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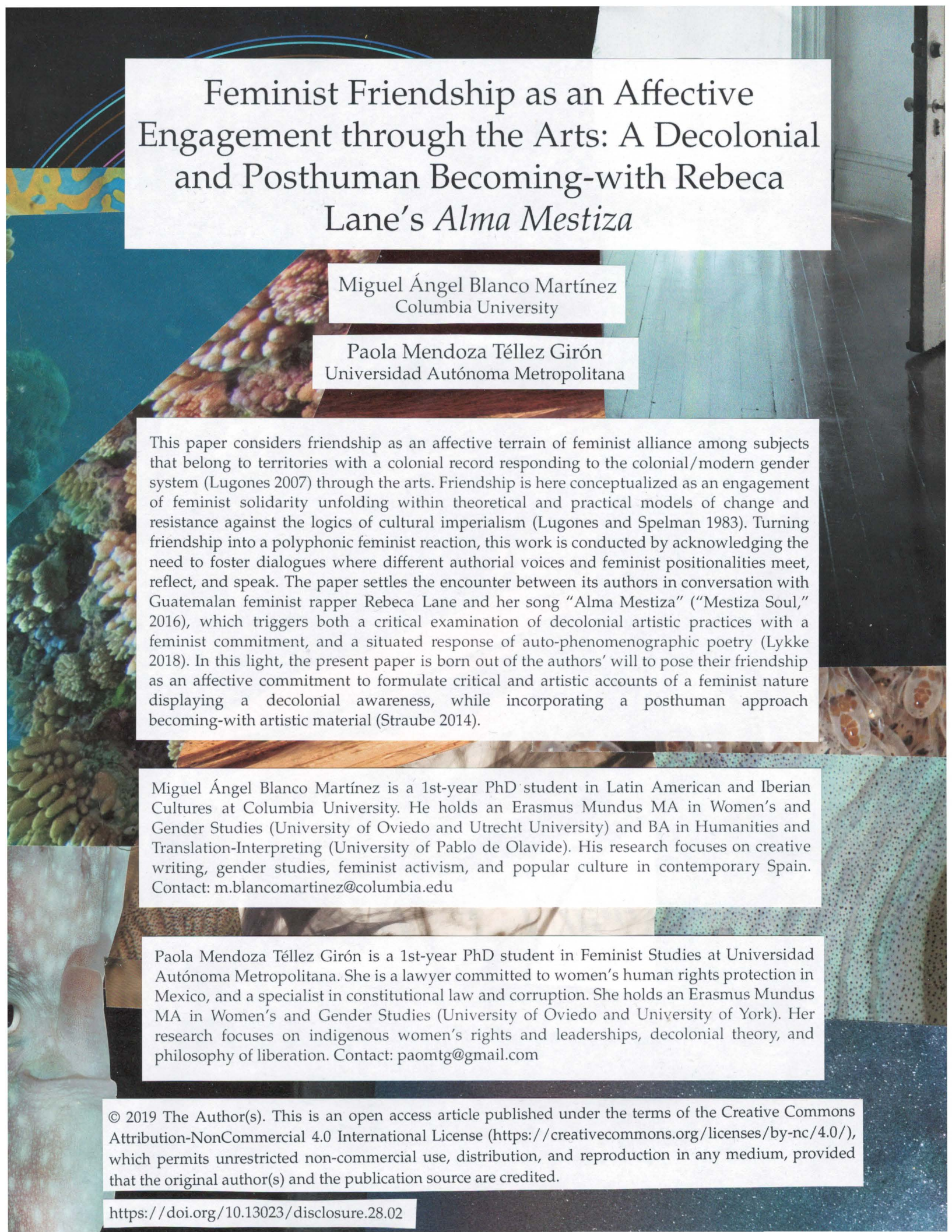
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Feminist Friendship as an Affective Engagement through the Arts: A Decolonial and Posthuman Becoming-with Rebeca Lane's *Alma Mestiza*

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This paper considers friendship as an affective terrain of feminist alliance among subjects that belong to territories with a colonial record responding to the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones 2007) through the arts. Friendship is here conceptualized as an engagement of feminist solidarity unfolding within theoretical and practical models of change and resistance against the logics of cultural imperialism (Lugones and Spelman 1983). Turning friendship into a polyphonic feminist reaction, this work is conducted by acknowledging the need to foster dialogues where different authorial voices and feminist positionalities meet, reflect, and speak. The paper settles the encounter between its authors in conversation with Guatemalan feminist rapper Rebeca Lane and her song "Alma Mestiza" ("Mestiza Soul," 2016), which triggers both a critical examination of decolonial artistic practices with a feminist commitment, and a situated response of auto-phenomenographic poetry (Lykke 2018). In this light, the present paper is born out of the authors' will to pose their friendship as an affective commitment to formulate critical and artistic accounts of a feminist nature displaying a decolonial awareness, while incorporating a posthuman approach becoming-with artistic material (Straube 2014).

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Introduction

This paper considers friendship as an affective terrain of feminist alliance among subjects that belong to territories with a history of colonization able to respond to the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones 2007) through the arts. To this endeavor, friendship is here conceived as an engagement of feminist solidarity that unfolds within theoretical and practical models of change and resistance against the logics of cultural imperialism (Lugones and Spelman 1983). Turning friendship into a polyphonic relationship of feminist reaction, this work is conducted by acknowledging the need to incorporate a dialogue where different authorial voices and feminist positionalities meet, reflect, and respond. The paper settles the friendly encounter between its authors in conversation with Guatemalan feminist rapper Rebeca Lane and her song "Alma Mestiza" ("Mestiza Soul," 2016).

Examining authors' friendship throughout their feminist co-inhabitation, positionalities, and respective ethnic backgrounds (Mexico and Spain), this paper seeks to discern in their alliance a differential affective relationality capable of fostering artistic responses to contemporary forms of racism and neo-colonial exploitation. As part of their feminist militancy, the music of Rebeca Lane becomes the meeting point in which to mutually reflect about the colonial record of their ethnicities, and to further articulate artistic dialogues implementing a feminist and a decolonial awareness. Thus, "Alma Mestiza" triggers in this essay both a critical examination of decolonial artistic practices with a feminist commitment, and a situated encounter of auto-phenomenographic poetry (Lykke 2018) with Lane's song. In this light, the present paper is born out of the authors' will to pose their friendship as an affective terrain on which to formulate critical and artistically situated accounts becoming-with feminist artistic material (Straube 2014).

To this task, the paper is divided into four sections. The first section conceptualizes the authors' friendship and feminist positionalities as an affective engagement informed by their

respective backgrounds. The second section introduces Rebeca Lane's music activism in line with the elucidation of contemporary feminist decolonial practices through the arts. The third section establishes the possibility of fostering an encounter between decolonial and posthuman theoretical patterns in the elaboration of our artistic approach. The fourth section finally provides a situated dialogue with Lane's piece in the shape of an embodied auto-ethnographic poetry. Overall, this paper aims to frame the authors' friendship as a feminist alliance in which the colonial records of their ethnicities are further complicated via their affective identification and artistic conversation with Rebeca Lane's music. In this sense, our account enacts the feminist potential of considering the personal and the arts as joint realms in the production of analyses and critiques of the colonial/modern gender system.

