

***LADINA-MESTIZA* AS A POLITICAL IDENTITY IN GUATEMALA**
THE POTENTIAL OF *LADINA-MESTIZA* CONSCIOUSNESS AS A POLITICAL TOOL
IN THE GUATEMALAN WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

BY: ANDREA ALEJANDRA GÓMEZ RECINOS

STUDENT NUMBER: 7792662

SUPERVISED BY: DR. ROLANDO VÁSQUEZ MELKEN

SECOND SUPERVISOR: DR. AURORA ÁLVAREZ VEINGUER

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GENDER STUDIES, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UTRECHT UNIVERSITY, UNIVERSIDAD DE GRANADA



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Abstract

This research aims to explore the possibility of collectively building a new *ladina-mestiza* political identity within the Guatemalan context and women's movement, mainly based in two decolonial feminist perspectives. First, the new *mestiza* consciousness of Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and secondly, in the *ladina-mestiza* political identity proposed by Yolanda Aguilar (2019). *Ladino* is a category created by colonial elites in Guatemala, that in the 19th century became the official identity to include all non-indigenous people, as such it aspires to Western whiteness and lifestyle (Taracena, 2019).

Historically, *ladina* feminists have made reflections to deconstruct, to a certain extent, the Western feminism that influenced the women's movement in Guatemala. These theoretical-political learnings and points of tension have mainly been around gender and social class oppressions. (Monzón, 2015) As Aguilar (2019) remarks, *ladina* women have done personal and collective reflections on *mestizaje*, over the last decades in the country. The reflections on who they are and where they come from have led some to self-identify as *mestizas*. However, there is still a pending discussion in terms of racism within the women's movement. As Aguilar proposed in her book *Femestizajes* (2019), the category *ladina-mestiza* as a political identity offers a new horizon to critically acknowledge the racist past and the anti-racist present of the *ladina* women questioning their privileges. In this research, I aim to shed light on the question: what is the political potential of mobilizing a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness as a political identity in Guatemala?

Resumen

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo explorar la posibilidad de construir colectivamente una nueva identidad política *ladina-mestiza* dentro del contexto guatemalteco y del movimiento de mujeres, basándose principalmente en dos perspectivas feministas decoloniales. Primero, la nueva conciencia mestiza de Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) y segundo, en la identidad política *ladina-mestiza* propuesta por Yolanda Aguilar (2019). Lo *ladino* es una categoría creada por las élites coloniales en Guatemala, que en el siglo XIX se convirtió en la identidad oficial para incluir a todos los no indígenas, y que por lo tanto aspira a la blancura y estilo de vida occidental (Taracena, 2019).

Históricamente, las feministas *ladinas* han hecho reflexiones para deconstruir, en cierta medida, el feminismo occidental que influyó en el movimiento de mujeres en Guatemala. Estos aprendizajes teórico-políticos y puntos de tensión han sido principalmente en torno a las opresiones de género y clase social. (Monzón, 2015) Como señala Aguilar

(2019), las mujeres ladinas han hecho reflexiones personales y colectivas sobre el mestizaje, en las últimas décadas en el país. Las reflexiones sobre quiénes son y de dónde vienen han llevado a algunas a autoidentificarse como *mestizas*. Sin embargo, aún hay una discusión pendiente en términos de racismo dentro del movimiento de mujeres. Como propone Aguilar en su libro *Femestizajes* (2019), la categoría *ladina-mestiza* como identidad política ofrece un nuevo horizonte para reconocer críticamente el pasado racista y el presente antirracista de las mujeres *ladinas* cuestionando sus privilegios. En esta investigación, pretendo abordar la pregunta: ¿cuál es el potencial político de movilizar una nueva conciencia *ladina-mestiza*, como identidad política en Guatemala?

1. Introduction

“As feminists, we have said, patriarchy is not only outside, it is here. Why wouldn't we say then that racism is also inside? (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 13, 2022)

As Aguilar suggests in her quote, to decolonize Guatemalan women's movement requires to continue fostering collective debates on racism, especially among *ladinas* and *mestizas* women. Historically, *ladina* feminists have made reflections to deconstruct, to a certain extent, the Western feminism that influenced the women's movement in Guatemala (Monzón, 2015). These theoretical-political learnings and points of tension have mainly been around gender and social class oppressions. As Aguilar (2019) remarks, *ladina* women have done personal and collective reflections on *mestizaje* over the last decades in Guatemala. For some feminists to do it, is also a matter of breaking free from colonial oppression “us, women, have to discuss the issue of *mestizaje*, because I am never going to ally with the Criollos. Never.” (S. Morán, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022)

As Morán notes, there have been some discussions. And for some women in the movement, the reflections on who they are and where they come from have led to self-identify as *mestizas*. However, there is still a pending discussion in terms of racism within the women's movement in the country. As Aguilar proposed in her book *Femestizajes* (2019), the category *ladina-mestiza* offers new horizons to critically acknowledge the racist past of *ladinidad* and establish anti-racist alternatives for the future of *mestizaje*. For this reason in this research, I will use the term *ladina-mestiza* to refer to the political identity proposed by Aguilar (2019).

In the last decade, I have felt the implications of being a *ladina* and the desire to move away from this imposed category. Through different debate groups and direct interviews, I explore in this research other Guatemalan feminists' experiences on this issue in the hope of finding commonalities in their perspectives. As we share similar positionalities within the colonial matrix of power, this research takes their experiences and insights to portray the potential of resuming Aguilar's (2019) proposal on the *ladina-mestiza* as a new political identity in Guatemala.

a. The question about *ladinidad* and *mestizaje*

From a decolonial feminist perspective, this research aims to shed light on the tensions between *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* in Guatemala to answer the central question: what

is the political potential of mobilizing a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness as a political identity in Guatemala?

Responding to the central question, this research expects to contribute to the contemporary *ladina-mestiza* debates on creating anti-racist and anti-heteronormative political positions, practices, and spaces in Guatemala. It does not aspire to provide a closed answer to *mestizaje*, and even less from a multicultural or ethnic perspective. Instead, it insinuates the new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness to stimulate *mestizaje* debates from a feminist perspective. The possibilities can be wide and varied, from further the possibility of questioning privileges to contributing with new elements to building coalitions, from the historical political process to the implications they have had for different subjects, specifically for women, according to their positionality in the colonial matrix of power in Guatemala. As the *ladinao* Guatemalan society needs to question the racist practices it reproduces in the present through its *ladinidad*, I propose a debate on the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness as a political identity.

b. Situating *mestizaje* in Guatemala

From the decolonial feminist standpoint, the debate about *mestizaje* in Guatemala is complex. Although in present-day women's movement in the country there are feminists who self-identify as *mestizas* or *ladinas*, there are only few spaces and theoretical productions on the implications of rethinking and reconstructing the *ladina and/or mestiza* identity to review the country's exacerbated racism and to use it as an articulating tool to build political coalitions. It is crucial to note that the contexts in which the *mestizaje* debates occurred in Latin American countries like Bolivia, Mexico, and Perú are different from *mestizaje's* trajectory in Guatemala, and therefore their political implications are not necessarily similar.

I became interested in this topic in the first year of this master's program in Granada, Spain. In the feminist debates class we came to learn about Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of *mestiza* consciousness in her book, *Borderlands: La Frontera* (1987). I went into her pages and experienced the accuracy with which she described the same discomfort I have felt as a *ladina-mestiza* woman in Guatemala. This brought me to think about other doubts on the central question of this research: 1) what theoretical knots need to be disentangled to approach *mestizaje* from a decolonial standpoint? 2) How can the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness contribute to personal healing and social cohesion of *ladinas*, *mestizas*, and *ladina-mestiza* communities? 3) What political possibilities would the *ladina-mestiza* political identity enable within the Guatemalan women's movement?

Anzaldúa was a well-known Chicana-decolonial feminist from the Texas-Mexico border and a pioneer for border thinking within decolonial studies. Therefore, her approach to the term *mestizaje* originated in her positionality as a hybrid, Mexican-American, Chicana woman *resisting* the colonialist Anglo culture in the U.S. Coming from Guatemala, *mestizaje* is not the same as Anzaldúa's concept. However, I share the feeling of the oppressive culture with her, and she has deeply inspired me to reflect on *mestizaje* in Guatemala, with the political decolonial horizons she creates through her book. After this new "awakening", I came across the book of the Guatemalan feminist academic Yolanda Aguilar (2019), called *Femestizajes*, a brilliant reflection with more than 75 hours of interviews about racialized bodies and sexualities of *ladina-mestiza* women in Guatemala. This masterpiece provided me with a more precise overview of the colonial imprint, the silences, the negation and the lack of content that *ladinidad* implies for/has imposed on the Guatemalan people.

It is essential to recall three aspects before going forward: a) The contemporary Guatemala nation-state identity was built on Eurocentric-Westernized standards, implicitly led by the hegemonic elites. *Ladino* became a central identity, although not officially but tacitly, as the Guatemalan citizen model. It should not be confused with *latinidad*, meant to describe the identity of Latin American people (Rodas, 1997; Taracena, 2019). *Ladinidad* as a conceptual category is a recent term proposed by different feminists like Aguilar (2019), Millán & Solís (2021), as a result of the category of *ladino*; constructed as a political identity in the 19th century by liberal elites (Rodas, 1997; Taracena, 2019). *Ladinidad* aspires to whiteness erasing all indigenous roots: Mayan, Afro, or diverse ancestry, pretending to contain all not indigenous Guatemalan people.

b) As a political identity and debate, the term *mestizaje* has gained force in the last decades in Guatemalan society. The category remains in a gray area as in some formats and questionnaires, institutions sometimes use it interchangeably with *ladinidad*. *Mestizaje* is not a widely used term by Guatemalans with diverse ancestry, as most not-indigenous populations use the *ladino* category to identify themselves (Taracena, 2019). c) Aguilar (2019) notes the personal and intellectual work on *mestizaje* that *ladina* women have been doing over the last decades in Guatemala.

According to Guatemalan historian on *ladinidad*, Taracena (2019), *mestizaje* was an historical and ideological project initially designed by elites to foster the idea of mixed races. However, as Rodas (1996) points out, it was later discarded for diverse economic and political reasons that did not benefit colonial elites. As Taracena notes (2019) despite *mestizaje* forgotten origins, studied extensively by Martínez Peláez (1971) in *La Patria del*

Criollo (The Criollo's Homeland), some contemporary debates about *mestizaje* aim to question the colonial national project and dispute political self-determination. There is a risk of reinscribing *mestizaje* as a neocolonial term, if the debate centers on culturalist approaches differentiating subjects through ethnicities. In the Guatemalan context, reinscribing it lies in reproducing the differences created by *criollos*; those Spanish-colonizer descendants who are rarely mentioned and yet have benefited from producing the country's inequalities. These hierarchies have structured society in a way in which *ladino* people are citizens entitled to a series of political, economic, and social rights while indigenous peoples haven remained diminished and relegated to the category of the others... in line with the historical exploitation of Mayan, black, and brown and other indigenous peoples (Rodas, 2006).

According to neocolonial standards of whiteness and progress discourse, as González Ponciano (2005) notes, the internalized shame, produced by racism, that many *ladino* people experience occurs if they dare to acknowledge the past of their indigenous roots. However, in most cases, disengaging from that indigenous past means denying a fundamental part of ourselves. My perspective is that this denial leads to shame over the acknowledgement that we cannot trace our past coherently and of the material impossibilities of articulating our contradictions as *ladina-mestizas*. This shame permeates our understanding of family trees, producing deep voids and amnesia gaps on who were our ancestors' backgrounds.

As Aguilar (2019) points out, I do not find it relevant to defend *mestizaje* as a cultural identity or proclaim it as a possible alternative to *ladinidad*. Instead, I understand it as a political, personal and collective category that can offer strategies and processes to acknowledge internalized racism, whiteness aspirations, and the possibility of healing from colonial impositions upon bodies and sexualities. I consider it a vehicle to discuss the colonial construction of racial hierarchies. I also consider a political stance to self-identify as *ladina-mestiza*. This last implies acknowledging the genealogy of oppressive *ladinidad* and the political emancipatory *mestiza* identity (Aguilar, 2019).

Through the research, I will refer to indigenous populations, including all Mayan, Garífuna, Xinca and Afrodescendants original peoples living in Guatemala as recognized in the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1995, in which Guatemala defined itself as a multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic society (Asociación Nelson Mandela, 2017). According to Brandes (2018), *Garífunas* are descendants of Arawak, Caribbean and West African groups who arrived at the Belize coast in 1832. As Dary & Galindo (2015) note, *Xinkas* are indigenous peoples located in the

southeast part of Guatemala, at least 300 years before the arrival of Spanish colonizers in 1524. According to Asociación Nelson Mandela (2017), Afro-descendants are a population composed of Mulatto, Creole, and other populations that have inhabited the country since colonial times and are part of the country's diversity. Moreover, they have not been part of the indigenous discourse or policies of the Guatemalan government. Another term used through this research is *criollo*. According to Martínez Peláez (1971), it refers to people born in America that were descendants of the Spanish conquistadors. Initially used to refer to the first Spanish settlers, it eventually included new generations of Spanish immigrants and implicitly suggested the superiority of these groups in comparison with indigenous and *mestizo* populations.

c. Situating myself

"Only partial perspective promises objective vision" (Haraway, 1988, p.583). As the author implies, the concept of placing ourselves in a partial positionality allows us to have a focused understanding on a topic and as scholars, to approach a subject from a specific time, context, embodiment, and experience. I have learned some lessons from my direct experience as a *ladina-mestiza*, middle-class, 30 year-old feminist in the Guatemalan highlands in Central America. In Guatemala's government register, I am part of the country's *ladino* ethnicity. I am a light-brown, racialized, *mestiza*. Looking at my ancestors' names in my family tree, I cannot materially track back any Mayan or other indigenous ancestors due the ladinization process of my indigenous ancestors, although I have tried (Rodas, 1996). More recently, through a personal exercise done within my family, the birth certificate of my great-great-grandmother's brother was found, which indicated that his ethnic identification was indigenous Maya Mam. Although that is the only piece of official historical evidence of my Mayan background, there are undoubtedly other markers that demonstrate it in an embodied self: the color of my skin, the prominence of my cheekbones, my slanting eyes, and the color and texture of my sleek hair. This example shows how indigenous populations and families have been assimilated into the Guatemalan Western culture, erasing non-white backgrounds and operating from racial whitening.

