, much like one of my former instructors, Della Pollock, I am interested in process; the change that happens incrementally throughout the course of a semester or quarter. I have tried to model vulnerability in my classroom, often drawing on my own processes and experiences. Like Bhattacharya (2016),

I crave discourses of vulnerability, in which we unmask, allow ourselves to be genuinely seen, without the need to wield weapons for our safety. Discourses that enable us to work with honesty; to address prejudices, belief systems, and pain; and to discuss the possibilities for discovering a way forward based on connection, interrelatedness, and our shared humanity. (p. 311)

I frame the class and vulnerability through an ethic of love, specifically drawing on my previous work (Calafell, 2007a), work by my former advisee

Rachel Griffin (2012), and of course, hooks (2001). In doing this, I ask students to engage each other with compassion, consider the varied life experiences and identities we bring to the classroom, to be in dialogue with one another, and to meet each other where they/we are at. In the best-case scenario, it works. But what happens when discourses that are supposed to be empowering and loving are appropriated in the name of disciplining? What happens when calls for critical love lack compassion?

White/Chicanx/cisgender/straight student: "I'm saying this from an ethic of love...(insert attack, insult, and diversion from the discussion of queerness in the work of queer women of color so that race is prioritized)"

Translation: "I'm saying this in the service of the violence of heteronormativity and my own ego ..."

C. Winter Han (2013) writes of the violence that can happen in queer communities when White gay men do not recognize their White privilege. He argues:

Shared experiences of oppression rarely lead to sympathy for others who are also marginalized, traumatized, and minimized by the dominant society. Rather, all too miserably, those who should naturally join in fighting discrimination find it more comforting to join their oppressing in oppressing others. (Han, 2013, p. 94)

Sadly, his words ring true at times in the classroom. Although I have written extensively about how queer love is about embracing difference and how the particulars of our queer communities matter (Gutierrez-Perez, 2015a, 2015b), a White gay male student in a recent intercultural communication class tested my theorizations of love and the limits of my anger. I felt relieved when my guest lecturer on embodied migration and performance noted this same student when I asked her for feedback about her experience in the class. It wasn't just me.

During the 2016 campaign for the democratic presidential nomination, Chelsea Clinton visited our university on behalf of her mother, and this same student—on this very public stage—performed many of the same acts of insulted narcissism and aggrieved entitlement in his questioning that had driven me up the wall as his former teacher. Rather than feeling angry, I felt like I had failed this student. Here we were, the only queer people in the room in a university context where queerness becomes ascribed with monstrosity as a norm automatically, yet we could not create a bridge between each other. Griffin (2012) writes that critical love bears witness to difference and at times, conflict. I remember vividly how his performances of whiteness and masculinity were continuously creating violence onto other students and myself in the classroom space. Did he feel like his queer, brown, and working-class

instructor was disciplining and silencing his queer voice? Did he feel like I should have had his back even when he said *that*? Okay, so maybe I am angry. No, maybe I am pissed. I shouldn't be afraid to go to class as my whole self. I shouldn't feel the horror of White and/or upper-/middle-class students banding together to terrorize me. Why do you feel so entitled to speak over everyone anytime you want? Am I not serving you what you ordered? This is *your* first critical intercultural communication class, not mine. The bridge is burning. Now what?

In these classes we are bridging, or at least trying. Merla Watson (2014) argues that Anzaldúa's conception of bridging sees it as "both a metaphor of becoming and a political act of loving, as well as a tactical mechanism for fostering dialog across categories of difference. Bridging, in this way, promotes and paves the way for self-reflexive alliance and coalitional building, or revolutionary love" (p. 179). When I teach, I am offering my queer, Chicana self on the altar to center the voices of queer women of color who are also engaging in the act of bridging. Critical intercultural communication pedagogy asks that as instructors we are mindful of our own identities and our experiences as we engage our students. Bridging is a central pedagogical tactic in critical intercultural communication pedagogy. It models a desire to engage with the Other through humility and compassion, even when the Other reflects some aspects of our own identities.

Did you just (un)queer Cherrie Moraga or Gloria Anzaldúa? Why would you even want to? Who does this serve? Don't you know that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house? (Lorde, 2007) "When did equality become a zero-sum game?" (Lorde, 2007, p. 98) Like Hooks (1996):

I want there to be a place in the world where people can engage in one another's differences in a way that is redemptive, full of hope and possibility. Not this "In order to love you, I must make you something else." That's what domination is all about, that in order to be close to you, I must possess you, remake and recast you. (p. 122)

As Ghabra (2015) states, it is so much easier to own our oppressions than it is our own our privileges.

