



## The New Mestizas

### Activist Consciousness Against Femi(ni)cide in Diasporic Collectives Formations During Mexico's #8 and #9M 2020

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#### Abstract

A mass women's march took place across Mexico's cities on Sunday 8th March 2020 (#8M), directly followed by Mexico's first ever nationwide women strike (#9M/ #UnDíaSinNosotras) the next day. Both these events deeply resonated transnationally. Open calls were disseminated through digital networked umbrella platforms appealing to Mexican women around the world to publically demonstrate against gender-based violence and femi(ni)cide impunity. The encounters that resulted from these led to new feminist collective formations hosting a wide range of lived experiences. And those encounters became, in turn, new potential spaces of belonging for activist consciousness to flourish in their diasporic context. This article draws on Gloria E. Anzaldúa's concept of mestiza consciousness to reflect on the formation of two such groups in London and Berlin and on their emerging narratives at the time.

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### Activist Consciousness Against Femi(ni)cide in Diasporic Collectives Formations During Mexico's #8 and #9M 2020

Sara Ibáñez O'Donnell (Heidelberg)

This is her home  
this thin edge of  
barbwire.

(Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*)

US-Mexico wall's barbwire marks the open wound, as Anzaldúa defines it in her work *Borderlands/La Frontera*, of this world (b)order. One could read the above quote quite literally. However, rather than a geographical marker, barbwire as home speaks here, rather, to its diasporic condition. It is as evoking of a harsh state of liminality as it is of an ability of resistance. The aim of this article is to explore precisely the diasporic condition of the consciousness formation in the year 2020 of two activist collectives, based in Berlin and London respectively.<sup>1</sup> Both groups provided me with individual and collective testimonies on how their activist subjectivities had developed. Given the collectives formed during the unfolding of transnational actions echoing Mexico's #8M and #9M<sup>2</sup> that year,

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<sup>1</sup> I don't name the specific names of the collectives given that the consent I obtained by members is now dated. In the case of the Berlin-based collective many members have changed since the time my fieldwork took place. This was also the case with the London-based one before they dissolved.

<sup>2</sup> I name throughout the article these hashtags when referring both to offline and digital manifestations of the gatherings in Mexico and around the world. #8M and

my purpose is to connect the emergence of these feminist formations to understand how both groups were shaped in different places and diasporic contexts at the same conjuncture.<sup>3</sup>

Berlin and London have historically been key for socialist feminist internationalist movements. With this historical legacy come inherited organisational structures embedded in the representational frameworks that hold space for International Women's Day, around which the activist practices of the groups unfold. Both cities are still today two of the strongest activist hubs in Europe and both are, of course, postcolonial nation-state capitals<sup>4</sup>. Both the Berlin-based and the London-based collective were born from a response to an open call to each of their respective Mexican communities just before the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions came into being. The lockdown measures made some of the feminist claims against gendered violence at the time all-the-more poignant at such an extraordinary time given they were strictly applied to women<sup>5</sup> living in a wide spectrum of nation-state regulatory frameworks. Authorities expected them to stay at home, with women at threat in their domestic spaces being further at risk. After the encounters of March 2020 many of the activists continued their activity and became engaged in the new reality the pandemic was posing to women in Mexico and to the migrant community in Berlin and London.

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#9M refer to 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of March. The latter was held under the hashtag #UnDíaSinNosotras

<sup>3</sup> I make use of the word conjuncture in the sense that Stuart Hall made use of it as a foundational concept to in the field of Cultural Studies.

<sup>4</sup> While I choose to centre in the diasporic condition rather than the diasporic history of migration in both contexts it is worth noting Mexican migration in both cities is substantially different, partially due to the difference between the foreign policies between both countries and partially because of the processes that women migrant face in both cities upon arrival and throughout their lived experiences.

<sup>5</sup> Unless specified otherwise I refer to women in alignment with the German acronym FLINTA\* which stands for "Frauen, Lesben, Intergeschlechtliche, nichtbinäre, trans und agender Personen" and translates into English as women, lesbians, intersex, non-binary, trans and agender people.