1. Friendship as a feminist engagement: positioning authorial voices

In mid-July 2017, the authors of this paper were sent an email confirming our acceptance as students of a transnational master's degree in Women's and Gender Studies across Europe. For two years, we had the chance to experience a feminist training and co-inhabitation in the company of feminist allies from all over the world. The city of Oviedo (Asturias, in Northern Spain) was our first destination, and from September 2017 to July 2018, we became friends and flat-mates in, as we would call it, *casa feminista* (the feminist house, see Figure 1). For all of us Oviedo was a new city, and English or Spanish was not our mother-tongue. Coming from different ethnic, linguistic, social-class, academic, and feminist backgrounds, the meetings at *casa feminista* greatly helped us to shift our theoretical training towards a friendly engagement of feminist participation. Weekly dinners, endless debates, feminist marches, sharing of readings, movie sessions, evening walks, occasional trips, and the exciting calmness of a shared routine turned our co-inhabitation into a friendly space of feminist kinship (see Figure 2). By July 2018, some of us either graduated from the master's, or left to our second home institution in another European

country. As of July 2019, the authors of this paper are able to discern an academic and personal continuum made possible thanks to a feminist engagement of friendship and alliance primarily knitted in *casa feminista*.

Bound to depart from the program, the authors felt the need to academically and artistically portray a part of our feminist co-inhabitation. This simultaneously displays the conflictive nature of our particular yet interrelated backgrounds, which have constantly confronted in dialogue our positionalities with our former and present experiences as subjects committed to feminism. As a place of human and non-human co-existence, *casa feminista* is not only a house but rather a communitarian space where objects, food, sounds, and non-human living companions have differently coincided in the evolving of our friendship. For this reason, the authors want to consider friendship as a fruitful affective engagement to pose systematic analyses and critiques incorporating a feminist awareness. This awareness is here informed by María C. Lugones and Elizabeth V. Spelman's (1983) conceptualization of feminist friendship as a relationship facilitating the development of theories aiming to change and resist the logics of cultural imperialism (576, 579).

Jointly emphasizing the need for white/Anglo feminists to make room for women of color, both authors thread a quasi-manifesto providing a few guidelines to talk and to be talked about (Lugones and Spelman 1983, 578–581). In these, Lugones and Spelman remarkably touch upon the importance of articulating situated accounts in feminist academia that acknowledge as many women's standpoints as possible, while also pointing out a sort of hermeneutics reminding white/Anglo feminists what Adrienne Rich (1984) would later define as "politics of location," that is, the ethical duty for white/Anglo feminists to recognize themselves as "outsiders" when addressing the experiences of non-white women (Lugones and Spelman 1983, 577). Lugones and Spelman (1983) inform the "fragile psychic state" (575) women of color suffer because of the silencing invisibilization exercised by white/Anglo feminism. In Lugones and Spelman's view, such an exclusion leads women of *raza* – as they coin to refer to women of color – into an alienation

that unspeaks in-between ethnic, linguistic, and social-class backgrounds.

In unspeaking, feminists of *raza* are caught in the constant accommodation of their accents, knowledges, and behavior under the lens of mainstream feminism (Lugones and Spelman 1983, 573–576). Out of their alliance to raise awareness about the dominating character displayed by white/Anglo feminism, Lugones and Spelman (1983) consider friendship among white/Anglo and feminists of *raza* as the "only sensical motivation" in the fostering of a non-imperialist feminism (576). This motivation induces white feminists into a self-fragilization state that critically reflects the asymmetry permeating their friendship with women of *raza*, and that renders their imperialist modes of behavior vulnerable. In so doing, white feminists could learn "to become unintrusive, unimportant, patient to the point of tears," while having their world of experience "disrupted [...] criticized and scrutinized from the point of view of those who have been harmed by it" (Lugones and Spelman 1983, 580). As a result, white feminists might be able to see women of color in their own communities, to understand their cultural texts, and eventually to desacralize white epistemological authority and their "ready-made theories" that tighten the experiences of women of color (Lugones and Spelman 1983, 581).

Paola comes from Mexico and Miguel from Spain, countries with tense and unresolved colonial records. In the provisional attempt to approach these from our respective feminist positionalities and shared intimacy, we felt prompted to find in the memories of our friendly living in *casa feminista* a differential affective relationality responding to contemporary forms of racism and neo-colonial exploitation. Out of these memories, music is fundamental. Day and night, *casa feminista* played the songs of Javiera Mena, Rebeca Lane, Gata Cattana, Princess Nokia, Francisco El Hombre, Mala Rodríguez, Ray BLK, Calle 13, Young Fathers, Lady Gaga, (Me Llamo) Sebastián, Alex Anwandter, Natalia Lafourcade, Café Tacvba, or Jorge Drexler. From this inspiring playlist, Rebeca Lane's music became a point of encounter in our feminist crises and debates. Paola, as a Mexican feminist allied with

women's indigenous vindications, found in Lane's rhymes triggering instances of decolonial feminism through the arts.¹ Miguel, as a Spanish feminist belonging to a country that continues to dismiss its imperialistic legacy, saw in Lane's music an artistic means to actively rethink his colonizing background.

Emplaced in the safety of *casa feminista*, but also within the Spanish escalation of far right-wing populism, Rebeca Lane's activism provided us with some support in our respective feminist interventions, and the socio-political scenarios where they are inscribed. A case in point was the recent Spanish denial, both by the monarchy and the caretaker socialist government (2018–2019), to offer any kind of apology to Mexico for the Spanish colonization on its territories.² As it will be examined in the following section, European colonization was not an isolated historical event. Instead, it was a dehumanizing system of Western negation of indigenous peoples and cultures enacting a gendered *modus operandi* that has pervaded through time, and that keeps nurturing the exploitation of human and natural resources in territories with a history of colonization. This denial has coincided with the rise of far right-wing mobilization in Spain, as seen in a shameful Francoist revival,³ the glorification of the Spanish imperial past,³ the targeting of feminisms,⁴ and the entrance of an extreme

¹ Henceforth, by decolonial feminism we refer to the theoretical framework developed in U.S. academia, particularly by María Lugones (2007). We differentiate this school of thought from the *des-colonial* (translated as well as decolonial) practices and theoretical approaches of Latin American feminisms. The latter focus on the situated lived experiences of *latina* women, as for instance the feminist activism of Rebeca Lane in the hip-hop scene.

² For more information about this event, see: <https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/03/26/inenglish/1553587549_240799.html>.

³ An example would be the social and institutional opposition to exhume the remains of former dictator Francisco Franco from the public basilica of *El Valle de los Caídos* (The Valley of the Fallen) in Madrid. For more information about this event, see: <https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/06/04/inenglish/1559644855_670635.html>.

⁴ A recent instance would be the inspection by the far right-wing political party VOX of feminist

right-wing political party to Congress for the first time in democracy after the fall of the dictatorship.⁵ These few glimpses, together with the difficulties of forming a stable government, inform the urgency of tackling right-wing populism from an intersectional feminist militancy contesting the Spanish dismissal of its colonization, while rendering visible the experiences of colonized women.

Regaining Lugones and Spelman's formulation, we want to acknowledge in this paper the potential of conceiving our friendship as an affective terrain of feminist alliance in response to the current socio-political scenario via a critical and artistic approach to Lane's song "Alma Mestiza." To this task, we simultaneously address the naïve pretension to briefly address our feminist commitment, artistic inspirations, and vital experiences over the last two years. These have undoubtedly made us aware of the systematic asymmetry investing the affective relationality of our friendship, but also of the power of the arts in posing this awareness in constant dialogue. Throughout this process, Lane's discography becomes a sonic material that displays her own agency and feminist positionality, as well as a musical memory of our co-existence in *casa feminista*. The present paper reunites our memories, critical knowledge, and artistic skills in the articulation of a theoretical and practical response of change and resistance to the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones and Spelman 1983; Lugones 2007) through our friendly engagement with "Alma Mestiza." As a whole, our response attempts to fully frame our friendship as a reflective space of feminist participation, and as a means to position our voices together in conversation with the artistic activism of Rebeca Lane.

organizations working with gender violence, migration, and LGBTIQ rights. This is part of a right-wing campaign of hate speech, institutional framing, and public shaming of feminisms in the country. For more information about this event, see: <https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/02/22/inenglish/1550852190_868783.html>.