My personal experience about *mestizaje* started with two education spaces in university. The first one was the interactive exposition *Why are we what we are?* which I will explain in chapter one. The second one was through Marta Elena Casaús Arzú book, *Metamorphosis of Racism in Guatemala* (2002), in which she interviewed oligarchy members to explore their racist perceptions on indigenous peoples. I am not only a *ladina*, which is not

to be white but reproduces the aspiration to be one; so I reclaim my *mestizaje*. And at the same time I am not indigenous, I can not be, so I reclaim my *mestizaje* (Chacón, 2021). Having been born still during Guatemala's Internal Armed Conflict (IAC), which was from 1960 to 1996, my education shaped me to read the country's history from the colonizers' perspective. It was not until I studied at the university that I understood the whole dimension of colonization and how it impacts Guatemalan society (Casaús Arzú, 2002). With time, I approached the Mayan cosmovision and spirituality within my possibilities, which allowed me to understand the narrow reasoning of colonial Guatemalan society. In Europe and the Dutch academy, I am part of the so-called-minorities (Haraway, 1988), who make it to hegemonic institutions in the Global North. In my privileged peripheral self, I am interested in the recent debates in Guatemala promoted by media outlets, activists, and academics that opened the door to study if the category of *mestizaje* could have different political and vital implications.

I have problematized my privileges and confronted how they operate. This breaking point demanded a political awareness to question power structures from which myself, my family and my community have benefited and continue to do to a certain extent. Still, I want to locate and distance my experience as a *ladina-mestiza* from the very different experiences of other ladino *groups* that have been part of power groups and who have historically benefited from the exploitation of most members of a staggered society. (Rodas, 2019) I will not point out one answer on how to be a "*good mestiza*", as there is no such a thing. This work does not aspire to provide fixed answers to the research question. However, it aims to produce questions about the possibilities that can emerge from *mestizaje* engaging with new generations of feminists and the dialogues it can make possible in Guatemala. Finally, Spanish is my mother-tongue. Through the research, I use English to the extent of my knowledge and with the geopolitics of language that it implies.

d. Theoretical framework and literary review

The epistemological standpoint for this research is framed in decolonial studies analysis of the world-system (Quijano, 2000) with theoretical influences of the work produced initially by Gloria Anzaldúa and *mestiza* consciousness, along with the decoloniality group of Latin American scholars like Anibal Quijano (1992, 2000, 2014), María Lugones (2010), Walter Mignolo (2000, 2018) and Catherine Walsh (2018). I will remark the importance of the decolonial feminist perspective to discuss the new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness from the voices of decolonial and postcolonial academics like

Ochy Curiel (2007, 2009), Yuderkis Espinosa Miñoso (2014), Marisol De La Cadena (2010), Julieta Paredes (2014), Emma Chirix (2008), Dorotea Gómez-Grijalva (2012) and Patricio Guerrero (2010) to expand of decolonial feminism and communitarian feminism.

The contributions of communitarian feminisms are key to guide possible healing pathways for *ladina-mestiza* women. In this regard I will present the proposal of Lolita Chávez (2020) and Lorena Cabnal (2015), In addition, to understand contemporary notions of *mestizaje*, it is critical to approach the *ladino* historiography made by Arturo Taracena (2019, 2020), Marta Elena Casaús Arzú (1994, 2002, 2014), and Isabel Rodas (1996, 1997). To understand contemporary Guatemala, I also portray neocolonial expressions of racism framed in the work of Ramón González Ponciano (2005) like *shuma* (low-class and indigenous person) or *muca* (low class and bad-taste person). In addition, to address the critiques of what a white interpretation and reenacting of *mestizaje* can reproduce, I will introduce the problematization of multiculturalism stated by Mayan academic Aura Cumes (2009), along with the potential of political identities proposed by authors like Rita Segato (2010) and Charles Hale (2002). Finally, this research has the purpose of imagining building new possible relationships and ways to be in the world, based on feminist collective *ladina-mestiza* reflections like Yolanda Aguilar (2019) proposes.

In this regard, *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* are two key terms that will be relevant in the following chapters and that I want to differentiate, as onto-epistemologically they do not carry the same meanings. As Rodas (1997) insists, these are not interchangeable terms. I advise the readers to understand them in the context of the historical and politically colonial society in which Spanish elites produced them. As mentioned previously, *ladinidad* was coined by Spanish elites as Guatemala's nation-state identity in the XIX century, when Guatemala became an independent country. On the other hand, *mestizaje* is a term that, although used during the colony, was later erased as an identitarian category and was brought back to the public debate in the book of Severo Martínez Peláez, *La Patria del Criollo or The -Spanish- Criollo's Homeland* (1971). This term for specific sectors of Guatemalan society also represents a political vindication that acknowledges the racism, classism, and coloniality permeating the *ladino* identity. I understand the *ladino* category and the potential of *mestizaje* as political identities and not as ethnic ones, following Aguilar's (2022) analysis that the *ladino* discussion was needed to understand how it is not an ethnic category equal to how indigenous peoples assume their ethnic identities.

I interpret Aguilar's proposal of understanding *ladino* and *mestizo* as political identities for two reasons. The first one is that as Rodas (1997) remarks, the *ladino*

population is so diverse and is composed of groups that have such different cultural practices and backgrounds that it can not be an ethnic homogenous group with shared traits, besides the fact that it is a Western subject construction. By mobilizing *mestizaje* in this research, I also resume Aguilar's proposal (2019) of the term as a political identity. As Dary & Galindo (2015) note, identity can be defined in two ways: a) as shared cultural traits and content (traditions, language, clothing, etc.) b) common life or historical experiences, in which members share occupations, a received social treatment, social organization forms, identifying to specifics, beliefs systems, and worldviews. The *ladina-mestiza* consciousness is located in the second one.

From my personal perspective, *mestizaje* needs to be built on the imbrications of an actively anti-colonial political ideology, a decolonial spirituality and an anti-racist feminist standpoint instead of trying make it respond to *ladinidad's* cultural and ethnic void and lackness based on not knowing our ancestors or having strong cultural roots. Resuming Tock (2020) and the interest of decolonial feminists for communities and social groups, the purpose of studying *mestizaje* in this research from the decolonial perspective is a desire for collective transformation.

I suggest that acknowledging *mestizaje* could create new political or relational possibilities for *ladino-mestizo* populations in the country. For instance, being actively anti-racist, to acknowledge middle-class and upper-class *ladina* women privileges, or to advocate against racism, sexism, and capitalism. And for the women's movement, to building broader feminist networks and to overthrow the patriarchal capitalist coloniality. Within these possibilities that *ladinas-mestizas* women are reflecting upon, there is also the awareness to mention and question the historical privileges we, as *ladina* women, have had in our territories while also disputing the so-called imposed identities that the nation-state built (Aguilar, 2019). As a feminist scholar, such as Aguilar (2019) and Haraway (1988) highlighted, I do not intend to speak for any subjugated subjects other than myself and people who participated in this research's discussions. In this regard, I explore the tensions between *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* coming from the peripheries of the Global South while pointing out the rooted colonialism inscribed in the construction of Guatemala's society/ nation state/ nation state identity/ social identities.

e. The thesis structure

The thesis explores and analyzes decolonial perspectives to explain to the readers the urgency of racism discussion for contemporary Guatemala. The first chapter will explain briefly the differences between *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* and the concrete examples about this topic in Guatemala to formulate the open question of this research. The second chapter will explain the contemporary decolonial and feminist debates leading to the proposal of border thinking, *mestiza* consciousness, and new imaginaries to build new social fabric. The third chapter will study the trajectories and contemporary debates about *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* like Rodas (1997) and Taracena (2019) documented; secondly, I will address the critiques to *mestizaje* as neo colonialism and cultural appropriation. I will include the voices of Mayan intellectuals and academics pointing out the neoliberal and neocolonial aspirations certain types of multiculturalism reinforce while legitimizing interlocking oppressions and binaries. All these perspectives will be in dialogue with the contributions of contemporary urban feminists and their reflections on *ladina-mestizas* political identity.

Finally, as Aguilar (2019), González Ponciano (2005), Hale (2002) & Segato (2010) propose, *mestizaje* can be an mobilizing political identity. I propose the *ladina-mestiza* political identity grounded in Guatemala's women's movement and suggest it has the potential to articulate feminists in unprecedented ways.

2. Methodological framework

a. Methodology

“Theory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. Perhaps, more significantly, it gives us space to plan, strategise, and take greater control over our resistances” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p.38). Resuming the author’s quote, to investigate the potential of building a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness collectively as a political identity in Guatemala is to explore the contradictions it implies. Because according to her, writing and producing theory also leads us to make sense of our own world and to translate in a way that becomes relevant for those who are powerful. To enable a conversation on racism is necessary and to do it from a *ladina-mestiza* standpoint reminds me of the contradictions I inhabit. To make sense of the potential of this political identity by speaking the powerful’s language, I put into practice a critical insight from feminist theory: the consideration that our embodied experiences produce individual and collective knowledge.

As Olmos Alcaraz, Cota, Álvarez Veinguer, and Sebastiani (2018) point out, decolonial techniques and methodologies can be activist-militant and have political implications for those of us who research. This is why this thesis specifically has an activist perspective from a feminist standpoint. Although I use some decolonial techniques and a decolonial theoretical framework to produce new knowledge, the methodology is not fully decolonial. And nonetheless, the epistemological and ontological potential of the methodological framework is to dismantle coloniality, racism, classism, and patriarchy in Guatemala to foster the imagination and the possibility of new worlds by giving voice to feminists that are questioning their own racism. The horizon of this thesis is clear: to discuss racism in the Guatemalan women’s movement. On the other hand, its heart is conformed by the stories, experiences, and reflections that women have through their feminist praxis in the country.

“Theory and praxis are constructions that presuppose the basic praxis of living. Without our daily praxis of living, it would not be possible to make conceptual and second-order distinctions between theory and praxis” (Mignolo, 2018, p.7). As Mignolo notes in this quote, theory and praxis are intertwined, and decolonial knowledge production is a collective iterative process. Using alternative research techniques to the hegemonic ones is also a research strategy to decide how research can be another way of resisting (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Therefore, the methods used to gather information were direct sources based on three online “debate groups” (Álvarez Veinguer- & Olmos, 2020) and two direct online

interviews. I also revised historiographical sources like articles, papers, book sections, and interviews.

The “debate groups” are a decolonial technique created by Álvarez Veinguer- & Olmos (2020) that, unlike focus groups or discussion groups, aims to create a dialogical space with participants to build collective knowledge. According to the authors, groups must meet the following criteria: a) to be horizontal, respectful and with clear participation agreements suggested by the groups. b) To be carried out with communities that know each other previously and share a concern or a curiosity on a concrete subject. c) To foster dialogue in the group, facilitators participate actively and share their personal opinions and experiences. d) To use open questions and let the dialogue flow according to the group’s priorities instead of imposing closed questions. I have chosen this technique instead of a discussion group or a focal group, which are better known and legitimized research techniques in social sciences for three reasons.

First, I organized the debate groups intending to be horizontal and dialogical spaces. There is “a whole pluriverse of possibilities that invite us to inhabit research differently and point toward multiple different forms to try to reactivate imagination and creativity in current ethnographic processes, betting on an open and explicit involvement with the groups of people, collectives, and movements with whom we research” (Álvarez Veinguer & Sebastiani, 2020, p.242). This knowledge production implied that I participated and contributed with my grounded experience and reflections. Every participant held a different positionality but the same importance in its contributions. The second reason was that, due to the nature and time/space constraints of virtuality, each debate group consisted of one session with six open questions. To apply this “debate group” technique, Álvarez Veinguer- & Olmos’s (2020) was also a political statement as decolonial methods are often not validated by academia. Nonetheless, they are the ones who approach people from a horizontal, curious, and respectful standpoint.