The actions of both groups were inscribed within broader alliances. They marched under the *Women's Strike Assembly* and the *Alliance of Internationalist Feminists* in London and Berlin respectively. The London collective was circumscribed to London's Latin American Front *Mujeres Latinas Unidas* in a similar way that the Berlin one was to the *Bloque Latinoamericano* in Berlin. The following day many of the members who had taken part in the march met again at their respective Mexican embassies to protest against the impunity of Mexico as a nation-state with regards to gendered violence. Crosses with names of femi(ni)cide victims' written on them and placards with slogans alongside Mexican flags were placed outside both embassy buildings. Photographic material of these actions circulated online and was shared amongst other diasporic responses to #8M and #9M around the world.

"Feminicide" derives from the term *feminicidio* (in Spanish). It was coined by the Mexican scholar Marcela Lagarde as a nuanced variant of US scholar Diana E. H. Russell's term "femicide". Russell used the term "femicide" for the first time in 1976 at the first International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women defining it as "the killing of females by males because they are female".<sup>6</sup> The variation of the word translated by Lagarde into *feminicidio* highlights the feminine aspect of the victims (either females or feminised bodies) as a cause for the impunity of the crimes. The concept would then become typified under the Mexican legislative context and key to feminist scholarship and activism in Mexico and across Latin America. Russell and Lagarde exchanged their views on the matter after the term *feminicidio* had become popularised in Spanish during the 1990s. At the time Russell expressed her disagreement with this nuanced variation of the word, given her intention had been to find a universal term. These differences initiated a series of discussions which have remained until this day raising important points on the challenges of the treatment of femi(ni)cide as a transnational concept. The epistemic debate poses questions on which histories and geopolitical frameworks

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<sup>6</sup> After decades of discussion around the origins of the terms and adjustments to her definition of femicide, Russell clarified the genealogy of both variations of the word ratifying this final definition in RUSSELL, *The origin and importance of the term femicide*.

should be given agency and how. I use the English term with brackets in the middle – femi(ni)cide – following, amongst others, the Mexican scholar Aleida Luján Pinelo,<sup>7</sup> who has argued that this amalgamation of the word brings together both Global North and Global South epistemologies and therefore has the potential of becoming a more just legal category. Whilst in London and in the “Anglo” context more broadly the use of the word “femicide” prevails in Berlin’s diasporic context activists also use the variation *Feminizid* (transposed into German from *feminicidio*) alongside *Femizid*<sup>8</sup>.

The mobility of the concept of femi(ni)cide attests to the different natures of transnational representational frameworks from which the activists are simultaneously producing knowledge. Two key questions that this article tackles are: how do the subjective formations of a diasporic consciousness against femi(ni)cide in the collectives formed in London and Berlin emerge? And in which ways are their border-crossing subjectivities producing translocal knowledge through their activism? In my process of theorising on consciousness formation processes, I relate some of the activists’ emerging narratives to key concepts in Anzaldúa’s border thinking. This epistemic framework serves both as a theoretical toolbox and as a method. In the following paragraphs I attempt to convey the co-production of knowledge that stemmed from my initial encounter with both groups, the oral accounts of some of the members and the collective articulation of their mission at the time.

I first came into contact with the Berlin-based activists during the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 protest in Berlin. The following day I attended the 9<sup>th</sup> of March transnational action held in solidarity with Mexico’s women’s strike at London’s Mexican embassy, which was also being replicated in Berlin. There I met for the first time some of the activists from the London collective and, in the aftermath of these encounters, I went on to follow

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<sup>7</sup> Co-founder of the research and data activist project Feminizidmap. See: <https://feminizidmap.org/>. The conceptualisation of the feminist concept of femi(ni)cide is exposed in LUJÁN PINELO, *Femi(ni)cide: A Cartography*.

<sup>8</sup> Both variations of the word became germanised and more prominent in the German-speaking public discourse around 2014 following the UN’s enquiry to Germany prior to eventually signing the Istanbul Convention in 2018.

up with both groups. After these encounters I decided to engage with three members from each collective through unstructured interviews in Spanish which took place via Skype in which I asked them to talk about their life-activism trajectories. After transcribing their oral narratives, I drew out common themes rooted in their stories and reflections around body and place. I also compared accounts of their lived experience working in alliance with other activists locally and on the ways in which living outside Mexico had shaped their activism. During the summer, once Covid-19 restrictions had lifted slightly, I was able to meet with the remaining members of the Berlin collective for a focussed reflective discussion. My information also relied on a survey that was shared with me to the wider group which constituted their collective mission and vision. The London collective did not meet again in person after the pandemic hit, despite the fact they had originally intended to, and ended up dissolving, so I followed with them through a collective survey.