As a queer woman of color teaching classes in culture and communication that actively decenters canonical voices by creating syllabi centered on work by people of color, I know what Ghabra (2015) is saying quite well. Bridging across difference is hard. Merla Watson (2014) acknowledges the labor of bridging as it "enables individuals to connect to others so as to transform and shift the boundaries between self and other without effacing various histories, desires, and differences. Bridging, a labor of love, requires work and does not provide comfortable or safe spaces" (p. 180). Furthermore, bridging can

never be taken for granted. It is “demanding physically, intellectually, spiritually, emotionally” (Merla Watson, 2014, p. 181). Thus, as Merla Watson (2014) argues, “we cannot always participate in this process of connection: we cannot always be ‘activists’” (p. 181). Like Anzaldúa (2012), I understand the Coatlicue space as a site of depression and renewal. My chair asks if I will teach a course I created on race and popular culture. I tell her that I need a break from the emotional exhaustion of a classroom that I know may bring a great deal of challenges. She understands and is supportive. My choice is an act of self-love. I tell her instead I will teach a course on women of color feminisms. Naively I thought it would be less challenging. Had I forgotten the horrors of the last time I taught the course almost seven years ago? I am always bridging, but I am not prepared to be walked on all over again.

(QUEER) LOVE IS A BATTLEFIELD

Do I want to open these old wounds? Am I sure that we are past this battle? hooks (2001) writes that love is “the will to nurture our own and another’s spiritual growth” (p. 6) and that love “is most often defined as a noun, yet ... we would all love better if we used it as a verb” (p. 4). As a verb, love is an act that must be taught, proliferated, and embodied, and “to truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients—care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (Hooks, 2015, p. 5). I know that yours is a pedagogy of vulnerability that “is not only an ethical or normative question, but also a political one” (Petherbridge, 2016, p. 599), but how can I admit to the reader that when we first met I did not act toward you with love? How can I write (with you over my shoulder) knowing that I hurt you?

Throughout our mentoring relationship, I have both loved and hated how you give me everything I need, but not everything I want. How can I thank you enough? hooks (2001) explains that “patriarchal masculinity requires of boys and men not only that they see themselves as more powerful and superior to women but that they do whatever it takes to maintain their controlling position” (p. 40). As a doctoral student, I remember meeting with you in that first week to discuss my work and yours and how we could possibly work together on a project. I remember how you leaned into my ear before you left convocation to make the appointment; how I excitedly went over all the details with my husband that afternoon; and how I immediately used my male privilege and power to attempt to dominate your space. Falling into tropes of monstrosity, I projected centuries of racialized, classed, and sexualized stereotypes and tropes of women of color onto your body to reproduce systems of domination that daily oppressed you (Calafell, 2015). Years later,

we are writing this essay on mentoring, love, and intercultural pedagogy together—this did not just happen. It took acts of love that viewed yours and my own spiritual growth as mutually important. It took an acknowledgment that love is queer.

I wish I could show you (and the reader) how painful it was to be queer, poor, and brown in the harsh and unrelenting battlefield of academia without you as my mentor. Without your strategic advice, I was gaslighted into believing that the racial, classed, and homophobic micro- and macroaggressions I was experiencing were not real. When graduate students actively campaigned against my run for department service to “teach me a lesson” and to “knock me down a few pegs,” I had no one to advocate for me from behind the closed doors or to tell me the *chisme* about who to trust and why. When no one wanted me as their advisee, when other graduate students avoided eye contact with me in the hallways, or when my queerness was disciplined, I knew that I had screwed up and that I needed to be deeply reflexive and not defensive in this moment. I needed to a new definition of love that acknowledge our queerness, our differences, and our spirits. I am not writing this to hurt you or to offer any excuses for the choices that I made because the actions that I chose created and contributed to a culture of lovelessness. I chose not to “cry or express hurt, feelings of loneliness, or pain,” and instead, I decided that I “must be tough” and “mask true feelings” (hooks, 2001, p. 38). And now, I am choosing to stop pretending that I wasn’t miserable without you. I cried alone staring at walls.

Because you believe that, “Vulnerability is a critical category that reveals the tensions and ambiguities as well as the richness and the perplexity of social relations” (Petherbridge, 2016, p. 601), we have reached a place where you now confide in me when another person betrays your love. I admit that I usually see a bit of myself and my own choices in these moments, yet from this side of the bridge, I see how vulnerability is courageous. It takes an unrelenting open-heartedness. I mean you believed in me even after learning that I had a lot to learn. You gave me a homeplace to be brown and poor and queer without judgment and without having to leave any of my identities at the door, and here is the thing—we *worked* for it. We chose to not let the bridge burn, and although we were vulnerable, we courageously got to the true labor of critical and queer love. I trusted you and you were committed to me; we treated each other with respect and mutual recognition; we performed acts of care and affection; and oh yes, we had some open and honest communication about (critical) love. How can I explain what a big deal it is that we are finally on the same page together? How can I show that I *still* have a lot to learn? Bridges need constant maintenance (Anzaldúa, 1990).