The interviews and group debates had eleven Guatemalan feminists and were held on May and June 2022. The third reason is that all were online as I am in The Netherlands, and the research participants are primarily in Guatemala. I am aware that virtual communication limits a more fluid interaction among participants, including the digital technology challenges that computers, bad internet connections, communication platforms, and other factors bring to the virtual experience. This technique was necessary to create a safe space where participants shared profound reflections and feelings. Their voices led the discussion, its boundaries and possibilities instead in a collective format. The meetings aimed to explore possible answers to

the research question on *ladina-mestiza* articulations. I will provide more details about the participants in the next section. The “group debate” and interview list of questions can be found in Appendix II. Each of the three debates lasted between one and two hours and had four to five participants, as follows:

1. The first online debate group was held on May 30 2022, at 4 pm Guatemala time, via Teams. The participants were four academic women with long trajectories as researchers: Ana Silvia Monzón, Ana Lucía Ramazzini, Silvia Ramos, and Isabel Rodas.
2. The second online debate group was held on May 30 2022, at 5 pm Guatemala time, via Teams. The participants were four young feminist women: Ana Bermúdez, Gabriela Maldonado, Lucía Méndez, Vera Rodas, and Regina Solís.
3. The third online debate group was held on May 31 at 5 pm Guatemala time via Teams. The participants were one feminist academic and one feminist politician: Yolanda Aguilar and Sandra Morán.

Furthermore, following the same theoretical and methodological framework, I carried out two direct interviews with similar questions which can also be found in Appendix II. These interviews intended to explore the perspectives from two of the feminist debate group participants with more time and in greater detail. The main criteria of selection were their anti-racist quotidian, political, and collective discourses and trajectories. The meetings were the following:

1. The first interview was held on June 12 at 6 pm Guatemala time via Teams with Gabriela Maldonado.
2. The second interview was held on June 13 at 6 pm Guatemala time via Teams with Yolanda Aguilar.

The debate groups and interviews were recorded via Teams and converted into transcripts. All women authorized their participation and appearance in this research. As discussions were held in Spanish, I translated, within my own capacities, all of their contributions into English. Although, it is not possible for methodological reasons to include the complete discussions, all of them contributed, supported and guided in one way or another, the reflections that I discuss through the different chapters.

As Lugones (2010) notes, producing feminist decolonial knowledge is a collective task that has to make the colonial differences of historically marginalized subjects visible. Intrigued to learn more about the reflections that different generations of Guatemalan feminist thinkers have on the issue of *ladinidad* and *mestizaje*, I imbricated their voices with theory in several sections of this manuscript, especially in chapters five and six. In those, I portray their quotes directly and analyze them in the light of different feminist theoretical concepts.

All my research participants contributed with invaluable insights into a possible pathway to build a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness, from their political activism to their actions, feelings, spirituality and other elements of what composes a person's life.

b. The group of women who participated in this research

"Thus, although (...) we shared many questions, doubts and unknowns, we were very clear about one thing: we did not want to do research (...) reproducing the power hierarchies of classical positivist research of classic positivist-extractivist research, which speaks on behalf of the people who speak on behalf of the people it studies". (Olmos Alcaraz, Antonia, Cota, Ariana, Álvarez Veinguer, Aurora & Sebastiani, Luca, 2018, p.150)

As the authors note, to produce research in a classic extractivist way speaking for people would be reproducing coloniality. In this regard, the purpose of learning different Guatemalan women's perspectives for this research was to understand the pathways they have taken to reflect on their identities and to build collective knowledge on a possible *ladina-mestiza* consciousness from their voices. All discussions were important to understand how some contemporary feminists understand their privileges and the anti-racist stances in which they frame their quotidian lives and their feminist practices towards building new decolonial horizons. A theoretical and political act of resistance (Lugones, 2010) in the light of what Cumes (2009) is to be able to recognize that there are many positionalities within the *ladina* populations, like women. It would not be the same to be a rural or an urban *ladina*, to live in the coast or in the eastern area of the country, etc. Following Lugones (2010) proposal of a grounded incarnate subjectivity, the focus of this research is directed towards a positionality of the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness that is urban, educated and middle-class. When I use the word urban, I do not only refer to the metropolitan area of Guatemala City, but to smaller cities which are predominantly

non-indigenous. The women which I invited to participate in this research are between 27 and 65 years old, consider themselves as feminists, and have made theoretical and political reflections on *ladinidad* and *mestizaje*. The *ladina-mestiza* political identity which I intend to develop in this thesis does not intend to repeat the exercise of homogenizing women into a universal group. Therefore, the group is not representative of all Guatemalans. I selected and invited them because they share similar positionalities among each other and with me, as one of the decolonial feminist principles is to produce situated knowledge. The selection criteria were: middle-class, feminist, educated *ladina* and *mestiza* women, with personal and family experiences with racism; theoretical reflections on the tensions between *mestizaje* and *ladinidad*; and/or political activism in the women's movement. Their positionalities are:

- Yolanda Aguilar. 59. *Ladina-mestiza*. Anthropologist, holistic feminist, transpersonal therapist, teacher and researcher. Author of *Femestizajes* (2019). She directs Centro Q'anil and continues to feel and search for the links of the *mestizajes* with the experience of bodies and sexualities; with extensive participation in the women's movement.
- Ana Bermúdez. 33. Anthropologist and hackkefeminist. She investigates issues at the intersection between technologies, territories, bodies and futuretopias.
- Gabriela Maldonado. 36. *Mestiza*. Degree in Communication Sciences. With a master's degree in Cultural Anthropology. Professional doula companion for people in gestation, childbirth and postpartum. Local director of a birthing center in San Juan La Laguna, Sololá, Guatemala. Mother of two children of six and three years old.
- Lucía Méndez. 28. *Mestiza*. Anthropologist and feminist. With experience in the field of social research and community, works on issues of human rights, historical memory and disappearance due to armed conflict.
- Ana Silvia Monzón. 62. *Mestiza*. Sociologist and feminist communicator. Ph.D. in Social Sciences from FLACSO, Central American Program. She has been a university professor in Universidad de San Carlos, Universidad Del Valle de Guatemala, and Universidad Rafael Landívar. Visiting professor at URACCAN-Nicaragua, and UES-El Salvador. Researcher on issues related to

history, education, sexuality, migration, ethnicity, media, from the perspective of gender and intersectionality; with extensive participation in the Guatemalan women's movement.

- Sandra Morán. 62. *Mestiza*. Lesbian woman, revolutionary, percussionist, popular educator, feminist activist and the first lesbian congresswoman in Guatemala (period 2016-2020). Coordinator of the international school for feminist organization Berta Cáceres and political scientist; with extensive participation in the Guatemalan women's movement.
- Ana Lucía Ramazzini. 45. *Mestiza*. Feminist. Sociologist and educator with a Master of Research in Politics and Society, PhD candidate in Social Sciences (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala). Research Professor of the Gender, Sexualities and Feminisms Studies Program at FLACSO Guatemala.
- Silvia Ramos. 37. *Mestiza*. Educator and sociologist from the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC), with a Master's degree in Latin American Cultural Studies (FLACSO Guatemala) and studies in Intercultural Education. Currently, Education Officer at Pestalozzi Children's Village Foundation, Guatemala office. University professor at the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences and Humanities in Universidad Rafael Landívar.
- Isabel Rodas. 55. She recognizes herself as part of other fractured identities in the national space. Anthropologist from Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, a Master in Social Anthropology (Paris 8/Universidad del Valle de Guatemala) and a PhD in Social Anthropology from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS -Paris). She is a part-time researcher at the Research Institute (IIHAA-USAC) of the School of History (1987-2021). Among her publications she has several on the subject of *ladino* identities, kinship, middle class and whiteness as symbolic capital in Guatemala.
- Vera Rodas. 32. Psychologist and counselor, feminist activist with studies and experience in reproductive justice, sexual and reproductive rights and access to abortion services in countries with restrictive laws.
- Regina Solís. 30. *Ladina-mestiza*. Anthropologist interested in identity negotiations through cultural artifacts.

c. The research positionality

According to Cumes (2009), decolonizing our feminist political identities would imply unlearning the hegemonic notions of progress based on uniform populations. For the *ladina-mestiza* group, I am aware and recognize that there are many other positionalities within the women's movement and that they are also in need of further discussion from anti-racist perspectives. However, this debate questions this particular group's privileges. Recognizing oneself from a place of enunciation, as proposed by Aguilar (2019), Haraway (1988), is a feminist practice that situates scholars and avoids claiming "objective" or "totalizing" perspectives on *mestizaje*. In terms of contemporary feminism, it allows for establishing a dialogue with others from a specific point of view. Thus, recognizing our positionality allows us, as feminists, two main points. The first is to abandon the idea of talking about the oppressed others. Moreover, to focus on our *ladina-mestiza* groups with their common denominators and, from there, to enable other articulations. Considering the historical context and the political implications from which this research approaches *mestizaje*, it is compelling for me to approach its content from curiosity and intuition and propose it as a political vindication and social mobilization strategy.

Through this research I will use the noun *we*, to refer to *ladina-mestiza* women as a political stance in four ways: a) to mention the participants of this research who identify themselves as *ladina-mestizas* or who are in the process of reflecting on the issue and identify themselves as *ladinas* or *mestizas*. b) To epistemologically enunciate a necessary positionality within the Guatemalan women's movement based on previous literature on the issue, as *Femestizajes*. c) To enunciate the existence of an heterogeneous group of *ladina*, *ladina-mestiza*, and *mestiza* women, who are reflecting on their racism and see the potential of this new political identity or the racism conversation itself. And, d) to include those *ladina*, *ladina-mestiza*, and *mestiza* women and other gender identities who by reading this research find meaning and resonance with my proposal of a new *ladina-mestiza* political identity.

3. Contemporary feminist debates in Guatemala

a. The itinerary

Guatemala is a country with recent but still insufficient literature on the reflections of *ladina–mestiza* women and the possibilities this enables, the urgency to dialogue on these issues opens a new door. In this chapter, I will focus on making a brief genealogy of decolonial contemporary feminist debates in Latin America, starting with the contributions of Black and Chicano feminism in the U.S., their political and theoretical framework, which has been helpful for feminists in Latin America. In the first section, I will present the most relevant and conceptual contributions as a product of profound personal and collective struggles of Latin American and Guatemalan feminist trajectories.

Then, in section b, I will portray two concrete examples of the contemporary debates about *mestizaje* in Guatemala and people's shared interests, especially social movements, to stimulate a conversation that questions the status-quo from self-determination and political identities. Lastly, from a feminist perspective, *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* in Guatemala encourage debates on ethnicity, political identities, and racial constructions that dispute and question hegemonic power. In the final section, and in the light of Feminists academics like Yolanda Aguilar (2019) and her book *Femestizajes*, I will share the open question of this research and why it is relevant to pursue creative answers to respond to it.

b. Contemporary feminist debates in Latin America and Guatemala

i. Politics of domination and decolonial studies

According to Curiel (2007), anti-racist and decolonial feminist debates in Latin America have been nurtured by anti-colonial and decolonial contributions of black and brown thinkers from colonized territories. This accurate genealogy of the fundamental thinkers of coloniality started almost 100 years ago. Around the 1930s, Aimé Césaire, a French Martinican academic and politician, started the Negritude movement and sustained his political proposal by analyzing colonialism and racism as central vectors of capitalism and Western modernity in terms of eurocentric thinking structures, values, and economic relations. Subsequently, according to the author, in the 1950's, Frantz Fanon, also French Martinican, proposed the concept of white gaze and the notions of the imaginary metropolitan world and the European universalist values as hegemonic. Fanon established the difference in the perception of colonizers' identity and the eurocentric delegation of the colonized as the

stripped, which he pointed out was reflected in thinking structures, political actions, and geopolitical relations. Violence was a principal vector of colonialism accompanied by dehumanization and expropriation, through power and domination, of the colonized predominantly Latin America indigenous and African populations. As racialized subaltern subjects, both authors were pioneers in pointing out the creation of hierarchical systems based on Eurocentrism accompanied by fictitious values of power and progress to justify the need for racial differentiation. At the same time, this structure would allow ignoring and minimizing the technological knowledge and the social, ideological and political organization of the colonized peoples.

As Curiel (2007) notes, their analysis fostered contemporary decolonial studies. The author points out to Quijano and other Modernity Group members, who have done profound reflections to explain contemporary Latin American societies' dynamics, racism, and inequalities. Nonetheless, many of these decolonial studies have approached gender and sexuality from a modernity perspective (Lugones, 2010; Curiel, 2007). According to Curiel (2007), on the other hand, black feminism in the United States, coming out of the historical oppression of slavery, has produced through its embodied experiences an essential archive of emancipatory political action. 20th century contributions include Combahee River, Angela Davis, and Patricia Hill Collins, who theorized on anti-racism, decolonizing sexuality and bodies, and the intertwining of oppressions between biological characteristics and the construction of race, and class and gender as categories of analysis. Hill Collins (1990) conceptualized within black feminist theory the term matrix of domination from which situated political analysis and practices are now part of rigorous gender analysis.

For Hill Collins (1990), the traditional additive models of oppression are rooted in Eurocentric masculinist thinking based on ranking dichotomous categorizations. Only either/or exists in this grammar of oppressions, in which one side is superior to the other. The matrix of domination conceptualized by her considers that race, gender and class are imbricated oppressions. She proposes shifting from only a few vectors to thinking in age, sexual orientation, religion, and ethnicity according to the historical backgrounds of black, brown, disabled, the poor, vulnerable populations. This analysis shows a historical system where different positionalities embody and benefit from different amounts of privilege and penalty. Therefore, for Guatemala, these interlocking systems are not interchangeable and can operate more or less in specific contexts and at different structural, symbolic, community, and personal levels.

