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**Terca, pero no pendeja:
Terquedad as Theory and Praxis of Transformative Gestures in Higher Education**

Omi S. Salas-SantaCruz

*School of Education
University of California, Berkeley*

Abstract

In this article, the author explores the concept of terquedad or waywardness as a blueprint towards gender/queer justice in education. Using María Lugones's (2003) theorizing resistance against multiple oppressions, the author presents Gloria Anzaldúa's' writings in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) and *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981/2015) as a project of storying the plurality of terquedad. In doing so, the author calls for a theory and praxis of terquedad as a framework to understand the embodied resistances queer and trans-Latinx/e students deploy as textual inconveniences to push back and resist the "institutional grammars" of U.S. universities (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Crawford & Ostrom, 1995). Through a plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016), the author introduces Quiahuitl, a doctoral student engaging with a praxis of terquedad when confronted with institutional and sexual violence as she moves within and against the geographies and power structures of the university.

Keywords: queer gesture, embodied refusals, gender/queer educational justice, decolonial agency and resistance, resistance research in higher education

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I look through my photos.

I am three, five, seven years old.

La terquedad is with me.

“Cierra las piernas, asi como las otras niñas”

“Una sonrisita”

“Ahora aca, solo los niños del salon”

“Sientate bien. Sonrie”

“1-2-3 Cheese”

Que terca eres.

Figure 1

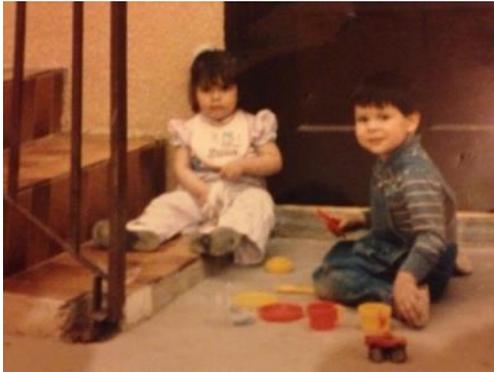
“Las niñas cierran las piernas.”



Note. Three children are sitting on the floor wearing ballet attire. The author is sitting on the left side of the frame staring at the photographer sitting with their legs open. The other two children to their right have their legs closed and are both giving a scornful side-eye to the author for not sitting properly for the photo.

Figure 2

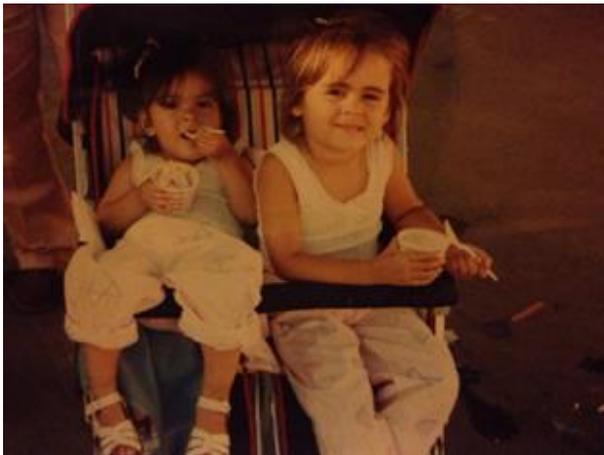
“*Sonrián.*”



Note. Two children are sitting outside in the patio of an apartment complex. The author is sitting on the first step of a staircase leaning on the wall and their legs extended towards the step. They have a stoic expression, making direct eye contact to the lens as they are captured grabbing a snack from a plastic bag. The second child is turned to the camera and smiling for the photo as he holds a PlayDoh roller.

Figure 3

“*Siéntate bien.*”



Note. There are two children sitting on a double stroller. The author is on the left side of the stroller with their legs over the guardrail and leaning back, refusing to sit properly. They are holding a spoon to their mouth and eating ice cream. The child on the right is seated properly on the stroller with her feet under the guardrail and using a waist belt. This child is holding an ice cream, has her spoon to the side of her cup, and is smiling for the photo.

Figure 4

“Ahora aca, solo los niños.”



Note. The image is a photography cutoff. There are six visible children and three others who were cut off from the frame. The author is on the far left with an affiliative smile that triggers an upward pull of their lip and dimpling of their cheeks. They placed themselves with the boys.