Critical love is a labor. Within the context of critical intercultural communication pedagogy, critical love requires a continual reflexive turn. It is not

enough as an instructor or mentor to say that you are bridging. Sometimes bridges need to be reinforced, pulled back, or rebuilt. Bridging is a reciprocal act; a delicate and necessary dance for critical intercultural communication pedagogues. It is a work in process that requires that we be constantly attentive, vulnerable, and critically queer. At times my relationship with you has been guided by my own insecurities and my failings. I often wish I could have been better. I wish I could have been strong enough to be there for you. Perhaps I read my insecurities and ego onto your body? I anticipated your arrival on campus with great enthusiasm. I made sure everyone saw your file. I excitedly advocated for you. You were the kind of student I dreamed of working with when I started teaching doctoral students. I wonder if my expectations for you were unrealistic? As you say, it took a while for us to get here. My anger at what I perceived to be slights were most likely driven by my uncertainty about myself in an environment where I constantly felt threatened and in some ways inauthentic. You were a mirror to me because of our similarities and because I imagined you reflected how others saw me. But the mirror transformed.

Lorde (2007) argues, "The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth" (p. 131). My anger and uncertainty were eventually transformed into beautiful growth. Perhaps we both needed to do our individual self-care and growth to be able to come together as we have? You were the only one who really saw me. You did not ask me to put aside part of myself because you knew the importance of being understood as a complex being whose identities defy easy categorization. For the first time in a long time, I was allowed to be me—a raised working class, queer, femme Chicana. Our bond was further forged and solidified in the constant battles we fought together against the heteronormativity that pervaded our shared spaces. Even when no words were spoken, only knowing glances exchanged, you made me feel safe. Two brown queers finally finding a space of mutual respect, possibility, and yes, critical love. Thank you for being patient and not giving up on me and the relationship that we have now made. I only wish we could have gotten here sooner, but I will always fight to keep the bond strong and protect it from others who want to destroy it.

SUEÑOS DE AMOR

We dream of an academy that exists without abuse. We dream of a space that allows us to grow rather than be crushed. We dream of departments where oppression is not so normalized that we become the problem when we

name it. We dream of colleagues that fight against the abuse and assaults we experience consistently. We dream of a space where all of our identities are honored. All of these dreams are undergirded by a desire for performances of critical love in the academy. In this chapter we have drawn on our experiences as queer Chicana teachers and practitioners of critical intercultural communication and pedagogy. Through a revisiting of previous work in culture and communication that explores the possibility of love as a practical and theoretical framework, we have used our lived experiences to complicate critical love. We argue that critical love as a key aspect of critical intercultural pedagogy must be driven by queerness. Queerness moves discussions of culture and communication beyond a race-specific focus that has long dominated the field, and by centering intersectionality, which allows for non-binary and non-hierarchical understandings of identities, we shift to a coalition-based approach to understandings of power and privilege that resists the urge to play Oppression Olympics and/or critical despots in the intercultural classroom, in the academy, and everyday life.

Thus, we urge critical intercultural communication pedagogues to consider the role of critical love in the classroom and in mentoring relationships as a necessary manifestation of critical intercultural communication pedagogy. However, love must be critically queer and intersectional in order to consider power beyond simplistic binaries that reinforce oppositional politics. For example, Cohen (1997) asks us to consider how women of color who may be working-class single mothers have experienced the stigmatization of their sexuality similar to queers of color. She argues that we must move beyond simplistic understandings of the queer/straight binary to consider how we might come to understand each other and coalesce around our shared experiences of marginalization. Rather than seeing only our differences or asking each other to understand identity in terms of single-axis thinking, Cohen (1997) offers an approach that asks us to complicate intersectionality queerly. This move underlies our approach to critical love. As both Calafell (2007a) and Griffin (2012) argue, the practice of critical love is coalitional as it oscillates between the I and the we (as I/we have done in this essay) as it asks us to be actively reflexive about our relationship to power and possibility. Additionally, and importantly, a critical relationship to love as an intercultural pedagogical approach does not shy away from anger and conflict.

This anger and productivity is important in relationship forming and coalition building. Griffin (2012) rightly notes the role of conflict within critical love, and we have attempted to show this through our narratives by drawing on Lorde's (2007) work. By owning our anger and by productively working through it together, we model in the very writing of this essay an act of critical love. Further, it is important to explicitly note that it is women of color feminists who guide our thinking. These *mujeres de color* told us to

be vulnerable on the page and to tell our stories. They told us to enter that place of solitude and darkness—the Coatlicue state—which Anzaldúa (2015) describes as the underworld and/or the realm of the soul and the imagination. Do you not believe us when we tell you that the wind shifted from the East to the West? We heard *La Llorona* calling from the darkness for us to face our fears, our anger, and our depression. She wailed, ¡Ay, mis hijos! (Moreman and Calafell, 2008, p. 314), and like good children, we listened. We went down to the river obediently. I remember watching her drown each one of us individually. I waited patiently for my turn. Under the water, we cried together and shared our pain, and we finally dealt with all the *mierda* between us. Critical love is a battlefield. A kind of borderlands space between us that rages with conflict but is full of possibilities for critical intercultural approaches to pedagogy and everyday life. If it helps, if it is comforting for you to know, we could not have written this essay without each other.

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