According to Curiel (2009) parallel to the critiques and contributions of black feminism in the United States, in the '80s, Chicano feminism, through the literature of Gloria Anzaldúa, Chela Sandoval, and Cherrie Moraga, among others, questioned cultural essentialisms, the imperialism of U.S. culture and the impositions of their culture. Along the same lines and later in her book *Borderlands* (1987), Anzaldúa created the notion of *mestiza* consciousness as a proposal of *mestizaje* and hybridization in the face of the impositions of white culture and the expectations of Chicano culture. She became the referent of decolonial studies on border thinking, which broke with the logic and structures of modernity and assumed horizons of political emancipation that did not respond to power but instead created new vital forms. Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* is a contestatory and vindicative proposal in the context of the U.S. empire. Her *mestizaje* notion is not inserted on logic of reaffirming the differences created by the nation-state in Latin American societies, where *mestizaje* in most countries implied an erasure of indigenous and black roots and histories.

As Curiel (2007) states, from the contributions of Black Feminism and Chicano feminism, decolonial studies were and are still able to produce analyses that deepen the relationship between colonialism and the imbrications of oppression. Meanwhile indigenous, Mayan, Afro Caribbean, and diverse women in other latitudes of Latin America were also approaching them from their incarnated positionalities, as they pointed to similar oppressions long before the hegemonic academy discussed them.

Since the 1990s, the decolonial theory has gained strength through Latin American decolonial scholars based in U.S. universities, part of the Modernity Group, dedicated to dialogue and producing knowledge from decolonial perspectives. Within this theoretical stream, Anibal Quijano (2000) coined the term coloniality of power, referring to the structures of control caused by colonizers, sustained in two vectors: the first one, the capital composed of the different axis of labour, exploitation, and slavery. The second one, the mental category of race, codified and justified the relations between the conquered and the conquerors. Colonizer descendants still exercise these structures in contemporary Latin American societies, which explains for Guatemala the subjugation and exploitation of indigenous peoples. On the other hand, the academic María Lugones coined in 2008 the term coloniality of gender, responding to Quijano's omission of colonialism's construction of gender. For Lugones (2008), the intertwining of race and gender as constructions of the colonization of America; and, would justify the differences between white and colonized subjects while accentuating the differences between white European women and the female colonized subjects. Therefore, it would justify the latter's exploitation and dispossession

within the colonial matrix of power. (Lugones, 2008). As Tock (2020) notes, there has been a critique of hegemonic decolonial studies and the notion of gender relations, clarifying that it was under a different key not called gender, in original populations across Latin America. The author recalls the contributions made by Rita Segato, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, and Julieta Paredes which established through anthropological and ethnographic work the existence of gender and patriarchy prior to the colonization process that started in 1492.

ii. Feminisms in Latina America and Guatemala

As Curiel (2007) notes, feminists from different territories across Latin America have embodied personal, community, and social experiences continuously consider the political, ideological, historical, and social elements that have configured contemporary societies in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the early 1980s, the feminist movement in the region started opening spaces for critical debates on feminist politics, as Saporta (1992) cited by Rivera (2021) analyzes. One of these important events was the first Encuentro Feminista Latinoamericano y del Caribe (Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting) in Colombia in 1981. The discussions on women's rights and class conditions produced a series of precise demands related to equal pay, the right to motherhood, and safe abortion—women's centrality within left political organizations and overcoming feminist links to socialism. The second Encuentro in Perú in 1983 held discussions revolving around patriarchy and a sex/gender system concomitant to capitalism, along with many women's homophobia and the racism's absence from dominant conversations in the region.

According to Aguilar (2009) and Saporta (1992), the fourth Encuentro was held in Taxco, Mexico in 1987 gathering more than 1,500 women to discuss complex debates such as who was the feminist subject. Bastian Duarte (2012), states that indigenous women pointed out a long time ago to the concept of culture and collectivity lacking from liberal feminist discourses. Rivera (2021) interprets the critique of mainstream feminisms as questioning the dominance of its hegemonic subject, traditionally a middle-class, heteronormative white woman. In the present in Latin America, the definitions and political practices towards gaining or increasing autonomy are as varied as their attention to the intersections of races, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. For instance, communitarian feminism, based on Mayan and other indigenous cosmovisions, is prominent in Mesoamerica, composed by the south of Mexico, Guatemala, some parts of Honduras and El Salvador, and feminists from ancestral indigenous populations in South America. This feminism reflects the intertwining of ancestral patriarchy and Western colonization patriarchy, as explained by Cabnal (2015).

As Monzón (2015) remarks, the genealogy of feminisms in Guatemala can be interpreted from a women's movement perspective focused on improving women's living conditions without necessarily criticizing gender inequality culture. The author notes that the country has followed a tendency to have coincidences with women's history in Europe and the U.S. from the 18th to the 20th Century. According to her, there were two historically differentiated political struggles within Guatemala's women's groups at the beginning of the 19th Century. At the end of the 19th Century, there was an increased demand for education and the right to vote by illustrated women. At the beginning of the 20th Century, the Gabriela Mistral Society (Sociedad Gabriela Mistral), composed of feminist women, circulated ideas about a broader citizenship and women's gender identity, as Casaús Arzú notes (2001) cited by Monzón (2015).

According to Monzón (2015) during the October Revolution, from 1944 to 1954, the state modernized, expanding social participation and citizenship notions. Both rural and urban women established a series of demands on political, social and labor rights focused on improving conditions. From the dictatorships of 1954 that would end in 1985, the regression of rights became evident. A crucial political moment for the women's movement was the student and popular leadership to recover the rights and democracy established during the October revolution in 1944 until the end of the first democratic period until 1954 and the feminist demands, known as the days of March and April 1962. Guatemala experienced almost four decades of brutality characterized by military governments and the genocide of the Mayan peoples, which Casaús Arzú (2014) points as the the ultimate demonstration of racism. The country went through criminalization and authoritarianism in these decades, which drastically reduced social mobilization. Some feminists' participated in the First International Conference of Women in Mexico in 1975, despite the lack of regional links as mentioned by Aguilar (2019).

After establishing the Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala as a democratic country in 1985, specific spaces of the social organization started emerging and reestablished; which allowed deeper theoretical reflections of feminist demands based on women's autonomy. *Mestiza-ladina* women from the middle and urban classes participated actively. In the following years there was an expansion of indigenous and sexual dissidents' voices. The variety of agendas, discourses and confirmation of collectivities within the same movement of rural and urban women, with their different class and ethnic positions, generated challenges regarding the possibilities of political alliances (Monzón, 2015).

As Monzón (2015) points out, the five-year period from 1990 to 1995 was also crucial in revealing the historical gaps between men and women and between *ladina-mestiza* women and indigenous-Afro-descendant women. In 1992, with the Fifth Centenary of the Spanish Invasion, a group of indigenous Mayan women denounced racism within the women's movement, and they formed the Mayan Women's Council in coordination with the still existing Continental Link of Indigenous Women, founded in 1993. Garífuna women started to coordinate actions with other Afro-Caribbean areas in sister countries such as Honduras. During the negotiations of the peace agreements in 1994, more than 30 women's collectives from the different towns of Guatemala formed, the still-active-today, Women's Sector to discuss a political agenda during the Peace Agreements. A significant achievement resulting from the Sector was the creation of the National Women's Forum as a government agreement, which gathered the perspectives of more than 25,000 urban and rural women at different levels within the country, reflecting the felt needs and priorities in terms of protection of women's rights. These discussions materialized in the document National Policy for the Promotion and Comprehensive Development of Guatemalan Women in 2001. The five years from 1996 to 1999 were marked, on the other hand, by the signing of the Peace Agreements (1996). Moreover, this period facilitated the participation of some women's groups in international events; for instance, the Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, 1994 and the IV International Women's Conference in Beijing, 1995.

According to Monzón (2015), the Women's Sector expanded the participation of rural organizations of Mayan, Xinka and Garífuna women, although not without tensions. After the Peace Accords, civil society organizations received substantial investment from international cooperation and the legal creation of non-governmental organizations as interlocutors of the state. In the academic sphere, spaces such as the University Program for Research and Gender Studies opened in 1994 at the University of San Carlos de Guatemala, the only public university in the country. The University Commission for Women, in 1994 in the Area of Women's Studies, FLACSO-Guatemala, in 1996, the Diploma in Studies of Gender, Fundación Guatemala/URL, in 1997. Starting in 1998, the monthly magazine, *La Cuerda*, was founded with an openly feminist agenda. In the 21st Century, the state recognized the dialogue with the women's movement from which the foundation of the Presidential Secretariat for Women emerged, where feminist organizations participated in its leadership and its control as a state entity simultaneously.

The beginning of the decade brought debates and tensions regarding ethnicity-race-culture approaches to depatriarchalizing sexuality and the invisibility of the

contributions of the lesbian movement in the country. A more significant number of organizations and collectives of rural and indigenous women, mainly Mayans, Garífunas and Xincas, shaped the demanded collective and cultural rights, racism and access to justice after the Internal Armed Conflict (Monzón, 2015). However, within the Mayan women's movement, detractors of feminism have also emerged, characterized as feminism of equality in Guatemala. As Cumes (2009) points out, indigenous Mayan and Xinka women have not been seen as interlocutors but as subject to guardianship.

For Cumes (2009) cited by Monzón (2015), no Mayan women's organization is currently institutionally feminist. However, some women identify with and support feminist approaches from the decolonial, postcolonial and feminism of difference. In terms of sexuality, bodies and eroticism, theoretical-methodological and political proposals began to take shape from the unequal power relations and the cultural constructions of the sex-gender system, the heteronormative regime and patriarchy. However, like Aguilar (2015) cited by Monzón (2015) remarks, the gender approach has been uncritical over the last fifteen years, which has resulted in the little circulation of theoretical-political debates on feminism. Meanwhile, the theoretical contributions produced by political lesbianism had been, until the beginning of the 2000s, a series of reflections and a community minimized by the women's movement. This community has made substantial theoretical contributions and political positions, such as the election of the lesbian feminist Sandra Morán, as a deputy of Congress period 2016-2019. Despite the hostility, the violence and the patriarchal culture, women's movement collectives opened and continue to expand the spaces for participation and politicization of feminists in the country (Monzón, 2015). On the other hand, the first academic productions about *ethnicity and the women's movement* started in early 2002, when Ana Silvia Monzón, feminist academic wrote her Master thesis "Among women: ethnic identity, a factor of tension in the women's movement in Guatemala, 1990-2000". The research analyzed the dialogue and political participation of women from different ethnicities in the Women's Movement in the country. As Ana Silvia mentioned in a debate group for this research, she studied the topic at a time where it was not in the women's movement debate:

"Since the end of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s, I started this reflection on ethnicity and gender. In 1998, I wrote a small article that appeared in the video called *Ethnicity and Gender*, at a time when this was not being discussed conceptually, neither in the women's movement nor anywhere else. I was talking about the triple oppression that some indigenous women colleagues also refer to, and

it is a thread of discussion that has been of particular interest to me. I did my master's thesis on ethnic identity in the women's movement. So, I do have that discussion in mind. Nevertheless, personally, no, I have never felt or assumed myself to be a *ladina*. It is a somewhat pejorative term colloquially, especially in some spaces". (A.S. Monzón, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Ana Silvia's quote poses an important reflection about *ladinidad* from a feminist perspective; although she did not perceive herself as a *ladina*, still recognized the need to debate on the women's movement's approach to ethnicity within the women's movement. Her provoked new reflections in *ladinas* and *mestizas*. For instance, Yolanda Aguilar, who later wrote *Femestizajes*, started reflecting on the subject after reading Monzón's research:

"In 2000, we created in Guatemala, with other compañeras (militant partners), a space called Conversatorio Feminista (Feminist Conversatory), which was an attempt to resume the political discussions we had come from. Ana Silvia Monzón was there and had written a thesis discussing the tensions between indigenous and feminist women. The truth is that at that moment, I asked myself, but how? So the tensions? And then I was left wondering." (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022)

From Aguilar's memories on the first academic approaches to ethnic identities from feminist standpoints, it is clear that the explorations on ethnic identities for *ladina* and *mestiza* women in the country are very recent. It has been feminist knowledge production that has made possible to question the historical imposed identities made to fragment society and in the present to impede larger political coalitions. "This dichotomous vision (Mayan-*ladina*) also tends to hide and minimize the great ethno-cultural diversity that characterizes the country, but which, for historical, political, economic and cultural reasons, continues to be denied" (Monzón, 2004, p.138). The author implies that this binary Mayan-*ladinas/mestizas* reproduction in discourses and political practices is although still a complex issue to discuss within the women's movement, widely normalized instead of questioned. In the past couple of years, there have been innovative theoretical productions, like *Femestizajes*.

"In a moment of studying feminist political identities, it was very easy for me to link up with Rita Segato's proposal on mestizo political identities. And then I

started to play a little bit with the concept of *ladina-mestiza*. *Ladina* because we come from racist traditions and genealogies and *mestiza* because it is a political identity that still needs to be built, that still needs to be made conscious, delimited, debated, etc.” (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 13 2022).

As Aguilar (2019) remarks, her theoretical path to coin the *ladina-mestiza* term has implied identifying the importance of this thinking process. Before and after the publication of *Femestizajes*, there have been other examples in the public debate that demonstrate that this is a discussion of interest in contemporary Guatemala.

c. Sociopolitical examples of *mestizaje* debates in Guatemala

The tension between *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* in Guatemala is a live conversation that so far is part of the debates social movements and academics are having in the country. The two most recent examples are an interactive exhibition called *Why are we the way we are?* (*Por qué estamos como estamos* in Spanish) and the series of Facebook lives *Identities in Tension: ladinidad and mestizaje* (*Identidades en tensión: ladinidad y mestizaje* in Spanish).