⁵ For more information about this event, see: <https://elpais.com/elpais/2019/11/10/inenglish/1573407794_574125.html>.

2. Contemporary moves of decolonial feminism through the arts

Rebeca Lane is a Guatemalan sociologist and feminist rapper. As a sociologist, she has explored the political contexts of urban tribes and new youth identities, particularly hip-hop cultures. Her musical interests led her to different art projects displaying her feminist activism in the overall visibilization of Central American women's struggles and contributions to the hip-hop scene. Her style and political stance has opened a gap in a world dominated by men and co-opted by a cultural industry with a specific commercial agenda that Lane has openly criticized. In an interview with a digital magazine, Lane stated: "I did not come here to please them or to repeat the phrases that we supposedly have to say... politically, I am not going to swallow things in order to receive a prize" (Vichez 2016).⁶ Rebeca Lane is part of an emerging generation of Latin American female rappers who touch upon common problems that women and girls face in the region, such as abortion criminalization, lack of sex education, deficient healthcare, sexual and domestic violence, femicides, human trafficking, and a deep-rooted *machismo* founded on the structural inequalities of patriarchy.

Hip-hop in Guatemala, as in her origins in the popular neighborhoods of New York and Los Angeles, has become a political platform to express the griefs caused by the long-lasting aftermaths of the civil war held between 1960-1996, as well as the resistances that have emerged to deal with the wounds left by enforced disappearances, political incarceration, ethnic cleansing, and genocides caused by the resulting Guatemalan dictatorships (Lane 2012).

⁶ Translation by Paola Mendoza Téllez Girón.

⁷ Guatemala was the scene of four decades of internal armed conflict that ended up with more than 200,000 deaths. About 83% of the victims were Mayan indigenous who suffered a series of systematic tortures as a plan from the army to end their ethnicity and take possession of their lands. Within this context, dictatorships have been the central political feature of colonial domination and imperial interests controlled by the ruling sectors and the Army. The civil war ended in 1996 with the Agreement of Lasting Peace between the Government and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG)

Indeed, Rebeca Lane decided to fuse her poetic vein with rap rhythms as a homage to her aunt Rebeca Eunice Vargas, who was a poet and a *guerrillera* (guerrilla) disappeared in 1981 at the hands of Guatemalan militaries during the civil war (Rigby 2015).⁸ In an interview with *The Guardian*, Lane stated that hip-hop is a healing tool for younger generations that have learned to survive in violent contexts: "It gives young people ways of organizing beyond armed conflict, beyond military or gang violence" (Rigby 2015). In this manner, hip-hop speaks to the power relations that underlie cultural practices, while also becoming a cultural space in which political action occurs and further impacts its audience's subjectivities.

As informed by Lane's career, feminist criticism through art is an invitation to challenge traditional representations of women in order to configure new social and cultural significances. Feminism brings into the Latin American hip-hop scene the opportunity to give an account of women's standpoints. Women's testimonies have the potential to situate particular women's efforts and struggles within common structures of gendered oppressions, which in Latin American countries display a record of colonization following the logics of the "colonial/modern gender system" (Lugones 2007). As decolonial feminist philosopher María C. Lugones has theorized, race and gender were the marks of civilization settled and reproduced by—the Eurocentered modern coloniality. Therefore, the dichotomy man/woman and its compulsory heterosexuality, along with its racial hierarchization, became a long-standing pattern of power that has shaped the bodies and subjectivities of the colonized ever since the

in 1996 (see *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala) [Commission for Historical Clarification]*, 1998).

⁸ Since the 1970s, the insurgent movement incorporated the Mayan people that had not been present in the first stage of the conflict. In this manner, Mayan people expanded the social base of the guerrillas, which provided greater support from the civilian population. As a result, from 1981 onwards the Army started an offensive against civil society, unloading disproportionate counterinsurgency actions (See *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico (Guatemala) [Commission for Historical Clarification]*, 1998).

colonial expansion (Lugones 2007), and one that is further replicated in the current exploitation of human and natural resources in places with this history of colonization. Especially for women of color, the enactment of their own accounts is crucial in the constellation of intersectional feminisms, avoiding thus the homogenization of women's needs and interventions under the agenda of white feminism (Lugones and Spelman 1983), and the overall commodification of women's bodies in patriarchal societies.


In this guise, feminist hip-hop subverts women's objectification as depicted by masculinized lyrics that construct violent meanings and practices while invisibilizing women's agencies and lives. By portraying their own imaginaries through music, feminist rappers make room for more women into the hip-hop scene, thus contributing to the empowerment, collaboration, and education among poor girls and women (Rigby 2015). Rebeca Lane's discography (2014–present) revolves around identity, culture, feminism, and anarchism, speaking up against the racialized, gendered, and capitalist hierarchies imposed since the European colonial expansion to the Americas and the Caribbean. Particularly, the production of the album *Poesía Venenosa* (*Poisonous Poetry*, 2015) took the rapper into an identity process in which she re-appropriates her indigenous roots without dismissing the internalization of Western values and education, which inform her (self-)racism and privileges (Vichez 2016). Later, in the poetry, the music, and the aesthetics of the album *Alma Mestiza* (*Mestiza Soul*, 2016) she deals with the conflicts and possible encounters of indigenous, *ladina*, and *mestiza* identities. Politically identified as *mestiza*, Lane defines herself as “ethnically diverse,” advancing a notion of a *mestizaje* that accepts and negotiates cultural contradictions (Vichez 2016).

⁹ In Guatemala, *ladina/o* identity refers to non-indigenous people. Within a caste model that reproduces the colonial racialized matrix of domination, *ladina/o* identity implies exclusion, exploitation, and dispossession of indigenous Mayan peoples, which are the majority of the population. *Mestiza/o* identity, understood as a cultural-biological mixture shared by a collectivity after colonization processes in Latin America, is used by Lane as a

By proposing the decolonization of knowledges and of the self, Lane challenges the colonial impositions that continue to deny the languages, identities, and even the sounds of the colonized. In line with these ideas, Lane's music merges the African American and Caribbean diaspora roots of hip-hop with Guatemalan Caribbean rhythms and cumbia. According to Chilean artist and researcher Julia Antivolo (2015), Latin American artists reevaluate popular world ritualization in the recovering of traditional arts and ancestral cosmivision, a move that enables them to elaborate their identity out of colonial chains. From a decolonial feminist perspective, deeply embedded in Lane's pieces, non-hegemonic local productions through the arts tend to dismantle the idea of the North American and Eurocentric masculine objective truth, whose universal scope has long concealed colonized knowledges, memories, and subjectivities (Mignolo 2012; Maldonado-Torres 2007, 2011). This universal thinking, inherent to the installation of colonial modernity and displaying racializing and gendering hierarchies, is thus challenged by local critical initiatives. As a result, protest art provides remarkable instances of local mobilization against colonial patterns of cultural representation, and thus of colonial power, performed by gendered and racialized subjects in territories with a colonial record.