The nature of the digital and physical spheres in which the protest actions of March 2020 took place implied a complex web of relationality. On the one hand, there was the relationship between the activists and International Women's Day itself and their role within a block of various mobilising networks. On the other, the different connections each of the groups already had collectively (and the activists individually) with Mexican-run platforms. It is worth noting that in 2019 the 8th of March was made a local public holiday in Berlin, though this is not the case in London. This of course allowed for further participation and organisation during the march. Another contextual difference is that in Berlin the *Alliance of Internationalist Feminists* had called for a separatist march to further represent migration groups that weren't present in the national march. This was not the case in London, in which there was only one march in the city culminating in Trafalgar Square. All these contextual specificities conformed the backdrop for the formation of these two new collectives.

Many of the oral, textual, and visual narratives against femi(ni)cide surrounding #8M and #9M in both London and Berlin came into being through allegorical references to Mexico's day of the dead, which were then customised in each local context. The now global chant *ni una más, ni una más, ni una asesinada más*, rooted in the Mexican movement

#NiUnaMas<sup>9</sup> was recited amongst the larger crowd at the march and at the embassy's action in Berlin and London. At times showing textual variations in German and English (*Keine Mehr / Not One More*), these activist practices are forms of transcultural knowledge production. The symbols they allude to perform translocally at a place level and, whether reciprocated or not by those in their surroundings, open pathways for a deeper transcultural understanding of structural gender-based violence. Of course, the transculturality of these practices does not only rely on the activist's agency given they are entangled with complex digital and non-digital flows of information. However, the collective subjectivities of these group formations, I argue, are key to an intersubjective understanding of femi(ni)cide and gender-based violence at a collective level. Here, I relate such subjective formations to Anzaldúa's concept of *mes-tiza*<sup>10</sup> consciousness.

### Mestiza Consciousness as Crossing

Gloria Anzaldúa conceptualised in 1987 the U.S.-Mexican border as an open wound "where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds" and the borderlands, amongst other ways, as a "constant state of transition".<sup>11</sup> Whilst borders are the physical representation of a liminal separation, the borderlands speak of the embodiment of their trespassing.

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<sup>9</sup> Ni Una (not one more) is a movement that stemmed from the global mediation of the so-called Juárez femi(ni)cides in Mexico's state of Chihuahua after the implementation of the NAFTA agreement between Canada, the US and Mexico. Susana Chávez used this expression in one of her poems and was later murdered in Ciudad Juárez, where she was from. This line was then claimed by many women and feminists coining the name of the movement. The name of the global Argentinian campaign Ni Una Menos (not one less) recognises, then, the memory of this Mexican movement against femi(ni)cide.

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the vernacular use of this word in Spanish has racial connotations that refer to a person or living being that is born from parents from different races. In the American context this means having both indigenous and Spanish descent. A second meaning it carries can be applied to something that holds a hybrid mix of elements, such as a music style.

<sup>11</sup> ANZALDÚA, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 3. In the following, quotations and other references to *Borderlands* are indicated by the abbreviation *B/F*.

Border-crossing and occupying the space of the in-between therefore is a queering state. A state of transition in which one belongs neither to one side nor the other. Similarly, the women activists of the Berlin and London-based Mexican collectives are inhabiting two epistemic territories at once. They carry their situated knowledge prior to their crossing, which allows them to relate the places their bodies inhabit in their present with those it has inhabited in the past. This situated knowledge serves as a heuristic tool to further trace transcultural connections between femi(ni)cide and spatial violence through their embodied experience inscribed in various territorial demarcations. Whilst this experience may be acquired individually, it is then articulated collectively through their activist practices, forging a portal of belonging for future forms of mestiza consciousness. Not only in the physical realm but also in the digital one, they are weaving networks that bridge the pan-Mexican and the European contexts.

The collective subjectivities of both groups are rooted in their members' life-activism trajectories, which were in turn shaped by their diasporic experience at the intersection of gender, race, class, ability and age, amongst others. Activists in both groups living in Berlin and London hosted a wide range of experiences which they reflected upon as key states of consciousness around gender-based violence. Some of these experiences were acquired in Mexico, but not all of them. They also spoke about other places they had lived in during their mobile lives and of the awareness they had gained through the connections with other activists in Mexico or in their current context. It was a common practice for them to share such experiences with each other to join dots between violence-body-place, meaning their individual knowledge-making performs at a collective level. Furthermore, the fact that both collectives took action within a transnational representational context meant that their knowledge-building often incorporated critical reflections on the role of the state. This came up for the Berlin group, for example, through comparative perspectives with other groups which took part in the march organised by *Alliance of Internationalist Feminists*. As "new mestizas" they forged alliances with other activists from Global South, politicising each other's experiences as collectives through the common challenges of their diasporic context. Members of the London collective, for example,



spoke in their interviews about the commonalities between Latina struggles and the *Black Lives Matter* movement, which resurged after the murder of George Floyd in the U.S.