My childhood photos where I refuse to make my body do what is being asked or the cutoffs that reframe me as being part of “los niños” captures mi terquedad,¹ a term I use in its pluralist sense as a source of survival and resistance but which has been used historically to describe willful defiance, stubbornness, misconduct, and insubordination to authority. In reflecting on the uses of photography, Roland Barthes (1979/2010) wrote that photos are not just images, but they can also be snippets of a just image where we can decode a new consciousness. I share with you my photos as a blueprint towards understanding gender/queer justice through the notion of stubborn gestures or the political dispositions that explicitly understand and contest oppression through embodied refusals. In this instance, I consider the photos of my childhood as capturing the ephemeral function of terquedad, a series of active subjective strategies caught in the process of what María Lugones (2003) describes as the oppressing ⇔ resisting relationship, where oppression and resistance are ongoing and incomplete (p. 17). Terquedad, in this case, is a resistance subjectivity at the level of gestures

¹ I use the verb terquedad to denote a praxis of stubbornness/waywardness among Latinx/Latine people. The goal of this essay is to uncover a pluralist understanding of stubbornness in each of its forms: as identity (terca/rebelde), as praxis of, as disciplinary gesture, as resistance sociality, as gesture of refusal, and as the embodiment of multiplicity and “mestiza consciousness” (Anzaldúa, 1987). I use terquedad, rebellious gestures, and stubbornness interchangeably.

when confronted with the cultural violence of gender dualism and other forms of a dichotomous self.

I begin with these images with the pedagogical intention of *looking for terquedad* in what Cindy Cruz (2013) describes as “the smallest resistances that come from the body” and are produced within infra-political hangouts that serve as spaces to conspire and breathe (p. 556). Considering the ways bodily movements are always already assigned cultural meaning, I note how through the recognition of the smallest of queer gestures² such as practicing *jotería*³ in the academy, and even perhaps recognizing waywardness in my childhood photos, is a means to call on the past to resist the present. A resistance sociality among Latinx/Latine peoples’ bodies and gestures as means to muddle with, desire, and even find pleasures when confronted with oppressive institutional and racial grammars⁴ (Bonilla-Silva, 2012; Crawford & Ostrom, 1995) that structure corporeal and aesthetic practices in higher education. Terquedad in the academy is thus a form of resistance sociality by listening and uplifting the “I-We” of “what your *jotería* is saying” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 85).

In the first part of this paper, I read through Gloria Anzaldúa’s book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and her essays “La Prieta” and “Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers” in the edited volume *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981/2015) to listen to her moments of terquedad as a multivalent resistant subjectivity. I use Lugones’s (2003) theorizing resistance against multiple oppressions to discuss Anzaldúa’s terquedad as a tactical embodied strategy when confronted with the meaning-making and disciplinary grammars of the dominant culture. In doing so, I highlight Anzaldúa’s epistemic

² I follow Muñoz’s (2009) and Rodríguez’s (2014) concept of queer gestures as a repertoire of cultural modes of knowing enacted through bodily movements, feelings, mannerisms, and linguistic behaviors that act/communicate through the interpretation of performance. Queer gestures consist of both cultural memory and a history.

³ I use the term *jotería* as a queer political body consisting of non-normative genders, sexualities, gestures, and as a “decolonizing social movement that seeks to move away from normative colonizing relations of power and toward horizontal, personal/collective, transgenerational, and transdisciplinary forms of thinking, being, and acting that make dialogue, respect, love, spirituality, and healing central to both vision and praxis” (Bañales, 2014, p. 8).

⁴ According to Crawford and Ostrom (1995), the central pieces of an institution are strategies, norms, and rules, which can be distinguished by their grammatical texture. According to Ostrom (2005) these grammars include “the prescriptions that humans use to organize all forms of repetitive and structured interactions” (p. 3). Similarly, Bonilla-Silva (2012) describes the racial grammars that shape and frame institutions. The notion of grammar moves beyond linguistic connotations to encompass vision, emotion, and sense of aesthetics.

shift about the notion of stubbornness: one that shifts from an imposed identity to a resistant subjectivity as the basis to navigate within, across, and in-between worlds of meaning, survival, and resistance (Lugones, 2003; Ortega, 2016). In other words, I treat Anzaldúa's embodiment of terquedad as the embodiment of her mestiza consciousness or the limen, "the place where one becomes most fully aware of one's multiplicity" (Lugones, 2003, p. 59).

In the second part of this article, I unpack the political possibilities of terquedad in spaces of higher education. Through a plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) I turn to a case study of Quiahuitl,⁶ a doctoral student engaged in a praxis of terquedad as an embodied refusal of the grammars of the university. Specifically, I offer the praxis of terquedad in the academy as a framework to unpack the multiple ways queer and trans Black, Indigenous, and Students of Color hold on to their complexity, where their body or specific aspects of one's body becomes a textual inconvenience to push back or disrupt the grammatical textures of institutions of higher education.