Lane's song “Alma Mestiza” (2016) explicitly acknowledges the contradictions in rendering visible the colonial oppressions of her indigenous roots and gender identity under the colonial/modern gender system (Lugones 2007). Artistic representations and performances that resist the erasure of indigeneity and of any difference destabilize the hegemonic gender system, easing the right to self-representation in decolonizing processes. In Lane's political stance through music, her *mestiza* identity navigates the contradictions that arise when women belonging to colonized territories visibilize their indigenous backgrounds. Accordingly, and as informed by Lugones' theorization, Rebeca Lane's music contests the colonial/modern gender system, while articulating an identity

political stance to recognize the indigenous roots of national identity and the fusion of cultures that must be (re-)signified.



repertoire seeking an artistic and political liberation. In the musical elaboration of her situated decolonial critique, Lane poses her body as a locus from which to react against the colonial lens that has distorted her indigenous roots, (self-)perception, and acknowledgment.

In the words of Antivilo (2015), the body “is a reduction modeled by the patriarchal vision” (7). For this reason, approaching the body as a physical terrain for the reworking of colonial imprinting becomes fundamental in feminist performance through the arts. In so doing, decolonial feminist artists can envision alternative identifications with their gender, and face the structural power dynamics that lie over their racialized and gendered corpo-realities (Young 1997; Grosz 1997). In a similar fashion, Latin American communitarian feminism recognizes the body as a primal territory against the material and symbolic impressions left by neo-colonial power relations. Considering therefore the colonized body as a battleground for feminist reaction, the corporeal realm simultaneously becomes a place for epistemological creation, life alternatives, and identities relating to community, history, and nature (Paredes 2010; Valadez 2014).

Instead of building upon complex theoretical corpora, only accessible to certain intellectual audiences and political forums, Lane communicates and connects with people via her direct engagement with the body. This is approached from her own embodied impulse, and it is capable of reaching a local and transnational audience with the aim of raising awareness about neo-colonial oppressions shared by numerous territories with a common colonial record (Vichez 2016). In this regard, the artist asserts: “I can’t write anything if it doesn’t happen to me through the body, through my experience” (Sierra 2016).¹⁰ Departing from these premises, both in the visuals and in the poetics of “Alma Mestiza” the singer performs a (re-)appropriation of the colonized subjectivity, body, and memory through the reconfiguration of her own identity. In this vein, she responds against the perpetuation of the colonial/modern gender system through time, while rendering herself as a woman from a territory experiencing

local struggles among women and indigenous communities. Lane’s bodily-political space of artistic enunciation thus subverts the “disembodied and unlocated neutrality and objectivity of the ego-politics of knowledge” (Grosfoguel 2011, 98) inflicted by Eurocentric thinking that delinks the racial, ethnic, gendered, and sexual epistemic location of colonized subjects.

The re-appropriation of the *mestiza* identity leads the rapper to reinforce elements of ancestral cosmovision in the aesthetics of *Alma Mestiza* as a purposeful decolonial strategy. The healing powers of natural elements, the cleansing rituals, and the portrayal of myths and traditional clothes become then symbols of resistance against neo-colonial powers, and also the tools for the reconfiguration of her identity (see Figures 3 and 4). This can be interpreted in the lyrics of the song “Alma Mestiza”: “Mother-Nature / Tenderly sutures / The rupture of my body / Once I freed myself from / My tough armor. Because it does not mature / A wound that is not healed / A mind without madness / A heart without ties. To flow is to destroy and to construct again / A house without walls / And to lose the fear to die” (Lane 2016).¹¹ Evoking the colonial wounds that she still embodies in the re-elaboration of her *mestiza* identity, Lane revalidates Guatemalan ancestral knowledges and spiritual practices that have been systematically disregarded over time in the interest of colonial dispossession.

Throughout “Alma Mestiza” (2016), the artist conceives the body from a cosmos-centric view, discerning in her materiality a space of inhabitability. In so doing, Lane moves away from androcentric abstractions of the (female) body to further articulate the collective-body, the body-territory, and the spiritual-body, all of which are imagined as an identity assemblage. In this vein, Lane has shared with a Chilean magazine that she cannot refer just to the material body because “what happens to us as women, what happens to the peoples in resistance, what happens to the native peoples, the Afro-descendant peoples, what happens to the communities historically excluded from social welfare, happens to me too” (Viancos

¹⁰ Translation by Paola Mendoza Téllez Girón.

¹¹ Translation by Miguel Ángel Blanco Martínez.

2019).¹² Likewise, Judith Butler (2019), talking about emotions at the body's limit, has pointed out that the clamor of the marginalized "is the living reminder that it is at the level of the body that political suffering takes place and it is through embodied action that the disfranchised make themselves known as existing." Altogether, Lane's musical reactions and Butler's reminder pinpoint the erasure and the exploitation of the colonized bodies and territories of the colonial/modern gender system. As theorized by Frantz Fanon (2009), these have been pushed out to the "zone of non-being" (42), a zone of racial oppression and exclusion where they struggle to be heard and to be noticed (Grosfoguel 2011).

3. Setting the terrain to become-with feminist artistic material

The unfolding of a differential affectivity informed by the memories of our feminist friendship through the arts, and triggered by Rebeca Lane's music, will be performed by combining Rebeca Lane's decolonial feminism with recent feminist research on posthuman engagement with artistic material (Straube 2014), and embodied auto-ethnographic poetry (Lykke 2018).¹³ Throughout our living together, the authors of this paper have discussed if posthuman theory could meet a theoretical encounter with decolonial feminism. As the colonial/modern gender system reveals, dehumanization was inherent to colonization. Hence, to remain human, or to theoretically question this category, has been a privileged stance held by an intellectual elite, which usually belongs to countries with an epistemic colonialist agenda. Furthermore, the emphasis of feminist academia to re-evaluate the relationship

¹² Translation by Paola Mendoza Téllez Girón.

¹³ The notion of the posthuman has been widely theorized in the last decades. For this reason, there is a great number of different authors and approaches addressing this concept. In this paper, posthuman refers to our feminist and affective engagement in *casa feminista* as one informed by a human and non-human co-existence, playing music a vital role. For a quick temporal overview of academic posthuman research, see: <https://literariness.org/2018/07/25/posthumanist-criticism/>.

of the human with the non-human in affect, animal, animacy, or posthuman theories (Ahmed 2004; Haraway 2008; Chen 2012; Braidotti 2013) has been differently approached within feminist academic circuits. Anti-colonial and decolonial feminisms, as for instance the efforts developed by indigenous peoples, have considered the engagement with the non-human as foundational, while being long researched by Western academia and its "ready-made" theories.

However, there have also been academic attempts to foster possible encounters among decolonial and posthuman theories incorporating a feminist awareness.¹⁴ In light of these contributions, and as a result of our diverse formation during our master's program, we would like to address "Alma Mestiza" by enacting a posthuman approach of critical engagement with the arts. Such an approach is greatly inspired by Wibke Straube's research on trans-cinema (2014), and Nina Lykke's auto-phenomenographic poetry rooted in lesbian widowhood (2018). By incorporating their personal needs and struggles as queer feminist researchers against the systematic conjectures that oppress them, Straube and Lykke turn the posthuman nature of their inquiries into affective healing frameworks. These are potentially useful for others suffering from the dynamics of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980), and thus, for others belonging to the gendered human realm and its de-privileging dynamics of the neo-colonial exploitation of human and non-human resources. In order to provide an artistic embodied response to "Alma Mestiza," Straube and Lykke offer the theory and the methodology to come near to Lane's work without absorbing her own artistic approach under ours. Furthermore, the implementation of their

¹⁴ Two recent instances would be Schaeffer, Felicity (2018), "Spirit Matters: Gloria Anzaldúa's Cosmic Becoming across Human/Nonhuman Borderlands," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43(4): 1005–29, and Kaiser, Birgit M. and Kathrin Thiele (Eds.) (2018), "The Ends of Being Human: Returning (to) the Question," *philoSOPHIA* 8. This last one includes contributions by Denise Ferreira da Silva, Vicki Kirby, Max Hantel, William Paris, and Bracha L. Ettinger.

models better relates to the European background of Miguel, and to his non-heterosexual identity and affects. What will be later developed is a situated posthuman account through the arts responding to the colonial/modern gender system as inspired by Rebeca Lane within the affective engagement of our friendship, our different ethnicities, and reflective tools.