The Berlin collective enacted a performative walk on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March with a placard stating the strapline “In Mexico Every Day Is the Day of The Dead” in Spanish. When I asked one of their members why they had chosen this as a theme, she recalled a group conversation prior to the march. They had discussed how such action might be perceived as a Mexican stereotype, given the reference to the well-known national festivity, but it was decided that it would be a good strategic move precisely because the use of the cliché would grab people’s attention.<sup>12</sup> I found this testimony particularly insightful because it denotes the group’s agency in re-signifying the incessant reproduction of death and dying in relation to Mexico to draw political awareness to the matter of femi(ni)cide. I relate this to the relationship between cultural identity, representation and signifying practices that Stuart Hall outlines in his work *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*. For Hall, the notion of identity denotes critical points of significant difference, which constitute “what we really are, or rather, since history has intervened in us, what we have become” and states that cultural identity is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’<sup>13</sup>. The activists’ strategy of dressing in garments that recall Mexico’s day of the dead connects with what Hall signals as “the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture”.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, contrary to being essentialist symbols of Mexicanity, the representations of their Mexican identity traits could be, as Hall puts it, “not an essence but a positioning”.<sup>15</sup> Being self-defined as a Mexican collective in itself is, as much as a national or a territorial demarcation, a *locus* or standpoint that already requires a mestiza consciousness shaped by diasporic experience. This agency in positioning their activism aligns with

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<sup>12</sup> This testimony can be found in an individual transcribed interview. I named this activist under the pseudonym Laura in my MA thesis. I interviewed her in March 2020 via Skype.

<sup>13</sup> HALL, *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, 225-226.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

what Anzaldúa calls “a tolerance for ambiguity” (*B/F*, 30) whereby the new mestiza

learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view [...]. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode. Nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned. Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else. (*B/F*, 79)

The activists’ mestiza consciousness can therefore contain multiple points of view which generate such plural and ambivalent collective subjectivities and produce knowledge through their activist practices.

### Geographies of selves

Cecilia<sup>16</sup> from the London group was in her mid-30s when I interviewed her in 2020 and seemed settled in the UK where she worked as a lecturer at a former polytechnic London university.<sup>17</sup> She was born and had lived in Mexico City, where she had worked for Mexico’s Federal Police Department. She had also lived in the Mexican state of Tabasco, in Madrid (Spain), and Cardiff (Wales), where she studied a PhD in criminal psychology. She eventually moved to the outskirts of London, where she now teaches. She considered her academic research a form of activism in and of itself, and admitted it was rare for her to join active protests but said that she felt compelled to take part in the action at the embassy because of how she had been affected by the media treatment of the latest femi(ni)cides in Mexico. Another younger activist in the group, a 21-year-old theatre student who had only lived in London for a year, told me her participation in the embassy protest was her first. Neither of the two interviewees had been regular partakers in protests against violence

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<sup>16</sup> This is also a pseudonym used during my interview transcriptions.

<sup>17</sup> An education reform in the UK’s Higher Education system in 1992 integrated what used to be called polytechnics into the universities system. These were institutions that taught technical skills yet awarded higher education degrees. A more intersectional student body still characterises these former polytechnics, with a higher proportion of students from lower income families and class backgrounds.

against women, however they both felt compelled to join the protests to align with Mexico's strike on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March while living in London.