Towards a Theory of Terquedad: Trespassing "Worlds" of Stubbornness

Anzaldúa (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) has made a crucial theoretical contribution to studies on the relationship among multiple subjectivities, survival, and resistance, a relationship central to personal and institutional transformation when confronted with the ongoing material, emotional, spiritual, and cultural violence of imperialism. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987) and her writings in the co-edited collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981/2015), Anzaldúa demonstrates a unique concern with the plurality of consciousness that emerges in the borderlands as the basis to contest the meaning, location, and source of knowledge production. However, instead of expanding the theory of consciousness in Cartesian terms, Anzaldúa makes the body a central concern to Brown epistemologies, both as the source of knowledge and a battleground over asserting decolonial agency (Anzaldúa, 1987; Cruz, 2001; Villenas, 2010). I offer her texts as a way of listening to her body. That is, I look for Anzaldúa's moments of terquedad to uncover its pluralist use as she navigates between, across, and within

⁵ I follow María Lugones's (2003) use of the word "worlds" to denote the spatio-temporal dynamics that construct social space.

⁶ Quiahuitl is pronounced *Key-a-wit*.

an imposed colonial/modern identity, a resistance and survival praxis, and as the embodiment of liminality.

In *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Anzaldúa (1987) describes “movements of rebellion” as a resistant sociality that emerges through the constant *guerra de independencia*, a clash between the demands of the dominant culture, *la cultura que traiciona*, and the stubborn “Will” of a mestiza consciousness (p. 16). She writes, “La mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” (p. 78). This inner war, I argue, is a war toward asserting multiple definitions, uses, and understandings of *terquedad*.

Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1981/2015a) childhood memories are stories of her *terquedad* where the institution of the family, church, and school try to assert their Will. Anzaldúa (1987) described when *terquedad* became an identity, an ideological system of oppression capable of hailing her (Althusser, 1970) under the signs of rebellion for demanding her name be pronounced correctly and her uses of the Spanish language: “hocicona, repelona, chismosa, having a big mouth, questioning” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 54). In other words, *terquedad* became “la seña” (Anzaldúa, 1981/2015a, p. 199) that her growth was going sideways.⁷ She recalls,

At a very early age, I had a strong sense of who I was and what I was about and what was fair. I had a stubborn will. It tried to constantly mobilize my soul under my own regime, to live life on my own terms no matter how unsuitable to others they were.

Terca. Even as a child, I would not obey (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 16.).

Anzaldúa as a *terca* is an attempt of the dominant culture to bring her under its Will, “to get rid of our accents” (1987, p. 54), a disciplinary subjectivity with the goal of re-orienting her growth by recruiting others to show her *las reglas* and guide her towards the grammars of the dominant culture. That is, to get rid of different ways of using *terquedad*. It is at this moment, the interplay between being made a Subject of *terquedad* and *terquedad* as resistance that allows her to see beyond the ideologies of the dominant culture. She continues,

⁷ Stockton (2009) coins the term growing sideways to describe ways of growing that defy heteronormative and linear trajectories toward marriage and reproduction. Her work demonstrates that in many literary renditions of the child, there exists an assumption that children should grow up and toward heterosexuality. In the essay “La Prieta,” (1981/2015a) Gloria Anzaldúa links rebellion to authority and objection to submission as a reflection of “an image” of being strange, abnormal, and queer (p. 199).

There is a rebel in me—the Shadow-Beast. It is a part of me that refuses to take orders from outside authorities. It refuses to take orders from my conscious will, it threatens the sovereignty of my rulership. It is that part of me that hates constraints of any kind, even those self-imposed. At the least hint of limitations on my time or space by others, it kicks out with both feet. Bolts. (1987, p. 16)

In this statement, Anzaldúa (1987) navigates the externalization and multivalence of *terquedad* as she moves across the logic of oppression and resistance. She distinguishes between the ideologies of “my Will,” as the conscious Will of the dominant culture, and the “sovereign Will within” (p. 66) as a praxis of active subjectivity when she announces that “wild tongues can’t be tamed” (p. 54). Here, *la terquedad*, the rebel that bolts, is a survival and resistance praxis against the cultural tyranny of patriarchy and the Anglo culture that try to capture her under the one meaning of *terquedad*.

Unlike hegemonic notions of ideology, which establish ideology as the “like-the-unconscious,” as a process of misrecognition by the subject (Leonardo, 2010, p. 200), Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) writing describes how she travels across and within the ideologies of the borderlands, in which *terquedad* does not fully exhaust her subjectivity if we consider her uses of stubbornness through a lens of resistance and transformation (Lugones, 2003).

Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) heightened awareness of seeing herself as being thoroughly, but not exhaustively “socially constructed in terms of power” (Lugones, 2003, p. 9), is reflected in her writings of *La Coatlicue*. According to Anzaldúa (1987), *La Coatlicue* depicts the contradictory: *el otro yo* (p. 47), another self that exists in the shadow of the representation of her *as being* stubborn but that informs her experiences *of stubbornness*. On the one hand, her writing functions as a mirror of her identity, as the representation of the colonial imposition, *terca* (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 97). On the other hand, her writing ruptures “false mirrors” and announces she is not fully captive of the representation of herself. Her writing becomes a “seeing through” into her inner faces, *las caras por dentro* (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxvii). In other words, Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) *terquedad* is not merely a reaction to oppression, but an act of resistant meaning-making on behalf of the active subject (Lugones, 2003, pp. 13, 97). Given the propensity of the dominant culture to externalize stubbornness onto particular body parts, such as her stubborn/wild tongue, Anzaldúa (1987,

1990, 1981/2015a, 1981/2015b) shifts her *terquedad* to the act of writing as a performance of her Will.

In “Speaking in Tongues,” Anzaldúa (1981/2015b) evokes the trespassing of the dangers in writing. She writes,

the hand is an extension of our will, it holds the pen, the brush, the lump of clay. It is both a symbol and a vehicle of communication. Without the hand the voice is helpless. When hand and tongue work together, they unite art and politics and attack the dominant ideology...Creative acts are forms of political activism employing definite aesthetic strategies for resisting dominant cultural norms and are not merely aesthetic exercises.” (p. xxiv)

Anzaldúa’s (1987, 1990, 1981/2015, 1981/2015b) aesthetic writing strategies function as a path toward transformation. Her writings exist as moments of *terquedad*, as a border tongue in which she develops the language of survival and resistance through “the path of red and black ink” (Anzaldúa, 1987, pp. 65, 69). For her, the spirit with no manners, *terquedad*, puts her in a state of psychic unrest, using sensory deprivation to imagine and desire otherwise. A form of writing that has an identity: stubborn, multiple, and contradictory, capable of changing her mind and body, belief system, and consciousness, the kind of performance work that manifests the same needs as a person, *a la que baña y viste* (p. 67). Anzaldúa’s writing is a modality of deliberate stubbornness as a praxis to resist the status quo. The art of *terquedad* is therefore an active subjectivity that is culturally and socially mediated with the intention of “making [new] meaning out of the experience, whatever it may be” (p. 73). The act of *terquedad* is an embodied creative process of becoming a subject of our own discourses through a process of disidentification (Alarcón, 1990), or in this case, a disidentification with one discursive theme of *terquedad* that serves as a “remaking” through her body and leads to “a path /state to something else” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 73). In other words, *terquedad* is a praxis of embodied refusals capable of transforming herself, the symbolic, and the material world.

Moreover, Anzaldúa (1987) conceives of her stubbornness as a political body embedded with the cultural memory of *los atravesados*, a political body that is malleable, preserving, and waiting. She writes,

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us. We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue,

we've kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant *norteamericano culture*...Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the mestizas and mestizos, will remain (p. 64).

Here, *terquedad* has social and cultural memory and is corporeally situated in charge of social, cultural, and spiritual survival. It is a form of survival and resistance through a series of political gestures, feelings, spirit, and images that have a history of resistance, from Aztec rites of mourning as defiance, La Llorona's lament as means to protest, and Anzaldúa's (1987) choice to be queer as a conscious decision of being two in one body, a "half and half" with feet in both worlds (pp. 19-21).

Listening to *terquedad* is then an anticipatory "illumination of the not-yet-conscious" to understand and critique the present (Muñoz, 2009, p. 28, 84). It is a listening of Anzaldúa's childhood memories of stubbornness/waywardness as a blueprint towards a new consciousness (1981/2015a). An attention to how Anzaldúa's *terquedad* is always at work, always in performance. Patient, quiet, proud, and even wild. Flawed but "infused with spirit" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 67). *Terquedad* has an aesthetic. It is messy, defiant, unbound, clumsy, porous, complex, and conflicted. It contrasts with what Anzaldúa (1987) describes as the sign of Western virtuosity and rationality (p. 67–68). It is what drives Anzaldúa to dig deeper into her wounds, which forces her to grow up quickly, rough, unyielding (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1981/2015a). It is imbued with transformative power as it drives the endless cycle of "making it worse, making it better" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 73), a going "through the dangers" in hopes of not repeating the performance (Anzaldúa, 1981/2015b, p. 163). Finally, *terquedad* serves as a survival mechanism that allows political actions to be unnoticed, unrecognized, non-threatening—yet it poses a constant threat as they are constantly misrecognized through the grammars of the oppressor as ignorance or self-sabotage. While *la terquedad* in Anzaldúa takes the form of writing, *terquedad* takes forms in many ways as one chooses the gestures of refusal and the creative acts in accordance to the worlds we may inhabit.