Becoming-with audio-visual material

Wibke Straube is a queer feminist scholar whose research focuses on the environmental humanities, transgender, and visual studies. In 2014, and as part of their PhD dissertation on trans-cinema, they proposed a critical framework of embodied engagement with audio-visual material rooted in feminist, posthuman, visual, affect, and queer theories. The author develops an audio-visual terminology and methodology surpassing the binary and occularcentric logics that have predominated in the relationship between films and spectators, as well as feminist visual theorization exclusively displaying psychoanalytic analyses (Mulvey 1975). As a matter of fact, Straube dismantles the ableist implications of the spectator figure, suggesting instead the notion of "the entrant-body": "The entrant becomes a permeable body, multi-sensorial rather than optical, touched and interpellated by music, other bodies and objects while touching upon different futures" (Straube 2014, 64). Out of the entrant-body, Straube widens the "haptic body" initially proposed by Laura Marks (2000), while contributing to a branch of feminist theorists dealing with the body and its affects in visual material (Sobchack 2004; Barker 2009).

These authors characterize the body as a locus affected by audio-visual material, thus fostering alternative identifications with it that rework gendered, vertical, and dichotomous relationships between the two. As the affective turn has been differently conceived by a number of authors since the early 2000s (Massumi 2002; Sedgwick 2003; Ahmed 2004), Straube acknowledges the blurring boundary between affect and emotion. In Straube's research, affect is hence defined as "an emotional (...) as well as

physical response to representation," ultimately enabling "an emotional 'becoming-with' between film and entrant" (Straube 2014, 54). Such a "becoming-with" stresses the mutual engagement among artistic material and the entrant-body at an affective level, consequently leading to embodied identifications that are necessarily situated. In being situated, and by enacting a feminist awareness, the encounters of body-entrants with audio-visual material specifically relate to the systemic intersection of oppressions. In Straube's study, audio-visual engagements navigate the liberating moments experienced by trans characters through dance, music, or dreams, which inform their need to differently identify with their environments. Straube terms these instants as "exit scapes," which also become for the entrant-bodies an opportunity to move away from their oppressions and to re-imagine better futurities.

Embodied engagements with audio-visual material not only facilitate feminist analyses of patriarchal oppressions through the arts, but also the possibility of articulating responses to them from our affected, and hence political, bodies. In Straube's dissertation, sound becomes a means to temporarily fade from hurting states, physically and psychically. When the body is then permeated by the touch of music, Straube highlights the activation of an "embodied listening," a concept retrieved from Gascia Ouzounian's research on the topic (2006). Also placing the body at the core of artistic encounters, Ouzounian implements Donna Haraway's idea of situated knowledges in the interaction with sonic material. By the end of the 1980s, feminist scholar Donna Haraway delineated her critique toward scientific rationality as a disembodied universal vision (Haraway 1988, 582) in the debate of Western feminist epistemologies. She considered the body and its senses as agents rather than resources, setting the ground for the development of situated knowledges and partial objectivities (Haraway 1988, 583). By incorporating Haraway's proposal, Ouzounian argues that "[i]n reviving the corporeal with respect to sonic experience, we cross the boundary from the impartial to the very personal, reclaiming that marginalized space as a space of significance" (Ouzounian 2006, 71).

Following the premises of Straube, Ouzounian, and Haraway within the scope of this paper, we discern a non-intrusive encounter with Rebeca Lane's song. Out of this, the entrant-body, its senses, and feelings are socio-politically affected by Lane via her lyrics. This encounter better elucidates the feminist potential of holding a conversation among different subjects and positionalities, which through music become-with without subsuming their respective languages, bodies, and critiques under one another. As previously discussed, the authors conceived this paper as an affective alliance among peoples with conflicting backgrounds that have found in friendship a relationship of mutual reflection and support. For us music is a healing tool to think about and to care for the other, as experienced in our co-inhabitation and listening to Lane's music. In the case at hand, we decided to render our becoming-with Lane's music through a poetic piece that ethically relates to our positionality and personal experiences, together with Lane's as depicted in "Alma Mestiza." Continuing with the feminist, affective, and posthuman input of our approach, the enactment of an embodied auto-ethnographic poetry, as displayed by Nina Lykke (2018), proves to be helpful in the artistic depiction of our becoming-with Rebeca's song.

An auto-phenomenographic methodology

Nina Lykke is a queer feminist scholar whose later work has focused on queer love, death, and mourning. Rooted in her experiences as a lesbian widow, Lykke has recently published a posthuman account of queer mourning merging a critical and a poetic approach. She develops the concept of "auto-phenomenography" (2018), a situated methodology of queer mourning and resistance through the arts. After the death of her life-long lesbian companion, Lykke underwent a prolonged mourning that had to face both the mandates of ableism and the medical stigma derived from compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). Feeling diagnosed because of her queerness and willful mourning, Lykke finds in poetry a relieving tool to not overcome her mourning, but to frame it as an artistic medium of queer resistance. The author provides a

"method of inquiry" (110) shaped as a "situated argument" in the fostering of a new ethics of intimate relations and of difference (122). She relies on a model deeply influenced by theories of affect, philosophies of immanence, and feminist neovitalist materialism (110), as well as by Donna Haraway's decentering of companionship as strictly human (116). In the elaboration of her situated argument, "bodily relations and affective intensities are given central attention" (109).

Lykke conceives of the bodies of the becoming-widow (herself) and becoming-corpse (her partner) as terrains on which to formulate an artistic response of queer mourning and resistance. Accordingly, she poses her body as the carrier of affective relations which, after the death of her wife, nurture a posthuman poetry among the two. In this process, Lykke's embodied memories lead to an ethics of affective difference through the arts that delineates a relational affectivity which is ethically asymmetrical: "There is no hierarchy of pain and suffering [...] the relationship between the positions involved is asymmetrical and existentially different, and for ethical reasons they should not be collapsed into one another" (Lykke 2018, 118). Such a differential affectivity deserves special attention for the purposes of this paper. Lykke maintains that the artistic tracing of her queer mourning shall begin from her differential affectivity as a becoming-widow. For this reason, Lykke witnesses the trauma of losing her companion to death, that is, *in conjunction with* but not *as* her partner. The shaping of her asymmetrical affective engagement with her wife is then primarily informed by the memories of their companionship once the latter has entered into the posthuman realm of death.

This remembrance, in which the body and its affectivities are centrally placed, configures in Lykke's poetry what she terms a "compassionate companionship" (Lykke 2018, 109). Lykke situates her mourning as a vital condition to produce a posthuman account against hetero-normative dynamics of family and diagnosis. Since both display an ableist attitude invisibilizing queer mourning for its non-heterosexual fulfillment, Lykke fosters a compassionate companionship in which there is

a shared striving of *being-with* as well as *being-for* the other (117). This is possible thanks to empathetic instances of quotidian sympathy, or what Lykke reworks in philosopher Ralph R. Acampora's lexicon (2006) as "symphysis": an "embodied rethinking of the notion of sympathy, stressing [...] that the subject, in a material, corpo-affective sense, is affected and co-experiences the ways in which his significant others are bodily affected" (Lykke 2018, 116). As a result, Lykke's auto-phenomenography revisits daily life as a (becoming-)widow to portray the shared yet differently experienced everyday episodes of her wife's disease. The focus on a differential corpo-affective everyday thus enables, in Lykke's mourning, a psychic identification with her partner after death, placing embodied remembrance as central to posthuman co-inhabitation.