Gemma<sup>18</sup>, the most senior activist in the Berlin-based collective was in her 50s and hugely well connected with other European networks of activists. She had lived in Germany for over twenty years. She married a German human rights lawyer whom she met in Mexico City's Museum of Anthropology while he was on a visit to Mexico. They eventually went on to have two sons. In her life narration, she identified as a housewife who had worked relentlessly to generate awareness of criminal impunity in Mexico. She had joined several political and activist networks against violence after moving to Berlin but recalled the process of looking for other women to organise as a difficult one. She felt she had either come across activists who were too young or, in the cases when she had engaged with activists of a similar age, she didn't feel they were active enough. Whilst she had protested on a number of occasions at the Mexican embassy in Berlin before, she found it hard to formalise a group with other Mexicans in action against multiple disappearances of women and men in Mexico. The biggest action she remembered from her activist trajectory was a remembrance event for the *desaparecidos de Ayotzinapa*, the mass kidnapping of forty-three male students in the Mexican state of Guerrero. For this action she had mobilised in coordination with a Europe-wide campaign and in conjunction with a Hamburg-based activist group. She stated that, whilst she had been active in other groups in the past, it was not until she got together with the collective in the run up to #8M and in preparation for #9M that she felt she had connected with a group formation as such.

Another young member of the Berlin-based group told me she had moved to Berlin two years prior to March 2020 to study a master's degree in Siegen before moving to Cologne where she met her German partner and eventually moved to Berlin with him. She spoke about the difficulties of starting from scratch her teaching career in International Relations. In the Mexican city of Guadalajara, where she lived before moving to Germany, she had started teaching after gaining her M.A. She had already been involved in student movements against sexual violence and

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<sup>18</sup> This is also a pseudonym used during my interview transcriptions.

femi(ni)cide within her university and spoke of several occasions in which she had co-organised protests whilst there. During her time as a student in Germany she maintained active contact with her former students and kept up frequent rapport with them about their activist and collective actions in Guadalajara. One of the motives that drove her to get involved with the collective was the potential of establishing links with the German media about some of those stories because she felt that they might have more traction if pitched from Europe, given she felt they would be more heard from here.

Public transport, streets, neighbourhoods and many other spaces in which embodied experiences of gender and place were constructed are central to the oral testimonies from members of both the Berlin and London collectives. One of the activists in the latter group spoke about how she became aware of her tight clothing in Mexico City when she was sexually harassed on a bus. When she lived in the Mexican state of Tabasco years later, where it is hotter, she started wearing shorts again for the first time and only then realised she had previously stopped doing so in the city. When recalling her move to Madrid she talked about how she stopped feeling sexually harassed in the public transport, however she recalled having experienced racial aggressions late at night instead. Another person described walking home at night for the first time during her first time spent abroad. She remembered feeling unsafe when she went through tunnels, until her feelings changed after doing so the first two or three times.

My conversations with these activists evidenced the depth of their everyday life experiences throughout their mobile lives. Very different senses of space arose from the #8M march and the embassy protests in both their cities. In the same way that the everyday lives of these women are marked by their sensorial memory of body in relation to place in Mexico, those who have inhabited other spatial contexts incorporate that knowledge in their localities in Berlin and in London. The same way that local activism actions can occur in proximity to the places (memorials, statues, institutions) that they are claiming to denounce, there is a memory of place that the action of protest elsewhere triggers and which remains in the corporality of the protests. Living memory, therefore, is

key to how mestiza consciousness performs, and *Aztlan*, or the homeland as Anzaldúa conceptualises it, is ever present in them.

## The Coatlicue State & La Facultad

In *Borderlands/La Frontera* Anzaldúa writes about the *Coatlicue State*. Coatlicue is an Aztec deity. Her name translates from Nahuatl as ‘serpent skirt’ and was considered symbolic of the earth and mother of other deities. She is the goddess amongst other symbols of dualism, of life and death and of mobility and immobility. As Anzaldúa states Coatlicue “represents duality in life, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective” (*B/F*, 46). As a state of “prelude to crossing”, it is one of transcendence towards a higher spiritual and political consciousness (*B/F*, 48). Like with the serpent’s bite, the new mestiza feels pain throughout the different stages of consciousness:

Every increment of consciousness, every step forward is a *travesía*, a crossing. I am again an alien in new territory. And again, and again. But if I escape conscious awareness, escape ‘knowing,’ I won’t be moving. Knowledge makes me more aware, it makes me more conscious. ‘Knowing’ is painful because after ‘it’ happens I can’t stay in the same place and be comfortable. I am no longer the same person I was before. (*B/F*, 48)