[Why we are, how we are?](#) was an interactive exhibition located in a museum of Guatemala City aiming to be an educational space to foster dialogue about the country’s roots, including the history, diversity and identity for a peaceful society. Considering the Peace Agreements were signed in 1996, the space was founded in 2004 by the International Learning Institute for Social Reconciliation (IIARS in Spanish). The space, which received more than 300,000 visits, according to its website, was mostly directed to Guatemala City’s urban *ladino* school and university students. Organized in groups, attendants were guided through an entertaining pathway, where they watched screenings, responded to guided questions and listened to very common racist sayings in Guatemalan society to question racism. Although it was closed in 2020 due to the space availability, it was one of the few physical spaces that had an anti-racist perspective of Guatemalan quotidian interethnic relations. (IIARS, 2021)

[Identities in tension: ladinidad and mestizaje](#): was a series of Facebook lives organized in Guatemala City by the independent digital media Plaza Pública and the political research and activism Instituto 25A, an organization born in the social movements that challenged the political class in 2015 in Guatemala. The discussions intended to articulate collective and plural reflections on the cultural, economic and political intentionalities that the *ladina* category implies and its implications for *ladino-mestizo* populations to reconfigure

them. (Plaza Pública, 2021). The group read various theoretical and public opinion pieces and met every Wednesday for four weeks, starting on April 15th 2021, to participate in each live discussion, which usually invited several social sciences researchers and activists. The interest in these discussions was high; for instance, according to Facebook metrics, the first one reported an audience of 5,100 reproductions with 125 people signed up to participate. The four discussions demonstrated the pursuit of questions and possible answers in the face of the insufficiency and emptiness that is *ladinidad*.

These two concrete examples demonstrate the collective interest in building knowledge reflecting on anti-racist and anti-sexist perspectives of identity, *ladinidad*, and *mestizaje*. Moreover, they both simultaneously set the pace for a breaking point around a national discourse on identity and, therefore, new narratives on collective relationalities (Millán & Solís, 2021). “Hopefully the *ladino* will cease to exist at some point. But right now it exists”. (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 13, 2022) Why is it urgent to acknowledge our indigenous-diverse *mestizaje* past in Guatemalan society? Could *mestizaje* as a political identity subvert colonialism?

In this chapter, I have briefly provided an overview of Latin American and Guatemalan feminists' genealogies. At last, I have presented the open question of this research within the Guatemalan contemporary context and the urgency to imagine if *ladina-mestiza* political identity can be a political strategy. In the next chapter, I will approach theoretical perspectives that can be helpful to configure a *ladina-mestiza* consciousness. To avoid confusions on the theoretical approaches, I will start by mobilizing coloniality of power from decolonial studies, to frame the discussion of power dynamics and the impact of coloniality in Guatemala. Secondly, I will bring up the critique to the contemporary coloniality of gender aware of the historical privileges of white Latin American women, along with decolonial feminist contributions to a bottom-up approach of feminism. Thirdly, I will expand on Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *mestiza* consciousness and liminal spaces, Nèpantla, and her proposal of reframing the understanding of *mestizaje* to highlight the importance of imagination and agency away from nation-state imposed identities.

I will carry on with the contributions of communitarian feminists as a journey to portray from both anti-colonial and decolonial standpoints the elements and possibilities this new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness can exercise politically. Finally, I will close the next chapter by translating and clarifying how I mobilize the different conceptual and theoretical backgrounds. I will differentiate and mention why these theories are necessary, and how they contribute to building a *ladina-mestiza* political identity.

4. Theoretical perspectives for a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness

a. The itinerary

As Lugones (2010) proposes, the decolonial feminist task is decolonizing epistemic and territorial borders, observing the colonial difference, and empathically resisting the epistemological habit of erasing them. It invites us to think about decolonial feminism, where our intersubjective gaze as feminists is grounded, historicized and embodied.

The chapter is structured as follows. In section one, I will discuss the emergence and reproduction of historical and contemporary coloniality in order to provide a comprehensive framework in which *ladina-mestiza* consciousness can be understood. Afterwards, I will discuss the critiques that decolonial feminists have put forth in order to counter this colonial epistemological heritage. I will expand on regaining personal agency as political subjects against nation-state and cultural imposed identities, such as ladino identity. In section three, I will introduce this concept together with ‘border thinking’ in order to open an epistemological space consisting of Anzaldúa’s concept of *Nepantla* and a hybrid mode of thinking connected to spiritual activism in order to access our *facultad* and *conocimiento, as feminist ladina-mestizas*. In section four, I will delve into the political and epistemic proposal of decolonial Mayan and indigenous intellectuals, along with communitarian feminisms in the context of Guatemala to imply that their contributions can provide guidance to fulfill a *ladina-mestiza* consciousness. Finally, in the last section of this chapter I will translate these theoretical concepts to ground the *ladina-mestiza* political identity.

b. The contemporary coloniality of gender

To foster the *ladina-mestizas* political identity is to understand why the discussion about it has to be portrayed from a decolonial feminist perspective. Decolonial studies have extensively described the historical processes and ideological reasons behind the emergence of colonial relations of power and exploitation in contemporary Latin American societies (Quijano, 2014). Against the hegemonic standard narrative of the ‘rhetoric of modernity’, that depicts ‘European modernity’ as a civilizational achievement, decolonial studies scholars demonstrated how ‘modernity’ could only emerge within a dialectical relationship to the non-European other, a relationship that is characterized by colonial violence, exploitation, and racism. America, or Latin America, was the first space/time in which colonialism

produced Modernity, as a new global power and identity constituted by two axes of power: race and capital (Quijano, 2014).

In this universal logic of power, race was the main instrument for creating populations with hierarchized ranks, places, and roles. This initial biological discourse created social relations and identities, like Indians, blacks, *mestizos*; castes like *castizos*, *zambos*, *mulatos*, and many others based on differentiated degrees of privileges, exploitation, and access to resources. The second axis of power was capital. Justified by the colonial differences, within the emerging colonial production-appropriation-distribution systems in the Spanish colonies, labor was controlled and exploited exclusively by the Spanish colonizers. They thus were the sole benefactors from the newly established colonial capital-wage relations (Quijano, 2014).

The emergence of the modern/colonial world-system resulted in the subjugation of peoples, subjectivities, intersubjectivities, spiritualities and cultures through the mechanisms of the coloniality of power, being and knowledge. (Quijano, 1992; Mignolo, 2000; Guerrero, 2010). As Lugones (2010) remarks, the colonial process that invented the colonized subjects reduced them to primitive beings, inferior to humans, and characterized them as infantile, aggressive, possessed, and in need of transformation. To resist and dismantle the effects of coloniality, Latin American feminism has started to incorporate concepts of class, race, gender, and sexuality into its discourse and political practices (Espinosa Miñoso, 2014). During this process, Latin American feminism has depended ideologically on the colonial discourses produced in the Global North. While Western feminist knowledge production is inherently Eurocentric, anthropocentric, and colonial, it has influenced Third World feminist on both a political and theoretical level (Curiel, 2009).

Feminist academics like Curiel (2009) and Mendoza (2008) remark, that hegemonic feminist movements in Latin America are primarily composed of mid-class, white and mestizas, urban, and heteronormative subjects. According to Espinosa Miñoso (2014), given the influence of colonial epistemologies in Latin American feminism, there is the need to critically reflect on the contemporary geopolitical dynamics of feminist thought in Latin America. In order to do this, the author suggests a bottom-up methodology to address epistemic privilege; such a methodology would focus on the experiences of the most vulnerable subjects and communities of societies to make the mechanisms of power visible. As Espinosa Miñoso (2014) notes, there is an urgency to produce knowledge and political praxis based upon cross-border feminism, anti-capitalist, and decolonized community approaches that can center common differences to address the effects of globalization through

justice and solidarity. Taking this into account, the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness aspires to make those mechanisms of power visible from an anti-capitalist and decolonial perspective.

In this section, I explained the origins of the colonial hierarchies which are still present in contemporary Latin American countries and the subjugation of knowledge, feelings, and social structures that relate in different ways to each other. In the second part of the section, I have problematized perspectives of how coloniality is imprinted in hegemonic feminism and why decolonial feminism is necessary to produce a situated analysis of *ladina-mestiza* consciousness. In the next section, I invite readers to say farewell to rigorous traditional reasoning logics and visit a liminal space where feelings, intuitions, fears, and other worlds celebrate pluriversal dances of life and death. A pluriverse with divergent political practices, relations, and worlds (De la Cadena & Blaser, 2018).

c. Anzaldúa: the soul's call for a new consciousness

i. The *mestiza* consciousness

As *ladina-mestizas*, in contemporary Guatemala, how can we *botar* (throw away) that which is worthless, *lo falso* (the fake), *lo superficial* (the superficial)? How can we inhabit a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness? To inhabit the *mestiza* consciousness would be "making a conscious rupture with oppressive traditions of all cultures and religions" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.82). Gloria Anzaldúa was a queer chicana feminist and theorist who was born in 1942 and passed away in 2004. Her work is considered central within decolonial studies, feminist and queer theories (Poetry Foundation, 2022). Anzaldúa's proposal became radically decolonial and epistemologically pluriversal as she invited Chicanas, migrants, Latin American people, and mixes of different cultural backgrounds, to learn from each other's struggles and living conditions. Her book "Borderlands: La Frontera" (1987) is now an inspiration and decolonial bet for feminist scholars. However, in the time in which it was published, her work was disregarded by academia for being not too rigorous or theoretical enough, as her book focused more on her personal experiences and reflections through storytelling. As I write these words, I want to invite readers to exercise with me by inhabiting the border by abandoning reason and connecting to your souls.

For Anzaldúa (1987) '*mestiza* consciousness' would be a transference of cultural and spiritual values from one group to another and for and from many cultures simultaneously. Her language and culture, Chicano, which is not Mexican exactly and not anglo-saxon, marked her life and work. As a Chicana from the Texas border, Anzaldúa lived through the

legacy of Mexican culture while resisting colonialist Anglo-white supremacy. She proposed walking away from the Western rigidity that associates order with progress and stepping in the border with the flexibility to “stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.7). Her reference to the psyche implies that decolonial feminists, can reconnect with our hearts and souls to produce new knowledge and for our lives to be based on interconnection, finding new truths and meanings to the problems and differences created by modernity.

The impact of *mestiza* consciousness is collective, because it is breaking “the subject-object duality” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.80) in Anzaldúa’s embodiment and life, aiming to outstrip duality. According to the author, if logical thinking could be transcended, then the differences created by modernity could also change; including those legitimized hierarchized social structures, inequalities, and violence. Her proposal leads me to think about the potential of a new feminist *ladina-mestiza consciousness*. A conscious rupture with *ladino* culture would imply for *ladinas* abandoning the safety and familiarity with hundreds of years of the privileges that the *ladino* populations have benefited in Guatemala.

As Anzaldúa (1987) notes, traditionally white elites want people of color to be divided through a distorted version of history. The strategy of divide and conquer has been successful in Guatemala. As González Ponciano (2005) remarks, hegemonic contemporary *ladinos* are not only a group that aspire white-supremacy. In the eyes of white elites, they are *shumos* and *choleros*, which means that they have bad taste and lack class. This pejorative white view on *ladinos* is incorporated and used heavily by mid-class *ladinos* to differentiate themselves from the lower classes of *ladinos*. As Anzaldúa (1987) notes, that distortion of history and ignorance continue to reproduce stereotypes in which different subjugated subjects experience more or less intensity according to their positionalities. Not only has the dominant culture imposed racial identities, but they have also taken most of the material and symbolic spaces, including narratives that perpetuate and justify the hate to everyone who is different.

What does this imply for *ladina-mestiza* consciousness? Anzaldúa (1987) implies that imagination is an arena to play, produce, create, and give birth to new relationalities and identities. To exercise the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness would require acknowledging the self-loathe the *ladino* group carries as a result of historically not belonging to the Spanish *criollos* or the indigenous groups, and from benefiting from the racial oppression everyone categorized as the other.

A new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness is also a pathway to collective healing from the colonialist wounds that make *ladino* people feel insufficient against white supremacy. The radical imagination and emancipatory liminal space that would entail collectively building a new consciousness within the Guatemalan feminist movement could lead to other embodiments of reality. This consciousness connects to what Aguilar (2019) remarks as recognizing the social and sexual racist mandates that have been imposed on *ladino* people, emphasizing gendered mandates for women. As both authors suggest, a new consciousness can be born through a personal reflection of the privileges and the internalized oppressions. For Anzaldúa (1987) border thinking is living with *la facultad* (the faculty), which means to break the resistance and allow ourselves to dive into the depths of perception. It is also the opportunity to inhabit the border from the soul. Both are necessary to participate in this dialogic process from a decolonial perspective. What can border thinking imply for feminist *ladina-mestizas*?

ii. Nepantla, border thinking from the soul

Anzaldúa (1987) generously reminds us that we, as individuals and collectives, have the capacity to read deeper realities and structures below surface phenomena. She calls this ability *la facultad* (the faculty) and defines it as "a sensing or quick perception that arrives without conscious reasoning" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.38). Not all parts of the psyche speak the same language or have the same sensitivity, as some of them communicate through images, symbols, feelings, and intuitions. *La facultad* is to access that knowledge and see what lies or hides behind these other knowledge manifestations. "Those who are pounced on the most have it the strongest-the females, the homosexuals of all races, the dark-skinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.38). The author implies that all those who do not feel safe in the world can more easily develop *la facultad*. It is a sixth sense to perceive danger and have a penetrating radar to avoid harmful situations or people in the outer world. For the author it is a tactic for survival cultivated in the psyche. As we, *ladina-mestizas* inhabit a liminal world where exercising and experiencing the oppression/danger that constitutes these ethnic and political identities, what pathway can we take to access that inner wisdom?