Extracting from Lykke's work an attention to mourning, the body, the everyday, sympathy, asymmetrical affective relationality, and to the memories of former co-inhabitation, we want to develop in this paper an embodied, auto-ethnographic, and poetic becoming-with "Alma Mestiza" from our friendly engagement and alliance, and without forcing Lane's performance, or our own positionalities, into the theoretical models detailed above. By incorporating Lykke's writing method, we can better capture our differential affectivity in engaging with Lane's song, as well as with the backgrounds that asymmetrically invest our feminist politics. These, as the Spanish denial of its colonization reveals, encapsulate the negation of indigenous peoples and cultures, and the neo-colonial practices currently fostering the exploitation of human and natural resources in countries with a history of colonization. As stressed beforehand, the Spanish negation of its colonization invisibilizes the gendered violences suffered by colonized women and the killing of countless lives under the name of conquest and religious conversion. Hence, mourning, both for colonized peoples and for Spanish society, has been strategically prevented. On the one hand, mourning has been a forbidden practice entrapping colonized peoples into social and institutional oblivion. On the other, mourning has been systematically dismissed by and within countries with a colonizing agenda – past and

present – therefore passing the muting of colonial killing onto current and upcoming generations.

In this paper, we would like to challenge this rationale by providing a situated account that opposes the colonial/modern gender system through the arts, and simultaneously addresses a decolonial artistic move enacting a feminist commitment. The reflection of our differential yet joint becoming-with "Alma Mestiza" will thus necessarily navigate our memories, former co-inhabitation, daily experiences, and the state of our friendship as particularly affecting our bodies. As Lugones and Spelman advise, we will see Rebeca's, Paola's, and Miguel's feminist politics within their own communities and cultural texts in the progressive demystification of colonizing, universal formulas of knowledge production. As a concluding note for this section, it is our will not only to facilitate a theoretical encounter among decolonial and posthuman feminist patterns, but also to discern within it the training and co-existence we have differently experienced throughout the last two years. During this time, our daily lives have been touched by the power of music, especially that which incorporates feminist claims. By positioning our authorial voices in this paper, we acknowledge Rebeca Lane's contribution to the learning and unlearning of our feminist ethics and praxis. We want to encourage anyone reading these words to seek in friendship a relationship of mutual growth, support, and alliance in the counteraction of patriarchal confinement nurturing the logics of racism and neo-colonial exploitations.

4. A posthuman artistic response to the colonial/modern gender system

Prologue

It has been almost a year since this paper started as a reflective exercise to portray our fruitful conversations in *casa feminista* within the context of our conflicting backgrounds, feminist training, and posthuman co-existence. The intention to become-with "Alma Mestiza" by enacting an auto-phenomenographic effort came up thanks to Paola's encouragement to Miguel

to render his poems as situated accounts in his academic research. We believe that creative writing is a medium to approach systemic socio-political scenarios from an academic feminist standpoint. In conjunction with a theory and methodology that enable us to come near to Lane's song, Miguel's poetry attempts to reflect the feminist potential of conceiving friendship as an asymmetrical affective terrain from which to better counteract racism and neo-colonial forms of exploitation.

Throughout this year, we still embody the discomfort of the possible contradictions that emerge from our academic positions, language, and privileges. How to foster a theoretical encounter between decolonial and posthuman frameworks without replicating Western academic hierarchies? How do gender, ethnic background, and overall politics of location come into play when writing about our friendship and Rebeca Lane's activism? In sum, is it possible to initiate a conversation among peoples from territories with a history of colonization, without falling into the logics of epistemological colonization? Again and again, we have discussed these questions, trying to find in each other's words and vulnerability some healing to the unending contradictions of the world-system we live in.

Being willing to render ourselves vulnerable in our friendship, through music, or in the formulation of an artistic or academic piece, implies finding in friendship an alliance to resist and contest the colonial/modern gender system, as well as the relief to the anxiety permeating any possible attempt to take a stand. Following Lugones and Spelman's manuscript, the co-authorship threaded all along this paper simultaneously voices the affective, positional, and territorial asymmetry investing our feminist and friendly engagement. For the matter of this paper, our memories in conjunction with specific academic references, not only inform but also stimulate these stances, as differentially shared in their affective expression.

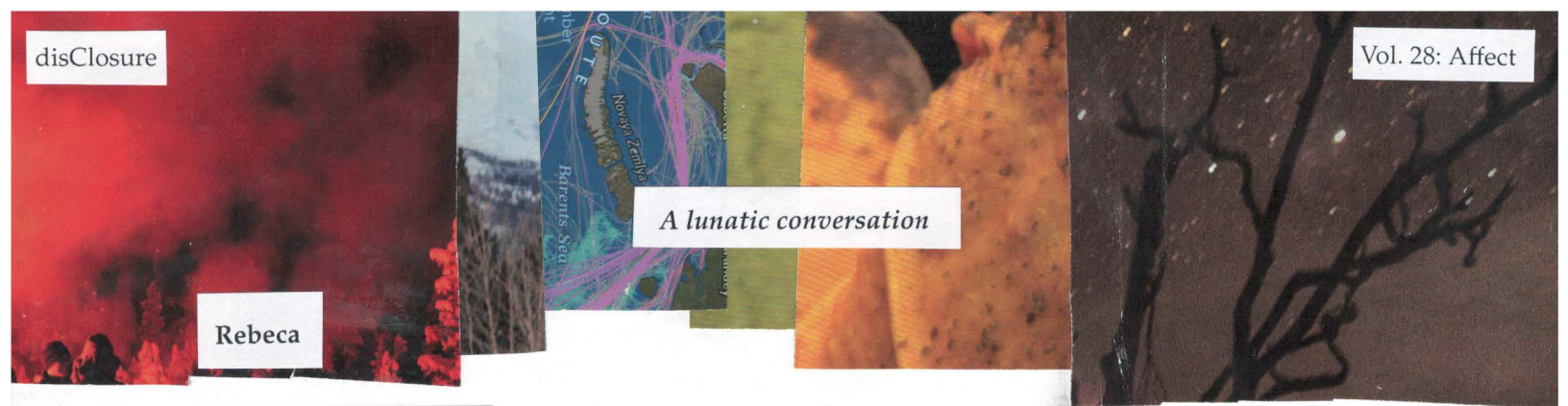
In mid-June 2018, Miguel went to a Rebeca Lane's concert at La Ingovernable,¹⁵ in

¹⁵ La Ingovernable (The Ungovernable) was an occupied space in downtown Madrid operating as a feminist communitarian enclave from May 2017 until November 2019, when the newly elected right-wing

Madrid. He remembers walking the communitarian space, listening to Lane, and sending Paola a recorded note of almost every song. Later on, in October 2019, Paola went to a concert of Lane in Mexico City. Likewise, Paola sent Miguel recordings, pictures, while letting him know all her impressions of the event. Even if physically separate, there was a differential affective sharing of the concert between us. Framed within the two concerts of Rebeca Lane, Paola and Miguel have repeatedly doubted, questioned, denied, silenced, interrupted, and misunderstood the validity, legitimacy, scope, structure, and poetry of this paper.

Despite vulnerability, listening, communicating, (co-)writing, reading, thinking, and feeling can become contradictory sites of encounter, we would like to stress again the power of friendship as an affective engagement nurturing feminist militancy, in and outside academia. This might not find rigid answers to any of these questions, nor wishes to do so. Rather, friendship can provide support and alliance in a time when neoliberalism and the circulation of capital entails patriarchal violence against and destruction of living bodies. In the face of it, we vulnerably hope to have documented Rebeca Lane's activism, a relatable academic corpus, and an artistic contribution in the most friendly possible way.

government of Madrid forced its eviction. During its running, La Ingovernable worked as a self-managed social center offering a number of open courses and activities. As part of Rebeca Lane's European tour, she offered a concert at La Ingovernable to raise funds to help those affected by the eruption of the *Volcán de Fuego* in Guatemala in June 2018.