Despite the fact I did not discuss the connection of some of the testimonies to Anzaldúa at the time of my fieldwork, I came to realise only eventually that Coatlicue’s skin changing, from birthing to death, could be read as a metaphor for different stages of activist consciousness. Cecilia, from the London collective told me she had joined these groups spontaneously without knowing exactly what they were looking for initially. She explained how at the beginning she had attempted to join various existing groups, yet eventually came to realise she did not feel right in them. Laura, from the Berlin collective, told me how she had felt uncomfortable in other pan-Latina feminist collectives when it came to, for example, how they had dealt with certain tactics around the subject of abortion. This led her to share these thoughts with the rest of the group, whom she felt

also offered a space for activity against femi(ni)cide in Mexico from Germany. This shows that their group identification as Mexican women came into being as a form of diasporic positioning by way of sharing a lived experience, rather than an essentialism, as referred to earlier in relation to Hall's understanding of identity and diaspora. Their collective activism is a cultural practice and, as such, affinities rely on common ways of doing. But what these narratives show, above all, is the change of skin required when entering Coatlicue's state in the search for new forms of belonging.

Whilst life and activism are likely to always be intertwined in the process of searching for meaning and belonging through collective action, this is all the more true when it comes to finding a collective consciousness around femi(ni)cide and gendered violence. It is in the processes of alliance with other groups that these commonalities or differences arise. However, regardless of disagreements, the belief that establishing alliances is a necessary tactic for collective organising remained overall unquestioned in the processual thinking of both groups during their formation. An increased affective sensitivity which was simultaneously present in regard to peers in Mexico and other activists in London and Berlin requires what I conceptualise as an intuitive knowledge in order to collectively weave a mestiza consciousness. Furthermore, Anzaldúa's notion of *la facultad* is an ability that the new mestiza develops precisely in the prior stage to entering the Coatlicue state. She defines it as "the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface". *La facultad* "is an instant sensing, a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning" and "an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide" (B/F 38). This speaks, of course, to the activists in both group's intuitive sensing abilities prior to establishing new affinities and forging new spaces of belonging.

## Conocimiento and Spiritual Activism

Anzaldúa's new mestiza goes beyond creating alliances through affinity. In her book *Methodology of the Oppressed* the Chicana theorist Chela

Sandoval seeks to counter-argue the idea that forms of oppositional consciousness are not possible under postmodern globalisation<sup>19</sup>. In proposing this discussion, Sandoval recalls a statement by Anzaldúa: “[...] the practice of a radical U.S. third world feminism requires the development of a differential consciousness that can be both applied and generalised: *la conciencia de la mestiza*.”<sup>20</sup> This type of mestiza coalition is, from a tactical point of view, vulnerable to the multicultural contexts of Berlin and London due to the existing politics of representation within the activist fabric in which they unfold. Whilst these activist groups are creating new forms of mestiza alliances, they are also affected by their local contexts. One of the narratives that emerged when surveying the London collective in the aftermath of ceasing their activity as a group was that there had been important discrepancies. Some wanted to continue to be purposely focused on femi(ni)cide whilst others thought they should merge further their vindications with other Latin American groups. This again speaks to the complexities of coalitions, given mission-driven decision-making implies that some differences cannot continue to co-exist.

Anzaldúa never finished her doctoral thesis, meaning that her concepts were perhaps not as validated as they should have been within academia after she died, despite the fact she had been actively teaching them and had, arguably, begun a school of thought. That said, her processed writing dwells deeply into mestiza alliances through the ideas of “*conocimiento*”<sup>21</sup> and “spiritual activism”. In her work she states that the former arises in trying to make sense of what is happening and coming “into deep awareness of political and spiritual situations ”.<sup>22</sup> She also states that

*[c]onocimiento* urges us to respond not just with the traditional practice of spirituality (contemplation, meditation and private rituals) or with the technologies of political activism (protests, demonstrations and speakouts), but with the amalgam of the two: spiritual activism [...] <sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> SANDOVAL, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 62.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 62

<sup>21</sup> “*Knowledge*” in *English*.

<sup>22</sup> ANZALDÚA, *Light in The Dark*, 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

Further to this, the scholar Martha Palacio writes in her book *Gloria Anzaldúa: Poscolonialidad y feminismo* about the act of crossing as “a condition of possibility for a way of life that allows making border-crossing a form of cross-cutting solidarity” which reiterates *conocimiento* as a prior requisite to forming a mestiza consciousness.<sup>24</sup> Palacio takes on Mignolo’s concept of colonial wound (who in turn takes it from Frantz Fanon), and places it at the heart of an awakening of knowledge around violence:

The colonial wound shapes bodies, assigns them and locates them in distinct spaces that determine the options of moving within and through them [...] The colonial wound is a history of violence, of clash and survival as much as an unfolding of creativity acting as a form of resistance knitted on to the skin that covers the raw flesh; the flesh of a body that walks and that becomes a voice to question what its told is real and normal: ‘what’s always been that way’.<sup>25</sup>

One could think, in this sense, about both the London-based and Berlin-based collectives as wounded subjectivities taking up space. Indeed, their activation journeys are linked to an experience of colonial wounding through the experience of migration to the UK and Germany. These, in turn, are also fuelled by a creative force, which can relate to what Palacio refers to as a “spiritual motor” when it comes to their *facultad* to generate knowledge through their collective activism.<sup>26</sup> Both groups were in agreement with each other when they said they had become more aware of the problems that Mexican women face because of some of the gender-related privileges they felt they had gained as Mexican women in Europe. However, they also agreed these privileges were inseparable to their experiences of racialisation in Berlin and London. This gender-race form of intersecting oppression was reflected in discursive formations. It is precisely in this sense that their *conocimiento* is a form of transcultural production of knowledge around gendered violence.

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<sup>24</sup> PALACIO, *Gloria Anzaldúa: poscolonialidad y feminismo*, 39-40.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47. Translation by author.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. Translation by author.



## Nepantlera Futures

Beyond the realm of the individual and group narratives these new *mestizas* shared with me, it is pivotal to state that the knowledge production through their forms of activist practice was not only relegated to the physical spaces they inhabited. The online spaces through which these collectives were able to organise were also part of the configuration of their group subjectivity. Of course digital subjectivities are highly visible in times of so-called “hashtag feminism” but I have decided not to focus on them to not detract from the alliances that indeed developed at a time when physical contact became precarious due to Covid-19. That said, it is worth adding that some digital spaces can also be liminal and host forms of new *mestiza* consciousness from the borderlands. Whilst #NiUnaMas and #NiUnaMenos, for example, are now global hashtags, they are spaces for potential new *mestiza* coalitions to arise, meaning the borderlands of the digital sphere has the potential of becoming a *Nepantla* capable of hosting *neplantera* (the female citizens of *Nepantla*) futures. In *Light In the Dark / Luz En Lo Oscuro* Anzaldúa states:

Nepantla is the point of contact y el lugar between worlds – between imagination and physical existence, between ordinary and nonordinary (spirit) realities. [...] Nepantlas are places of constant tension, where the missing or absent pieces can be summoned back, where transformation and healing may be possible, where wholeness is just out of reach but seems attainable.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, the digital spaces in which new *mestiza* practices unfold can be read as a third space in which alliances flourish precisely because they are nor-here-nor-there. Therefore, they allow for *mestiza* subjectivities to be imagined beyond politics of place.

As producers of knowledge, the activist groups in question in London and Berlin are only two of the multiple webs of relationality raising new *mestiza* consciousness around violence. As stated at the start of this article some of the activists became involved in discussions taking place in Mexico at a time when many of those conversations moved online after Covid-

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<sup>27</sup> ANZALDÚA, *Light in The Dark*, 2.

19. Regulatory structures became more apparent during lockdown, revealing the nation-state sutures and to put these into discussion collectively reinforced further activists' capability of navigating multiple contexts to further inform their critique. As Gloria Anzaldúa states:

[I]n Nepantla we realize that realities clash, authority figures of the various groups demand contradictory commitments, and we and other have failed living up to idealized goals [...] we're caught in remolinos [vortexes], each with different, often contradictory forms of cognition, perspectives, world views, belief systems – all occupying the transitional Nepantla space.<sup>28</sup>

As well as a space where contradictions surface, the space of Nepantla multiplies the potential of webs of belonging for future mestizas to flourish. *Nepantlera* futures can emerge as spaces of possibility given, they are, in Anzaldúa's words, a "psychological, liminal space between the way things had been and an unknown future [...], the space in-between, the locus and sign of transition".<sup>29</sup>

To sum up the processual formations of these two groups born in London and Berlin during Mexico's 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 through Anzaldúa's border thinking: a *mestiza* consciousness is conformed by entering the Coatlicue state, after which *new mestizas* are born out of it who belong in new *Nepantla* spaces created by the *facultad* of their activists as places where spiritual activism can flourish. The outcome is their transcultural knowledge production, i.e., the *conocimiento* they generate. A *nepantlera* future, would offer a home for new mestizas to continue to (re)imagine alternative forms of relationality in which structural gender-based violence could be understood and dealt with transculturally.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*.

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