Pláticas con Quiahuitl

Quiahuitl is a Xicana queer woman who traces her roots to Indigenous pueblos of the Nahuatzen mountains of Michoacán. Currently, she is a doctoral candidate that engages in *terquedad* as a resistant praxis to navigate the demands of professionalism in her doctoral

program. I employed a plática methodology (Fierros & Delgado Bernal, 2016) to unpack her terquedad. According to Fierros & Delgado Bernal (2016), "pláticas move from method to methodology when they are embedded within the rich, analytical theory of Chicana feminism, engage contributors as knowledge creators essential to the meaning-making process, draw on life experiences, and provide a potential space for healing" (p. 115).

For the last six years Quiahuitl and I engaged in multiple cara a cara and synchronous conferencing pláticas about our doctoral program. These pláticas served both as a strategy to collect data and to theorize resistance practices at the level of gestures. In this context, pláticas served as a form of "organizational gossip" (Hafen, 2004), a process of information and knowledge sharing that attempts to manage and engage with organizational regulation and resistance. These pláticas are thus in themselves infrapolitical resistance hangouts and rich sites of knowledge and information production (Cruz, 2013).

In this particular study, I used dated and time-stamped transcripts and images of thirty-five one-on-one pláticas in the span of five years between July 1st, 2015 and April 15th, 2020. Through a process of revisiting and discussing the themes and transcripts of our previous pláticas, Quiahuitl was able to theorize her lived experiences to co-construct knowledge pretraining to the pedagogies of professionalism as graduate students of color in predominantly white universities, procedural and institutional knowledge regarding degree milestones, petitions, appeals, and navigating faculty hazing and violence. The theme of terquedad as stubborn gestures of refusal emerged inductively as we discussed institutional demands and regulations.

The research agenda remained open and evolving as Quiahuitl read, approved, and provided feedback on all the drafts to this paper. As co-participant in the production of knowledge, Quiahuitl shared two personal journal entries that she produced after reading the second draft of this paper and that I cite extensively as theorizing how and why she embodies terquedad. Moreover, in these journal entries, Quiahuitl added photographic evidence that we decided not to include to protect her anonymity. Instead, I describe Quiahuitl's aesthetic choices to unpack how gestures are a resistance practice that offer concrete avenues of producing meaning in the academy. Finally, following plática methodology as a potential space for healing, our pláticas turned to ceremony, both spiritual and material, where Quiahuitl and I

supported, uplifted, recognized, and remembered each other's complexity as the basis for coalition building.

Terca, pero no pendeja: Embodying the Limen as a Praxis of Institutional Transformation

When I asked Quiahuitl about her journey, "how did you get here?," she began to describe herself and her journey in academic terms. She is a first-generation college student and a McNair Scholar who graduated with honors distinction and cum laude from her undergraduate program. At the graduate level, she was admitted to top tier research universities and considered to be at the top of the applicant pool, which made her a recipient of some of the most prestigious multi-year and dissertation fellowships. When Quiahuitl stopped sharing her academic achievements, she found it compelling to say, "that is all to say, *que soy terca pero no pendeja.*"

While the term *pendeja* has many colloquial definitions in the Spanish language, Quiahuitl was making an epistemological distinction about her *terquedad* as being different from willful ignorance or being "a dumbass" who lacks an understanding of the rules of the academy. Quiahuitl wanted to discuss her academic dismissal as having less to do with "academic deficiencies" and more to do with faculty incapacity to understand her *terquedad*.

Quiahuitl describes her *terquedad* as an embodied way to make space for her complexity and multiplicity in the academy by refusing the grammars of professionalism and the culture of silence that demand a particular kind of subject. She explains,

[The Ethnic Studies Department] had an understanding of what Latinas ought to be and behave in higher education, especially in doctoral programs. I was the only Xicana in my cohort. To be a *doctora*, in the academy, there is an expectation of being a good, quiet, firm, but soft-spoken Chicana. A cookie-cutter.

Quiahuitl explains this cookie-cutter persona as a gendered and racialized expectation that serves to discipline how students in her former department ought to behave and act. This ideal student functions to keep Quiahuitl's multiple identities outside the institution. Quiahuitl describes her aesthetic intentions as a strategic praxis to reclaim the meaning of professionalism. She describes her first day at the doctoral program:

I had these fiery red beaded earrings, and I also had gauges, so I just slipped the earrings in. I had half of my hair shaved with leopard print, and the other half was cut short in a

melenita, and I think my hair was like a burgundy brown/reddish. My eyebrows carefully drawn in and threaded, makeup done up, nails, and toes done.