Rebeca

*Cosmic consciousness
From a magical heritage
Seeking in the shadow¹⁶
The traits of my soul.*

A lunatic conversation

Miguel

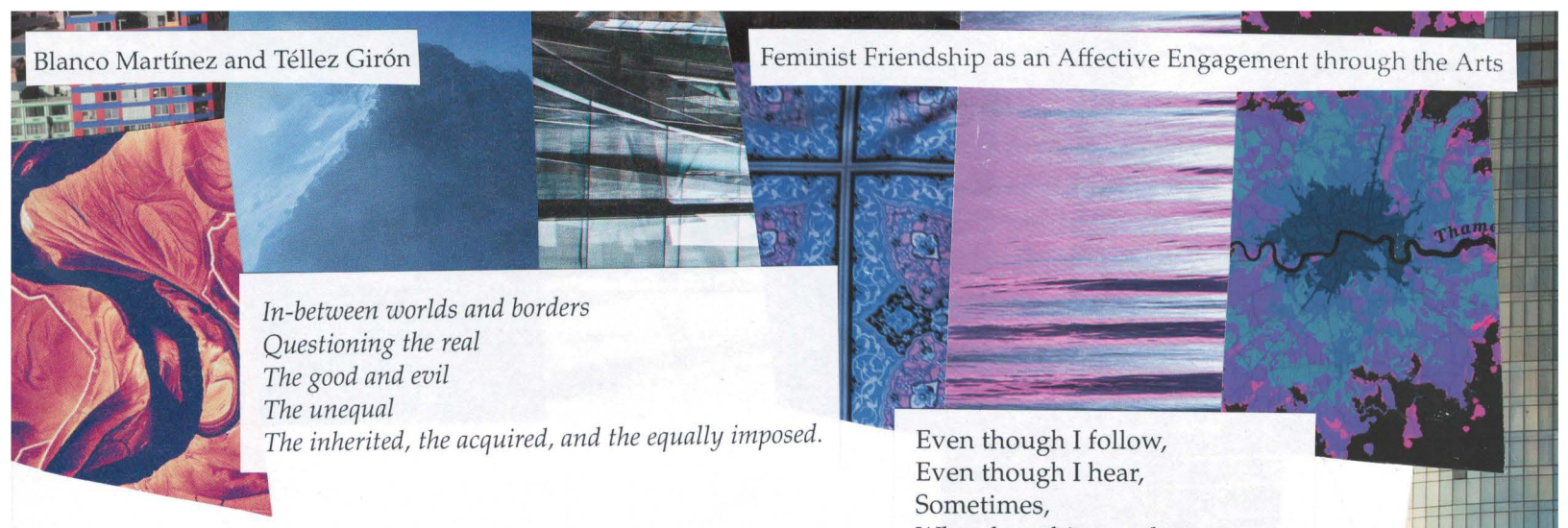
*Tengo el alma asustada.
Jadeando como un perro
I listen to your soul
To the heritage of the never grieved,
Of the never mourned,
That now, as ever,
Seek for a calling of their names.*

*Tengo el alma asustada.
Jadeando como un perro
It is harder and harder to hear.
The TV screams at you,
While the president denies your consciousness,
And the king ignores the magic
They could never convert.*

*Learning how to become an animal, like a Nahual
I am a body transiting the spiritual path
It is not linear
My language is ancestral
I travel spirally.*

*In this blinding noise,
The beating
Where your pains inhabit
Affects my body,
Its odysseic back,
Its thin skin,
Flesh,
Sex,
Drowning under this ocean
That after stealing my breath,
Teaches me how to swim
Otherwise.
And so, I follow.
And so, I breathe again,
Or perhaps for the first time.*

¹⁶ The whole song has been freely translated from Spanish by Miguel and together revised with Paola.




*In-between worlds and borders
Questioning the real
The good and evil
The unequal
The inherited, the acquired, and the equally imposed.*

Even though I follow,
Even though I hear,
Sometimes,
When breathing underwater
I still fear they might scream.
They with a universal name.
They with a masculine voice.
They with gentle speeches built
Upon dead bodies,
Silenced tongues,
And burned traditions.
Yet it's this terror
The source of my deception,
The colonial suffocation
Where the erasure of your body
Incarnates the privilege of mine.

*I am a creature
In-between cultures
Navigating through the trash
The beliefs that nullify me
To bury them.
Mother-Nature
Tenderly sutures
The rupture of my body
Once I freed myself from
My tough armor.
Because it does not mature
A wound that is not healed
A mind without madness
A heart without ties.
To flow is to destroy and to construct again
A house without walls
And to lose the fear to die.*

This fear
Lies as the reminder
Of what they left behind.
The armor of
Self-denial,
The armor of
Colonial killing.
To bridge anew.
With homes surpassing borders,
With bodies knitting on each other
The healing colors of
Mother-Nature.

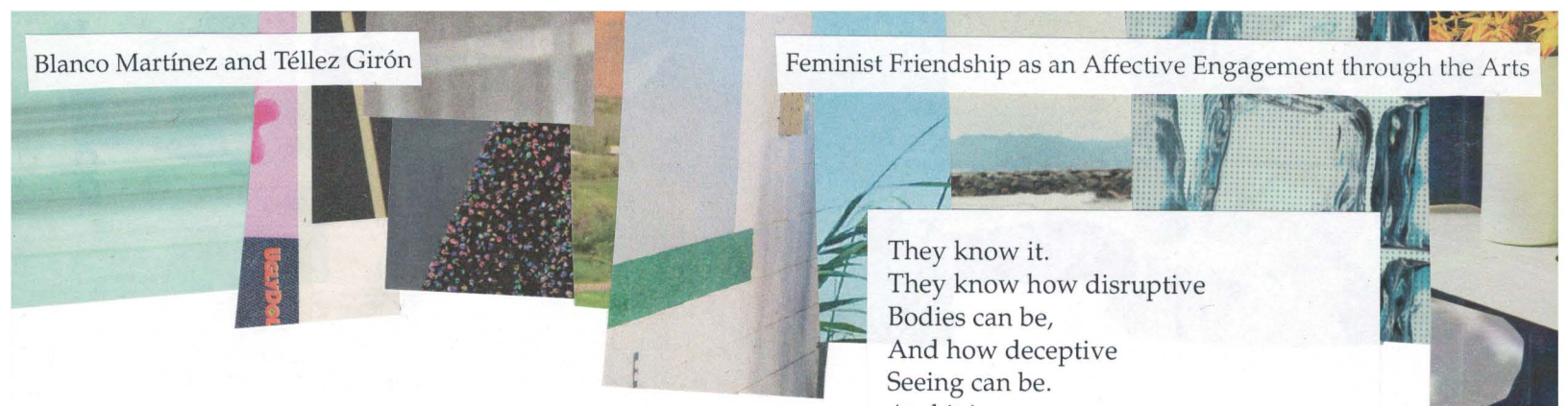


*Mestiza I am
Atrocious contradiction
The four colors of corn in my color.*

Abhorrent they say.
Dirty they say.
Animal they call you.
Because ignorance is
As fragile as fear,
And unlike yours,
Their skin is so thick
They cannot speak the
Wisdom of their bodies.