For Anzaldúa (1987), border thinking is living with *la facultad* (the faculty). It is breaking our resistances in order to dive into the depths of our perception. It influences the perspectives in which we see the world, from concrete material aspects of life to the soul's depth. It is a vertical new vision and it is returning to a state of consciousness in which the

soul directs the experience. Unlike the West, where well-being only passes through emotions classified as pleasant or beneficial, a deep connection with the soul generates knowledge through life experiences that are difficult to go through.

Anzaldúa (1987) speaks directly to women, the queer, the subjugated, inviting us to travel to liminal spaces through the soul, intuition, and *la facultad*. She recovers an ancestral cosmological embodiment in which the inner and outer world are first connected to the soul. She proposes breaking the prejudices for the dark, ugly, ill, dead, and unknown. Through Anzaldúa's perception of feeling the world, people are connected first through the faculty and the soul and then through other abilities, like reason. What worlds could we produce as *ladina-mestizas* if we acknowledge the fear, the racist hierarchies, and our *facultad* to connect with our souls? This is not an answer that the mind can respond to alone; a journey to *Nepantla* is necessary.

Acknowledging one's collectivity's privileges is the first step. As Anzaldúa (1987) notes, Western mindset populations are programmed to ignore that the modern life comfort relies on the lives of historically exploited people that continues in the present. It is urgent to question the binaries that reinforce these lifestyles. To live in *Nepantla* implies seeing the spaces among perceptions and beliefs regarding differences, as it's not them but the labels used which are obsolete. So to inhabit *Nepantla* with enough *conocimiento* (knowledge) is interconnecting the ability to develop the *facultad* (the faculty). She describes *conocimiento* (knowledge) as the guide that gives us the strength and willingness to question and transform our life's perceptions and conditions.

According to Anzaldúa (1987), knowledge is prone to be easier to access after painful and joyful experiences that foster mutual empowerment. It implies confronting one's beliefs and habits using the faculty, elevating knowledge to the same level as science. To transform those life conditions entails reflecting on individual internalized and collective imposed identities and the narratives they reinscribe. Dominant cultures impose mandates that we internalize, which is why introspection and knowledge are so necessary to subvert them. If *mestizaje* in the U.S. context can also be a tool for agency and imagination, could it be the same for *ladina-mestiza* consciousness? *Conocimiento* (knowledge) and *facultad* (faculty) are important because they lead to the potential of creating new worlds. If dualistic thinking is at the heart of the West, how is it reproduced if *ladina-mestiza* women are denied the possibility of creating new narratives and metaphors to inhabit themselves and inhabit collectively a new political identity?

iii. Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* proposal

Anzaldúa (1987) calls me to think not only at the individual level, but to remember how personal stories can contribute to create collective narratives. The aspiration is to create a new *mestiza* consciousness from Anzaldúa's proposal on spiritual activism. Transforming the axis and structures that polarize reality requires doing a thorough self and collective examination of the traumas, regaining the freed energy's receptiveness. As feminists, being guided by the soul's voice also dismantles the learned paradigms. We aim to generate new narratives in which we can envision, embody, and experience new political and spiritual collective horizons. As we understand the current reality is hierarchical and patriarchal, we acknowledge the risks of remaining in hegemonic race, class, and gender intersectionalities. It implies that digging into the roots of our non-dominant cultures and histories and understanding alternative relationalities with other people and sentient beings is an outstanding identity category composed of the spirit, feelings, and body. As our bodies are rooted on earth, so can we grow into our *mestizas* identities, spreading alternative cosmological perspectives, spiritualities, and cultures (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Beliefs and values from the wisdom of past spiritual traditions of diverse cultures coupled with current scientific knowledge is the basis of the new synthesis. The emerging narratives are multicultural. They not only insist on analyzing and combatting oppressive power systems, but advocate the need to collaborate and capacitar (empower) in realizing common goals. The new versions of reality they offer demand that you employ alternative ways of knowing and rewire your ways of seeing, thinking, feeling, and expressing. By using information derived from multiple channels and different systems of knowing you collectively create new societies (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Anzaldúa's *mestizaje* proposal is radically emancipatory as it invites us to review ourselves and connect with our affections, dismantle the imposed cultural controls and blur the effects they have had on our *mestizo* racialized bodies. While her work is a window to other horizons, there are other substantial contributions to approach the body, feelings and spirit, both individual and collective, from reciprocity and collectivity.

d. Decolonial and communitarian feminisms

According to Walsh (2018), while Western feminism attempts to address subordination, it becomes hegemonic by positioning itself in the world as the only alternative through colonial, imperialist, and transnational relationships and institutions. As Aguilar Gil (2019) describes, different proposals have emerged that transgress not only Western

categories but also the very purposes of such hierarchies and relationships, especially coming from indigenous women resisting oppression and patriarchy, better known in Latin America as decolonial feminisms. Decolonial and communitarian feminisms have approached the body-territory and its relationship with nature and the depredation that the capitalist world system continues to cause; they also have acknowledged ancestral patriarchy, which converged later with Western patriarchy. Learning from community feminism is a powerful political commitment considering that its contributions break the schemes of order and progress to reconnect people with their most profound personal and political feelings in interconnection with others. To recognize its value is also to be openly anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal to the extent that its proposals invite personal and collective healing of centuries of colonization, violence and dispossession.

To Aymara activist Paredes (2014), there is an epistemological break between Western feminism and academia; she remarks communitarian feminism as the revised non-hierarchical, reciprocal and autonomous complementarity between women and men, not from the mandatory heteronormative vision but political representation and not from the family but the community. As Aguilar Gil (2019) notes, this group acknowledges patriarchy and the importance of women's movement but their anti-patriarchal struggles are different and they include the anti-colonial factor as part of their analysis. They self identify as not feminists but as social justice intellectuals and territory defenders in most cases, as some have also made significant contributions to understanding power relationships outside of western identity markers.

Some women within the Mayan movement share their view that feminism is a liberal current, so even with emancipatory proposals to the patriarchy, they propose alternatives that do not dialogue in a feminist decolonial key. Emma Chirix, Kaqchikel sociologist, interprets the scope of modernity with the Mayan communities that do not call themselves indigenous, "we have played, we have danced with modernity. You have to know how to be there and get out... I play with some theories; I review them, and what allows me to analyze my reality well" (Chirix, 2008, p.36). Both authors refer to the fact that there are evident struggles to resist and defy modernity, coloniality, and patriarchy. However, their analysis and proposals do not focus on fixing the hegemonic system but on analyzing how their own Mayan social organization structures can break free from colonial oppression.

- e. Elements of communitarian feminism to reflect on mestizaje without falling into cultural appropriation

I humbly enter this section with the intention of recovering the wisdom and power of communitarian feminism. As I also found in the interviews, to come closer to Mayan Cosmovision and communitarian feminism has been a common pathway for the participants of this research. According to Cabnal (2015), Q'eqchi' and Xinca, healer and defender, the recovery of plural knowledge and healing practices of indigenous women entails cosmogonic justice and spiritualities in the emotional dimension. This notion for nature defenders is transcendental for revitalizing and protecting their lives and territorial defense. Among this multiple ancestral knowledge, there are several keys that I portray as theoretical contributions when reflecting on the possibilities of *ladina-mestiza* consciousness. These intellectuals, land-territories defenders stress several aspects to regain balance within a cosmological perspective:

- i. To interpret the body as a political territory (cuerpo-tierra-territorio/body-land-territory).
- ii. To link the body as a territory and the personal and collective healing to restore the earth's balance and harmony.
- iii. To interpret reality through the heart, emotions, and feelings as interconnected beings.

As Aguilar (2019) reflects, there is a colonial imposition of domesticating emotions towards the body and people's sexualities. To interpret the body as a political territory (cuerpo-tierra-territorio) implies understanding the power relations that colonialism has produced within our bodies, in nature, and the relationship between them. The academic in social anthropology, Mayan K'ich'e Dorotea Gómez-Grijalva (2012), names her body as a political territory in which one can rethink and build one's history. "I do not think there are hierarchies between them because the three dimensions are equally important to revalue the meaning and the way I want to touch life through this body"(Gómez-Grijalva, 2012, p.6). The author breaks the hierarchies of the body, mind, and spirit integrating life, emotions, and healing.

This integrative approach is part of indigenous cosmovision. As Cabnal (2015) notes, to heal within the cosmogonies of indigenous peoples is a political cosmic path. Defending the body is understanding that the body is a "historical territory in dispute, with the ancestral and colonial patriarchal power, as a vital space for the recovery of life, recovery of the body to dignify and joy concerning nature. Nature is an emancipatory political bet" (Cabnal, 2015, p.103). To link the body as a territory, personal and collective healing to restore the earth's

balance and harmony implies that healing connects to the community dimension. As she remarks, “When you heal, I heal; when I heal, you heal. Such is the reciprocity of healing. Heal from my body-earth territory” (Cabnal, 2015, p.104). Therefore, emotional healing links closely to resistance. “Emotions are closely linked to healing. This link is constitutive and constituent of political work in a junction of struggles for water, rivers, forests and mountains, food autonomy, mega projects and violence. To heal as an act of personal and political vindication, enriching the fabric of life's web” (Cabnal, 2015, p.103). This is why communitarian decolonial feminists approach emotions as processes of inhabiting the border in resistance, as a political vehicle for the defence of the body-territory and as a junction of struggles against patriarchy, mining, hydroelectric, fracking and other Mega projects for the fabric of life. Collective healing is also necessary because emotions have political meaning and power relations traverse them.

As recognized by the Kaqchikel theorist Chirix (2008), the patriarchal and capitalist system has generated deep wounds in women due to discrimination and oppression based on ethnicity and gender. Is it recognizing the need to inhabit the border and feelings can lead us to talk about epistemic healing? How do we integrate it into the body and life? “We must seek other knowledge that allows us to be happier, and that happiness links to other living conditions that allow us to generate well-being” (Chirix, 2008, p.36). A way to help the *ladina-mestizas* heal our history and live the healing of emotions as a political act would be acknowledging plural forms of healing, relating, understanding and spiritual-political reading of reality. The approaches of Chirix (2008), Cabnal (2015) and Gómez-Grijalva (2012) are at the intersection between the defense of life and with personal and collective healing.

Can a political identity contain other relationalities with our bodies and collective? Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic, Maya K'iche' leader and a land-territory defender, is a member of the Council of K'iche' Peoples for the Defense of Life, Mother Nature, Land and Territory (CPK). For her, “we are energy, bodies, and spirits, mind and cosmos. The big problem is that the West stayed in mind, and the mind is criminal” (Chávez, 2020. min. 24:50) communitarian feminism invites us to reconnect with our bodies, enjoyment, pleasure, and inner voices. Like Chávez points out, “let us look for the ancient wisdom and the elements that say healing is possible. We heal with massages, Mayan ceremonies. We also heal with art, the link, the elements, with meditation, fasting, and we heal in community.” (Chávez, 2020, min.24:50)

So far, I have mobilized the concept of *facultad* and *conocimiento* of Gloria Anzaldúa and brought communitarian Mayan, Xinca, and Aymara feminists because it is insufficient to discuss *mestizaje* as a political identity without dismantling the rationality that built it as a

category. Moreover, it is impossible to believe that only through intellectual work can we fulfill the big abyss installed in our bodies based on denial and silence of *ladina* identity. It is not the mind who will find the way to embody new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness, but the emotions and the heart. Following the rationality for this endeavor would be following the same paved road that has not led the West to deconstruct its colonial matrix. What would we need to acknowledge about our emotions as *ladina-mestizas* to take a different road?

According to Guerrero (2010), the academy has incorporated emotions into its analysis field; nonetheless, epistemologies have not been modified in their disciplinary sense, perpetuating the instrumentalization of power and, therefore, they continue to be empty of affectivity. Emotions are socially, culturally and historically situated constructions of meaning. Thus, approaching the heart is urgent to enable an academy to produce liberating knowledge committed to living. Emotions build sense by situating themselves in specific and social embodied bodies, which find in these constructions other ways and possibilities of practices, discourses and horizons that allow inhabiting the world. That is to say, that hearting is an act of political resistance at a critical moment for the world led by Western civilization. For the contemporary Guatemalan society, hearting is urgent because discussions on social justice and anti-patriarchal stances revolve around the profound colonial wound of the rape, the violence, the dispossession, the denial, the racism, the genocide. However, these cries of confusion usually stay in intellectual debates that rarely explore the importance of intersubjective personal and collective processes, as Aguilar (2019) has pointed out.

f. Theoretical translations

The proposal of the Kitu Kara people and Guerrero (2010) is important to rescue because there are few discourses in Guatemalan, Dutch, and many other countries' academia that state the full integration of the heart as part of knowledge production. As a political act, it is powerful because it places at the center the possibility of another way for the academy to consider its paradigms, the discourses that it legitimizes and circulates, and the power relations that run through it. Understanding this approach from the communitarian and decolonial feminisms is essential because, in writing this research, the answers to the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness will be limited if they remain only in the rational mind.