Quiahuitl's decision to adorn her body, from earrings to her toes, is an awareness that every part of her body functions as a site of meaning-making. Her aesthetic choices constitute a praxis of *terquedad* as an embodied refusal of Eurocentric notions of professionalization by actively challenging the university's docile body: good, quiet, firm, and soft-spoken. She continues to describe her intentionality:

I wanted to always be strategic with the way I dressed. Depending on what mood I was in and, or where I was going, I always thought about what statement I wanted to make aesthetically because for me it was a way of reclaiming space and also (albeit nonverbally) decolonizing the academy.

Quiahuitl has an understanding that her body is capable of challenging the dominant notions of who is and who looks like a doctoral student, a refusal of institutional grammars made through gestures, vernacular, clothing, and aesthetic appearance in which she refuses to let go of her multiplicity through her body. She describes her embodied refusal to abide by this grammar of professionalism in the academy:

I like wearing dark lipstick. I just felt like it made my face pop. I look at dark and bright lipstick like war paint. Something about having a dark color gives me a little extra something, like strength or self-empowerment. As you know, I love falsies. I have big eyes, so putting on false eyelashes helped me accentuate the depth in my eyes. *I had a gangsta-danzante-aliyah-tomboyish-femme kind of stilo, you know?* I could give you tomboy, 'urban,' the sweats and baggy sweater, and I could give you my danzante look. I feel like my aesthetic is also a manifestation of my spirit. *Rebelde con causa.*

Quiahuitl sees herself as a rebel with a cause in which her aesthetic choices not only challenge the grammars of professionalism in higher education but also engage in a politics of decolonizing the academy by reclaiming a space for her multiple selves in the institution. For Quiahuitl, *terquedad* is a tactic to manifest her spirit when confronted with the expectations of becoming *a doctora*. For instance, Quiahuitl discusses a time she blurted out, "that is dope" to refer to a research project she got excited about and to which a faculty member scolded her by saying, "you don't have to use that language in the university to continue to belong to your community." Quiahuitl sees her *terquedad* as rooted in what she identifies as indigenous forms

of resistance and self-care by summoning her various selves that are made to stay at the gates of the academy. Terquedad thus allows her gangsta-self, her spiritual danzante-self, the tomboy-self, and her femme-self to show up collectively and trespass into a space that is not meant for them.

Quiahuitl's terquedad is a deliberate attempt to redraw the field of power of who belongs in the academy. However, some of her peers and faculty only perceive her aesthetic choices as detrimental, as a performance of ignorance and self-sabotage since her embodied refusals are grasped through the logic of oppression. They assume Quiahuitl unconsciously embodies the objective structures (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) that prevent her from enacting acceptable behaviors and comportment of professionalism for doctoral students. This reading, however, assumes what Lugones (2003) describes as the univocity of meaning, where Quiahuitl's terquedad is (mis)recognized as a form of agency from the standpoint of liberalism and its unified, fixed, singular Self (Lugones, 2003, p. 86).

A reading of terquedad as resistance subjectivity, however, allows us to understand her actions in multiple ways such as self-preservation or as both self-preservation and self-sabotage, given that an act of resistance, according to Lugones (2003) can be read and intended to act in both or numerous ways (p. 13). In this double-bind of oppression and resistance, Quiahuitl's stubborn gestures become political performances embedded with endless possibilities for thinking and acting against oppression in worlds of sense that exist alongside academic worlds and can, therefore, undermine it.

In *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, Lugones (2003) describes negotiating and resisting multiple oppressions as a process of trespassing (p. 8). That is, Lugones describes a "spatiality of resistances within and against the spatiality of dominations," (p. 8) in which an action like terquedad can operate under both the logics of oppression ↔ resistance. However, the point of an active subjectivity is to trespass the logic of oppression as a process of redrawing the field of power relations (p. 11). Of importance is Lugones's (2003) notion of the "arrogant perceiver" that is unable to recognize either oppression or resistance and thus opens the possibilities for Quiahuitl to enact and experiment with new joys and meaning-making that go unnoticed and are capable of facilitating infrapolitical resistance spaces (Cruz, 2013) into which to practice new ways of being in the academy.