Uttering instead
The universal speech,
The unhuman solitary tone.
But not you.
*Contradicción atroz.
Voz mestiza.*
Echoing the power
Of self-calling,
Of collective calling,
Of nature calling.

*Looking for my identity in a racist society
The colonial mind installed in my pupil
The reflection in the mirror gives me back what I believe
If I do not mold my soul.
I do it in the Eurocentric phallogentric models
That transform my experience into an exotic object
Painting cultures as something folkloric
Skipping the subjective from theoretical models.
They wanted me to keep quiet about the heritage of my blood
They wanted me to forget the violence against my mother
But they could not take from us the internal fire
The eternal knowledge
The signals found in dreams.*



They know it.
They know how disruptive
Bodies can be,
And how deceptive
Seeing can be.
And it is.
Because my eyes couldn't see,
And the mirror that reflects us
Is the same one that divides us.
Transforming the personal into
The laughable,
The cultural into
The exotic,
And the cosmic into
Madness.

But once I turned my back to the mirror,
I happened to see what was around me.
There I felt the haunting force
Of unspoken genealogies
And the roots of an earthly survival.
Because the power of the oral exceeds
The privilege of the written.
And so, I listen.

*That is why we defend our land and its secrets
With two raised fists and amulets in the soul
With the force of the volcano
The roar of the jaguar
The strength of the female warrior and of the animal spirit.*

It's almost full moon, Paola.
And lunatic I remember
Our last ritual.
It was full of love,
And you taught me to call me back.
To call my back
So I could bridge with you,
Nature,
Myself.

Together we heard you,
Rebeca.
We heard you
Calling yourself
And all the names,
Traditions, and tongues
Colonial killing attempted to silence,
But never dared to bury.



*Mestiza I am
 Atrocious contradiction
 The four colors of corn in my color.*

So here we are.
 Here we all are.
 Calling our backs,
 And the backs of the others,
 So we can see,
 And feel,
 Backwards,
 Non-linear,
 And only with
 Corporeal reflections.

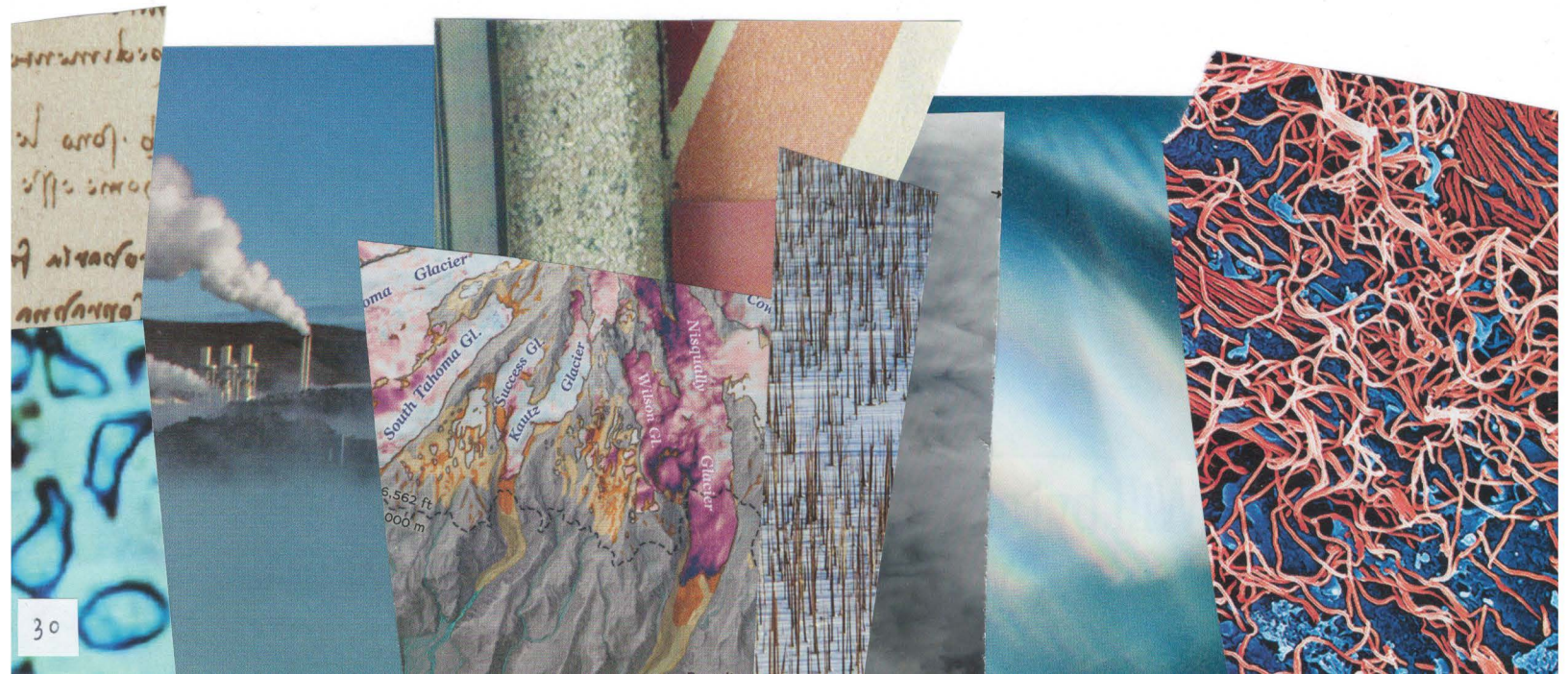




Figure 1. A winter view from *casa feminista*. Personal photograph.

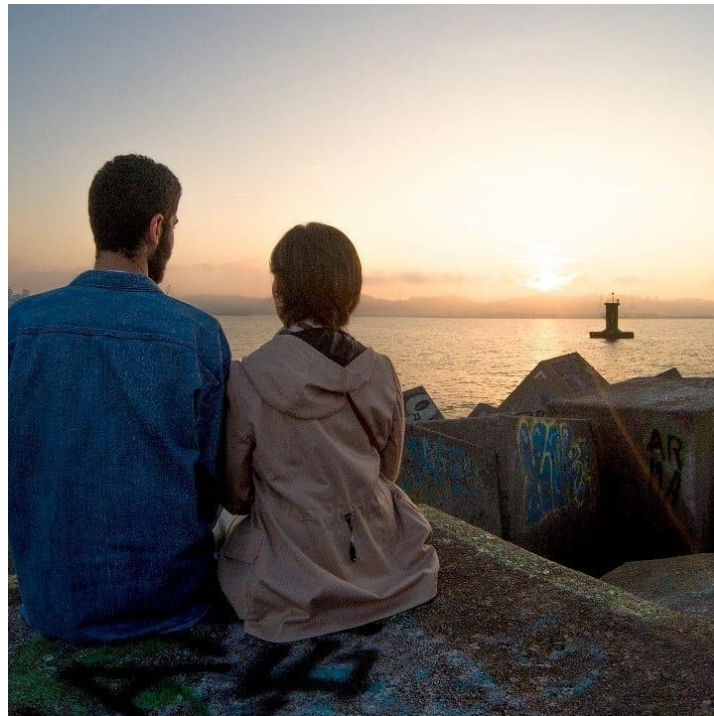


Figure 2. Our backs, as we face the waters that connect us (Gijón, Asturias). Personal photograph.





Figure 3. A screenshot from the video-clip of “Alma Mestiza” showing Rebeca Lane singing with an aesthetic that addresses the message of the song.



Figure 4. A screenshot from the video-clip of “Alma Mestiza” showing Rebeca Lane along with a group of women in friendly companionship.¹⁷

¹⁷ To watch the video-clip of “Alma Mestiza,” see:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P8Y0BB7kh2c>.

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