In this chapter I have portrayed communitarian feminisms contributions because I believe *ladina-mestiza* feminists can exercise doing, thinking, and feeling by inhabiting the border. As a political exercise, we resignify and reposition the importance of decolonial feminism towards building the new. Anzaldúa's *mestiza* consciousness and Nepantla proposal

are the frameworks in which I propose a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness. I know and am aware that epistemologically, her work addressed resisting anglo culture in the U.S., its colonial history, and its colonialist present. Therefore, a pertinent theoretical translation is that it is not *mestiza* consciousness that I want to refer to when I propose a *ladina-mestiza* consciousness. In other words, I do not intend to copy their arguments and codes to impose them on an entirely different colonial identity such as the *ladina*. Instead, I want to rescue from her work the possibility of recovering our agency as *ladina-mestiza* women, to bet on the construction of worlds from the faculty and the soul. I also interpret her work in light of the proposal by Aguilar (2019). The author emphasizes recognizing not only institutionalization, typical of modernity but intersubjectivity. She suggests detaching from colonial, class and gender mandates imposed on us as *ladinas* by the Guatemalan nation-state and its elites. Anzaldúa's proposal becomes not a formula but a political inspiration; a guide on those aspects of the soul on which we can resignify new consciousnesses in resistance and contestation to the hegemonic colonial order in Guatemala.

A second theoretical translation is to not fall into cultural appropriation of communitarian feminisms elements, but to approach them from humility and respect for the vast ancestral knowledge that they contain. Mayan grandparents in the communities speak of having two hearts when a person feels something but says something else, when they have a double intention, or when there is ambiguity in their words, feelings and actions. I have brought these Mayan activists and theorists to name the concrete possibilities that would enable new worlds for *ladina-mestizas*. Their voices are pertinent, urgent and necessary to find other ways to relate to emotions and feminism as a political position to resolve the tension of having two hearts, being only *ladinas*, and being only not indigenous. Women from community feminism address somatization, feelings and thoughts with the ancestral knowledge of grandmothers and indigenous healers. From my learning about Mayan spirituality and what I gather from the multiple voices of decolonial and community feminists mentioned in this exercise, emotions are integral to the body and thought.

Although all the elements presented in this chapter have great potential to enable some parts of a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness, in order to do so, first, we *ladina-mestiza* women need to learn and acknowledge the colonial past of *ladinidad* and how it became a racist identity. Can we, *ladinas*, let go of the two hearts colonialism has imposed on us? The reflection process guiding us to acknowledge ourselves as *ladina-mestizas*, *mestizas*, or *ladinas* and their colonial heritages are often painful. To let go of those two hearts, and to integrate ourselves as complete beings, needs a revision of history. In order to heal, first we

need to look directly at the wound that our empty *ladina* identity has created in us, personally and collectively. With this, I imply that only by understanding our past, we can reflect on our present and change our future.

In the following chapter, I will expand on the trajectories that the *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* have had in the Guatemalan context since colonial times, when it became a nation state, and the contemporary social embodiment of being *ladina*. Then, I will present theoretical arguments to suggest a transition from *ladinidad* to *mestizaje*. And finally, I will provide arguments to respond to the question if *mestizaje* can open new doors implying its political potential in contemporary Guatemala.

5. The open question of *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* in Guatemala

Because “the oppressor can be oppressed” (A. Monzón, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022), a central and powerful element and a political position is the critique of *ladinidad*. To acknowledge the possibilities that *mestizaje*, as a located politics of grounded theory, can contribute to new understandings of Guatemalan society, (Casaús Arzú, 2014; Rodas, 1997; Taracena, 2020; Hale, 2002). To explain better the trajectories of *ladinidad* and *mestizaje*, in section one, I will portray two important nuances of both concepts. First, I will provide a political, historical, and contemporary trajectory of *ladinidad* in Guatemala. The purpose of this brief genealogy is to fully display how colonial power played a crucial role in imposing identity markers in the country’s populations. Second, I will recapitulate the intellectual production of Guatemalan academics, who have approached the problem of racism from different standpoints imbricated with the participants of this research to propose a transition from *ladinidad* to *mestizaje*. Finally, I will bring to discussion the possibilities of *mestizaje* as a vehicle to open new doors. I will move forward to chapter four, which will focus on *ladina-mestiza* consciousness from a feminist contemporary Guatemalan standpoint.

a. *Ladinidad* Trajectories and the Conformation of the Guatemalan Nation state

To understand a country’s present it is necessary to remember its history. The current territory known as the country of Guatemala, located in Central America, was part of the mesoamerican region, mainly composed of different lordships of the Mayans until 1500 A.D. The Spanish crown initially invaded and oppressed indigenous people in Guatemala from 1524 to 1548 (Vásquez Monterroso, 2017). As Dary (2018) points out, in the present-day the country is inhabited by 25 peoples made up of: the *mestizo* and *ladino* people, Garífuna, Xinca and 22 Mayan peoples. According to a International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) study (2020), the National Census of 2018 states that of 15 million inhabitants, almost 44% self-identify as Mayans, Garífuna, Afro-descendant, or Xincas. However, unofficial figures show that more than 60% of the population is indigenous. Wealth concentration is alarming as only 2% of the population controls 65% of the country’s productive land. Additionally, poverty affects 75% of the total population, and chronic malnutrition to 58% of the indigenous population (IWGIA, 2020). In such a diverse country, these statistics are rooted in a hierarchized society, because as explained by Carillo (1992),

the Spanish colonization produced structural racism and historical inequalities before and after the conformation of the Republic of Guatemala.

According to Dary (2018), from the time of the colony starting in the early 16th century until the end of the 19th century, the Catholic Church had strong influence and power in society. As a landowner, it was in charge of education centers and the moral supervision of middle and upper-class families. These education spaces indoctrinated Western values and lifestyle on students who would later become decision-makers administering social policies on *mestizo*, *ladino*, and indigenous populations.

As Rodas (1996) points out, at the beginning of the 18th century, the term *ladino* was meant to contain the populations over which the colonial authorities had no influence; those *mestizos* who lived outside of indigenous communities, including poor Spanish and escaped indigenous inhabitants. Their backgrounds, social and economic traits were widely varied, and the only thing they had in common was that they were not exactly indigenous populations. Rodas notes (1996), this made it impossible that in the 18th century and the present time, that *ladino* and *mestizo* identities can be interchangeable terms.

According to Rodas (1996), before the country's independence in 1821, the diverse *ladino* groups did not have the rights to acquire land. While indigenous populations lived in communal lands and were forced to work, the *ladino* communities were not legal, as they did not live in indigenous areas nor in main cities inhabited by Spanish and *criollo* populations. Elites perceived *ladinos* as lazy and untrustworthy, because all these disorganized groups had no common cultural traits. Their political participation and economical contributions did not benefit the authorities. To address that lack of economic contributions of *ladino* groups, for colonial administrators it was easier to homogenize them in order to classify them socially. As of this new recognized category, *ladinos* started tributing to the Spanish Crown and were assimilated into the colonial system incentivized by a series of benefits. They gained the possibility of acquiring royal lands and farms and occupying authority roles in the government. Although the racial variable played an important role to legitimize these inequalities, in reality it was the articulation of social and economic relations that reinforced the duality of *ladino*-indians.

As Rodas (1996) notes, many ancestral and communal territories were granted as *ladino* territories after the Liberal Revolution of 1871, legalizing indigenous lands in the hands of elites and *ladinos*. Garrard-Burnett (1997) points out that the liberal reform policies introduced by the former president, Justo Rufino Barrios, lasted until 1920, when the dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera was removed as president, after almost a century 's quarter.

According to Rodas (1996), for a long time before this, *ladinos* exercised their citizenship rights through freedom of labor as individual landowners, agricultural producers and traders, and holding power in authority charges. However, the political measures taken during the revolution in 1871 reinscribed differentiated citizenships leaving indigenous populations in marginal spaces of national identity. Rodas (1997), remarks that it was in that context in which certain *ladino* elites positioned themselves to gain more political and economical benefits, that representatives of the Mayan movements started being vocal against the power abuse of *ladino* elites. Indigenous populations directed their questions and uprisings to those specific groups. *Ladino* elites became an arm of the state, and therefore exploiters of indigenous peoples. Those *ladino* groups associated with the elites gained many benefits from this new identity, while *mestizo* groups with other backgrounds did not necessarily participate in the exploitation process.

As Taracena (2019) and Rodas (1996) state, there were essential tensions within *ladino* groups, as their backgrounds were heterogeneous and no ethnic traits were necessarily shared. Their social, economic, and political success strategies entailed long processes and struggles. An example is that from 1823 to 1865, the government issued laws to benefit *criollo* and *ladino* landowners, while in the 1860's authorities exercised forced labor on indigenous communities through debt peonage. *Ladino* became a hegemonic term to include *mestizos*, assimilated indians, *criollo* descendants, and migrants. According to Taracena (2019) and Rodas (1997), it was precisely after the political triumph of liberals in 1871 via an emerging powerful *ladino* class that those elites positioned themselves over other lower-class *ladino* and indigenous populations.

Taracena (2019) notes that in the 19th century, Guatemalan elites believed indigenous populations had degenerated after the fall of the Mayan civilization in 1100 A.D. Therefore, the government subordinated the indigenous populations to exploitative practices, relegated their workforce to their racial condition and excluded them from education policies and social *ladino* spaces. Not only were they discriminated against and excluded as right-holders, but elites read any attempt of indigenous population political organization as a manipulation of external groups. This exclusion caused their participation in decision-making spaces to be drastically limited as they could not contribute to the creation of a collective national imaginary. Although liberals did not pursue social segregation, with time the category *ladino* strengthened into a white-aspirational category that included European immigrants. Even though eugenic policies implemented at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century were meant to improve indigenous and *ladino* races, they ended up to be a

universal category for non-indigenous people, especially *ladinos* and *criollos*. As being *ladino* implied gaining more privileges, it also became a matter of survival. For Rodas (1996) the ladinization process was forced upon the personal and collective acculturation of the Guatemalan population.

According to Taracena (2019), the economic inequalities between indigenous and *ladinos* also caused the former to depend on the government's forced labor policies. In other words, the *ladinos*, mainly those associated with the elites, fulfilled the civilizational requirements of the *criollo* project, while indigenous peoples could not participate on the same terms as them. An essential aspect of the binaries created by the state was the gradual erasure of the black and mulatto populations in the construction of the national project. This deletion from the conformation of the republic reinforced the dualist narrative of *ladinos*-indigenous. The Republic of Guatemala adhered to the civilizing ideals of order, progress, and ladinization to form its constitutional principles, regulations, and codes to disguise the exclusion of indigenous populations within the civilizing process of citizenship.

As Taracena (2019) points out, the government stimulated *ladinos* with economic benefits related to access to Spanish trade networks. For Rodas (1997) to be *ladino* entailed being racist, abusing authority, and appropriating communal ancestral lands. It was in that specific modus operandi that the interpretation of indigenous by *ladinos* and vice-versa was born. Rodas (1996) notes that the despise for Mayan ancestral knowledge and social organization systems created differentiated opportunities and access between *ladinos* and indigenous populations in terms and access to citizenship, education, labor rights, social dynamics, military service, and public charges. As Taracena (2019), remarks the government also homogenized civic and culturally different groups of *ladinos* to make them Guatemalan citizens by collecting data on the population in three categories: *ladinos*, Indian, and foreigners. Until the Revolution of 1944, the state and the liberal constitution acknowledged ethnic diversity in its political discourse and laws concerning access to rights and opportunities.

According to Rodas (1996), the Guatemalan nation project's formation imitated the European civilizational citizenship model. The state and elites produced imaginary citizenship and developed long-term practices and modern institutions to lead to national integration. However, these built and fictional loyalties, together with the principles and practices of Modernity, only applied to *ladino* groups, imposing an exclusionary imagined community. The state fostered an asymmetrical system of ethnic discrimination and indigenous assimilation within *ladino* culture. Both liberal and conservative Guatemalan historians

portrayed that indigenous people degenerated after the decline of the Mayan civilization. Not only this elitist narrative elevated the Mayan civilization of the 11th century and prior to the Spanish conquest, but reduced the 18th century Mayan indigenous people to decadent and submissive landworkers, with no connection to their Mayan ancestry. This racist hegemonic ideology became central to legitimize the past and present racial hierarchies.