Quiahuitl's enactment of *terquedad* is an enactment of multiple ways of being, which ultimately pose a threat to the academy, the moment various aspects of her body "talk back" (Cruz, 2011). In Quiahuitl's view, *terquedad* mobilizes her body to make claims of belonging in the academy in her terms, "showing up in snapbacks, grillz, and dark lipstick." In other words, the epistemological distinction of being *terca pero no pendeja* announces Quiahuitl's process of moving away from "practical reasoning" to *terquedad* as an action/intention that may not help her escape the oppressive structures of the university but allows her to critique its oppressive structure and can help her arrive to a consciousness leading to liberation in her other worlds of sense (Lugones, 2003, p. 55). Quiahuitl's process of refashioning professionalism functions as a political gesture to refuse neoliberal intellectualism, coloniality, and arbitrary institutional grammars—a significant reclamation against ongoing acts of violence against non-dominant student populations.

La Terca con Dientes: Refusing Academic Violence

Quiahuitl's family migration story, like many other families who migrate with young children, is marked by separation at the U.S./Mexico border. She recalls being six years old when her mother was taken away as they tried to cross the Tijuana–San Diego border. She tells the story:

I remember being in a blue van. At some point, some strangers opened the side of the truck we were in. I was fucking scared. I jumped onto my mom's chest and bit her blouse so we wouldn't get separated. She was taken away.

Quiahuitl describes this moment as a recollection of her *terquedad*. This memory of latching to her mother's blouse, *con los dientes*, is when Quiahuitl's stubborn Will confronted the Will of the State, a willful moment expressed through the clenching of her teeth. She shares this memory of *terquedad* to describe her journey in two doctoral programs and to provide us with a view of the uses of *terquedad* as a resistance subjectivity in academic "worlds."⁸ Quiahuitl explains how this embodied memory, the inner impulse of *terquedad*, makes her latch onto things, leaving marks, even if what she is holding onto is taken away, a taking that is momentary

⁸ I move away from the concept of academic cultures to describe academic "worlds." Academic world in this sense relates to the historical, political, social, institutional, and epistemic relationships that produce the university.

as she finds her way back through her teeth marks. She recalls her experiences dealing with her academic dismissal:

I refuse to let any of these people break my spirit. They can tug and pull, but they can't break me down. It's in my blood. I recognize we come from warrior people. Even my homies who are locked up say it all the time. We come from a legacy of brilliance and fighters. I refused to get stomped down and kicked to the side. There is too much at stake.

Like many first-generation mujeres and queer-of-color scholars, Quiahuitl's academic journey is deeply personal. She describes the moment that she received her acceptance into the university as the moment that also inaugurates the criminal proceedings against her younger brother who was arrested and prosecuted for gang-related violence at the age of thirteen. Quiahuitl shares this situation as one of her motivations to pursue a doctoral degree and focus her work on Mexican and Chicano gangs in Southern California. While this drive to write an otherwise of Chicano gang culture has been described as a stubborn pursuit "difficult to handle for a woman researcher," the university's creation of diversity programs and admissions expects this type of research from Quiahuitl as a legitimate person to theorize on race in the academy and gang culture in general (Bacchetta et al., 2018; Ferguson, 2012; Moallem, 2002). She is an expected multicultural subject until *la terca con dientes* showed up. She recalls her experiences:

When I think about my graduate school experience, I, for whatever reason, have been consistently confronted with struggle. I don't even look for it—when I was at Y University—I actively tried to steer away from politics and drama and focused on my work because I knew/know my work is fucking dope. I know I have a 'unique' positioning, but somehow either whom I was associated with or *something about my presence posed some kind of threat to some people*. Unfortunately, regretfully for me, those people just so happened to be in positions of power, and I got to experience their wrath and exertion of it. I mean, I got pushed out of my doctoral program. I got forced out of an Ethnic Studies Department for voicing a complaint despite being told to be quiet.

Quiahuitl understands that her aesthetic choices and her body alone pose a threat. Her *terquedad* beyond an aesthetic refusal is an unwillingness to be silent and speak up against “her people,” what she describes as Chicano/Latino cisgender men who fail to recognize their power and read her *terquedad* as a provocation of violence. Quiahuitl describes a refusal to appease

the social body of educational institutions through a culture of silence and respectability, a becoming *terca* for what she describes as "not selling her integrity and dignity" in exchange for belonging.

Quiahuitl explains she became *terca*, a *terca* understood from a logic of oppression, because, according to her peers, she didn't know when to be silent or how to speak up. Quiahuitl was not silent when she experienced the most extreme cases of gender and racial violence and emotional abuse from colleagues and mentors, a speaking-up that made her into "a rebellious, angry student" because she allowed her conscious Will to clench her teeth down tight and leave marks in the tenure portfolio of faculty of color. *Terca* because she spoke against the culture of machismo among Latino faculty men despite being advised the contrary, "given her record with academic issues," *terca* because she won't pack and leave. *Terca* because she appealed. *Terca* because she applied to another doctoral program and continues her academic journey. *Terca* because she asserts her body as a confident Xicana scholar despite the experiences of violence to claim her identity, her body, and her voice(s). Intentionally *terca*, politically *terca*, she continues,

colleagues and mentors describe me as a loudmouth, 'always fighting some kind of war, and *there is something wrong with me and in me.*' My colleague asked me, 'does everything have to be a war?' I felt that my colleague wasn't empathetic to my struggle(s) traversing the treachery that is inherent in my journey in grad school as a working-class woman of color, you know? I felt like a sense of judgment on his behalf because here he is reading what I recognize as acts of defiance.

Quiahuitl recounts being disparaged by colleagues and faculty because they perceive of her gestures as turning everything into warfare. She explained she knew she was at war but in one she did not start, albeit in one she is willingly fighting back. Moreover, being hailed as the subject of *terquedad* also becomes the justification given to Quiahuitl to make sense of her precarious conditions within the university when she describes her colleagues asserting "there is something wrong with me and in me." Her experiences are her fault for being mad, always fighting. It is her *terquedad* that places her in a constant war.

Terquedad, as described by her mentors and colleagues, is perceived as a full-frontal attack in Gramscian terms.⁹ Quiahuitl, however, conceives of this war as a travesia, a crossing the treacherous terrains that sustain the university. Quiahuitl is indeed in a war, an inner war between the Will of the institution and her Will to remain multiple and complex. She invokes her terquedad:

I don't give a fuck if you are a professor. Why are we so afraid? We tell survivors of sexual assault and rape to name their rapists, why aren't we as graduate students name dropping professors who cause us psychological, spiritual, and emotional harms and distress? Imagine what that would do? How it would force these motherfuckers to be accountable and to humble themselves down.

In other words, Quiahuitl understands her terquedad as a process that makes her peers and faculty uncomfortable. It is a becoming that makes others uncomfortable when Quiahuitl remains multiple: spiritually in tune, demonstrating a strong work ethic, and being outspoken. A queer body that destabilizes the distinction between object and subject of knowledge. One that requires Quiahuitl to "act professional" and not act as if she was part of a gang if she wants to be more than an object of knowledge.¹⁰ Quiahuitl understands her terquedad as a performance that produces a social space of resistance and survival among those who join her in reading her terquedad through a different frame of intelligibility. It is a stubbornness that creates a geographic area to be both object and subject of knowledge production. Quiahuitl states,

I have reached a point where I am like fuck that. Enough is enough. So what if I am always fighting? The reality is that I am! People like you and I are continually having to fight for our dignity. I know it's not good for my health, and trust me, I work very diligently to balance all the poison I confront in these white treacherous academic

⁹ Gramsci (1971) describes a war of maneuver as a confrontational and direct attack at the State while his war of position indicates a struggle over hegemony within the institutions of civil society. In this manner, Quiahuitl is more accurately engaging in a "war of position" or the hegemony over the meaning of professionalism. However, her terquedad is not understood as a counter-hegemony given her actions are read, judged, and understood from a logic of oppression.

¹⁰ Quiahuitl describes how gestures, body image, comportment, speech, and accent determine how faculty treat or label students as belonging to the academy. She states this pattern is similar to how the State determines membership to gangs, where the body and its adornment indicates belonging. In this manner, Quiahuitl tells me the State and its institutions of higher education reserve the right to be unmarked as "the real thugs" despite having a documented history of engaging in criminal and violent activities.

spaces consistently thrown my way through yin yoga, running, the gym, reiki, danza Azteca. At this point, I do not give a fuck about how other people see me maneuver my way through grad school. I've had to create my blueprint.

Quiahuitl is conscious that her terquedad is creating a blueprint towards new geographies of meaning and a resistance sociality where we mutually recognize each other as *tercas*. "People like you and I" places me in this relationship of resistance subjectivity where I return to my photos as a blueprint into my worlds of terquedad, a traveling that allows me to understand and write Quiahuitl terquedad as an act of survival and transformation. A returning to *mi terquedad* is to collectively conspire, thrive, survive, and resist the damages caused by the university. A shifting into our worlds of terquedad to prevent the academic venom from spreading. A return to gestures of embodied refusal to find new paths of *conocimientos* and imagine new political fantasies that Quiahuitl describes as embodied "mermaid energies" with "gauged ears like the Aztecs," in which, "the bigger the gauge, the bigger the vision." Where we, *terca* scholars, envision, enact, and transform ourselves and institutions of education through the pedagogy of terquedad.

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