Taracena (2019) and Rodas (1996) note that racism in the context of Guatemala was an ideological construction to justify indigenous populations' economic subordination. As Rodas (1996) points out, the Guatemalan government, marked by its colonial-modern ideology, was only capable of interpreting Mayan and indigenous populations as a cheap workforce, farmers, and voters. Elites were heavily influenced by intellectuals of the theory of evolution from the United States, France, England, and The Netherlands. As Rodas (1996) remarks, that Darwinistic framework associated the phenotype of the white race to an advanced degree of reasoning and civilized behaviors.

b. From *ladinidad* to *mestizajes*

What is needed to break the *ladino imaginary* monopoly? As Rodas (1996) remarks, historically, the Guatemalan state had no interest in collecting cultural characteristics to build a collective identity: no stories, heroes, or artistic expressions. As long as *ladino* groups aspired and fit into the Western ideal of civilized citizens, everything else was irrelevant. Moreover, because of this lack of awareness of how history has built *ladino* as a homogenizing identity, the contemporary *ladino* has no historical memory on the implications of it. An example of it is Isabel 's following quote, where she recalls that even though she did not perceive herself as a *ladina*, she already belonged to that positionality in other people's eyes. As she felt confronted to acknowledge it, she transformed her realization into the curiosity of studying *ladinidad* trajectories in Guatemala:

“One of the topics of my work has been *ladina*, because a Maya colleague confronted me and said: "What are you going to do with the Mayas if you do not speak any language? Well, she was right, wasn't she? Since then, I have dedicated time to understanding this *ladino* issue. By the way, she was also the first one who called me *ladina*. I had never heard the term in school. The truth is that I spent all of high school in urban life. So I did not confront that concept. When you open up to other community spaces, you realize that they look at you that way. And then I began to understand that for other people, you belong there. That this position does exist,

you cannot deny it” (I. Rodas, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022).

Isabel's comment is a powerful example of decolonial feminism in the light of Lugones (2010). As she researched the colonial difference in *ladinidad*, she identified the historical, economic, ideological, and political reasons that led to the category's creation. Isabel did not choose to be a *Ladina*; others still perceived her as one.

To question her positionality and integrate it into her research work was an honesty and transparency exercise, as Aguilar (2019) refers to about acknowledging *ladinidad*. Isabel's grounded knowledge production opened the pathway to a new understanding of the *ladino* issue. From a decolonial feminist perspective (Lugones, 2010), she transitioned from a personal research interest and her personal experience into a collective question, making the issue of *ladinidad* from a critical, grounded perspective visible. From this, I imply that a first decolonial feminist step to breaking the *ladino* monopoly would be recognizing *ladinidad* implications and using them as a vehicle to discuss racism in the country, aiming to transform it as the category remains obscured by coloniality (Lugones, 2010).

A second step would be located in grounding heterogenous positionalities of *ladino* and *mestizo* groups. "In Guatemala, the self-identified *ladinos* have denied their *mestizo* condition and adopted prejudices and stereotypes that denigrate all non-whites worldwide" (González Ponciano, 2005, p.11). Through this strategy, non-indigenous groups also learned to benefit from a racially discriminatory system and society, and adopted with loyalty this new political identity. Following González Ponciano, the formation of the *ladino* identity does not necessarily include groups with diverse backgrounds, as many *ladino-mestizo* groups have been excluded from the *ladino* elite's nation building project and benefits. This is a primary reason why some voices continue to disown any relationship with the identity built by the state. In the present, we need to understand that the *ladino* identity has been a long-term nation building process based on the construction of political identities in which certain groups have benefited from economic, political and social relations. Resuming González Ponciano(2005), to name those constructions would be a vehicle for making visible multiple positionalities and tensions within the *ladino* population. As Lucía's following quote recalls her perception that *ladinidad* reproduces the aspiration to whiteness, it also tells how for some groups the *ladino* monopoly is broken:

"I grew up in a pretentious school for the middle class and very aspirational people. I saw how people called themselves *ladino*, but with disgust. I mean, with

disgust towards the indigenous. Oh, I am *ladino*; obviously, I am *ladino*. How can I not be *ladino*? Moreover, I thought, I am definitely not a *ladina*. Because I associated the *ladino* with an economic possibility that I did not have, with a skin color that neither my family nor I had. There was also no possibility, within the margin of naming myself, to be able to understand and treasure the black history of my family". (L. Méndez, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

I portray Lucía's comment to demonstrate how there are populations in the country who, for different reasons, are aware of the *ladino* issue from other intersections like a class perspective, skin color, or family history. Perspectives that do not respond to the privileges of this category, but that, on the contrary, question its totalizing imposition on how different populations should be and behave. From my perspective, Lucía's comment is crucial for the *mestizaje* debates because it portrays how some women and *mestizo* groups do not feel represented by *ladinidad*. Therefore, it could be possible that they found more meaning in new political identities and that they could find new representations of their historical positionalities in these alternatives. I suggest that naming this perspective could be one of many pathways toward breaking the *ladino* monopoly. Furthermore, it would enable these new political identities into new vehicles for political articulation.

The possibility or impossibility of this refers to what Rodas (1997) identified as the problem, which is that the state and intellectuals historically and discursively imposed the *ladino* identity as the national identity, not officially but implicitly. This assumption has impeded *ladino* narratives from considering the nuances and positionalities of geography, class or background. A possible antidote to the rigidity of the *ladino*-indigenous dichotomy could be to look at other nations with significant indigenous populations. Rodas (1996) notes that other countries have achieved to become plurinational and pluricultural states, which means there is no need for Guatemalan society to continue self-identifying from the oppressors' historically constructed *ladino* identity as the only pathway to succeed. According to Rodas (1996), to continue using it indiscriminately over different populations with different cultural practices, social classes, and backgrounds, living in very different territories would only perpetuate the notion that Guatemalan non-indigenous populations are not diverse and reinscribe the dualistic narrative *ladino*-indigenous. For the author, a more complex analysis on *ladino* groups' diversity is necessary, as it has been historically excluded by the elites managing the government.

"The demonization of *ladinos* and the rigidity of the Indian-*ladino* dichotomy buttress

the epistemic superiority of anthropologists and their power to define who is Maya, *ladino*, Garifuna or Xinka. This system produced intrinsic shame in all those who did not fulfill that ideal” (González-Ponciano, 2005, p.14). For the author, the white and hegemonic *ladino* elites have denied the possibility of building a notion of *mestizaje* based on acknowledging indigenous *mestizaje*. Therefore, they have encouraged a “de facto segregation of Indians from non-Indians, and the conviction that everyone occupies the place that he/she deserves in the local and the global socio-racial hierarchy” (González Ponciano, 2005, p.12). I suggest that to continue reading the country’s history past and present in terms of the Guatemalan nation building project legitimates the acculturation and the colonization processes imposed over our territories. By doing so, we would reinforce the *ladino*-indigenous binary, which would impede the possibility of building a diverse horizontal system. Although emerging groups of *ladina-mestiza* women, for instance, can not create a new political identity through the contents that indigenous ethnic identities do have, they can start by acknowledging the historical processes of the *ladino* identity and dismantle them. As Gabriela commented in a debate group, there is a need for some women to name themselves politically through new identities in order to state their anti-racist stances:

“I do feel that there is a need to also name ourselves in a certain anti-oppressive way towards indigenous people, towards Afro-descendant people. Like there is a need to say I am not against you, I don't want to do violence, I want to recognize you, I want to recognize you in my truth. Yes, to recognize the diversity in me. But yes, maybe the language is too short and the spaces are too short for us to be able to do it”. (G. Maldonado, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

As Gabriela comments, the need to choose a political identity is necessary for her to be part of a diverse community and demonstrate solidarity. Some women with anti-racist perspectives see the need to name themselves in new terms in order to separate themselves from the racist genealogies of *ladinidad*. Still, when discussing *mestizaje*, there is a central concern depending on its grounded positionality. It should be addressed to clear the road for new pathways: is building *ladina-mestiza* political identity neocolonialism?

Understandably, there are critiques to considering *mestizaje* as a vindication and reflection of the past and present of *ladino* groups in Guatemala. Following Bastos (2000) cited by Cumes (2009), the so-called *mestizo* nations in other Latin American countries have aspired to create population uniformity through the imposition of Western culture. These

states have managed a discourse of *mestizaje* as an aspiration to whiteness, representing the erasure of the ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the different territories of Latin America. The discussions on *mestizaje* in Guatemala have not found much echo considering that in other countries such as Mexico and Ecuador, *mestizaje* has been the erasure of the indigenous and the return to white European hegemony. “Building a nation is a process of building race, where the original racial groups are transformed into ethnic components” (Williams, 1993, p.154) cited by Segato (2010). In Guatemala's case, the *ladino* category was not based on the racial origins of the *mestizaje* of its different groups. Instead, it implied homogenizing and flattening the potential of ethnic and cultural differences.

I understand this concern, as it is mainly related to how indigenous peoples and indigenous ancestry were erased and assimilated through the *mestizaje* discourse in other Latin American countries. Nonetheless, “discussing race is a blind spot in the Latinamerican discourse about otherness” (Segato, 2010, p.16). It is necessary to recover the possibilities of *mestizaje* for *mestizas* and non-white people. Although they are diverse according to the region and country we come from, it can lead us to the "reconstitution of entire peoples, to the recovery of old knowledge, of forgotten solutions" (Segato, 2010, p.20), considering the modern world is unsustainable. Following the author, this *mestizaje* could open new doors to make visible the hidden peoples erased by colonization.

To discuss race implies “to initiate a new era in political proposals to mend lost genealogies, to recover the historical gaze of those who have been expropriated of their memory and who live in a kind of genealogical orphanage” (Segato, 2010, p.20). The author implies the importance of understanding identities from a historical justice perspective. Because, “ethnicities or social groups are not essence but history. And history is not formed by social groups that enchant or disenchant, but by extrapersonal realities (ideologies, economic and social processes, political facts, etc)” (Tarecena, 2019, p.518). As Regina comments in the following quote, to acknowledge *ladinidad* void is part of what is required of assuming our history and potential:

“I learned that there is a strong emptiness (in *ladinidad*). Naming me *mestiza* is not going to take it away from me. I have made my family tree. Yes, but it will not take it away from me because I was not formed in indigenous practices. I was not socialized in another type of cosmovisions. I do not speak an indigenous language. However, I think that walking with emptiness is part of assuming this identity. There is a little piece in my heart; in my chest, there is a piece of land I will not finish putting my foot on.” (R. Solís, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Following Segato (2010) and Solís, I frame the proposal of *mestizaje* in the light of a new *ladina-mestiza* political identity that is not the ethnocidal notion historically used to suppress and cancel the memory of native populations. It is the acknowledgement of the void and the potential of the new through a historical perspective of identity constructions. According to Segato (2010), some identities have been constructed over shared suffering, instead of historical experiences or shared cultural traits. For the author, to retreat into this single perception would be to freeze identity, leading to “fundamentalisms, and these are anti-historical, nativist, culturalist, and inevitably conservative because they are based on a construction of what is supposed to have been the cultural past and its forced fixation on becoming permanent reality” (Segato, 2010, p. 34). For Segato to hold on to monolithic identities impedes us to achieve fairer and happier ways of relating to each other as a society. Therefore, it is important to locate identities in grounded spaces and times, as the author mobilizes the concept of historical pluralism; which would be thinking that culture would not be a fixed and immune referent for identity, but would locate the historical project of a population as the “main vector of difference” (2010, p.35). In this framing, history produces and transforms identities, which explains how *mestizaje* is a much more approachable and malleable identity. Under this logic, the notion of *mestizaje* as state imposed and the notion of *mestizaje* as an ethnic category responding to identity politics are discarded. Segato (2010) proposes a third understanding of the concept as a deconstruction process that privileges the South, simultaneously located in space and time.

My proposal, therefore, is to understand this reflection of *mestizaje* as a process of self-determination and agency for *ladina-mestizas* (Aguilar, 2019), a cosmopolitical proposition (De la Cadena, 2010), and historical pluralism (Segato, 2010). The aim is to reflect on the negotiation of collective political identitarian categories; to question and resignify the obstacles that imposed hegemonic identities imply. We need to question to whom does the perpetuation of the *ladino* category really benefit? The aim is walking towards pluriversal doors, where *ladina-mestizas* can partially build the coexistence of bodies, knowledge, desires, and inter-relations (Aguilar, 2019).

c. Can *mestizaje* open new doors?

According to Segato (2010), to remain in the discussions in which identity markers are still divided from each other will most likely reinforce simplistic debates on the issue of racism. Self and collective reflections of *ladina* and *mestiza* women about our racism are still incipient. Our present reality demands from us, *ladina-mestiza* feminists, a complex

understanding of the imbrications of oppressions in order to politically articulate ourselves. Because as Cumes recalls (2009), indigenous women in the country have assumed themselves the task of remembering and highlighting the critical oppressions caused by racism and ethnic differences. It is a reality that in a plural country like Guatemala, "the racism of white and *mestizo* women weighs as much as the patriarchy of white, *mestizo* and indigenous men" (Cumes, 2009, p.34). As the Mayan movement gained strength in the recent decades, Cumes (2009) brings attention to two crucial points. First, the discourse of multiculturalism in Guatemala has meant that particular identities have had to be essentialized to claim their legitimate rights, especially in the Mayan movement. Although, as the author points out, the historical claims of the original peoples have always existed, the present is a historical moment in which they converge with the multiculturalist debates. According to Cumes (2009), multiculturalism is a political ideology that understands population diversity and its relationship with the state in a specific way and is mainly reflected in the generation of public policies, the formation of social movements with specific identity ascriptions and a neoliberal current. This multiculturalist movement sustains practices and discourses that seek the emancipation or integration of their sector into the Western society. Simultaneously, Segato (2010) notes that the multiculturalism debate does not aim to dismantle the colonial system, but instead asks for representation, inclusion, and to a broad extent for assimilation into it.

Following Cumes, to problematize multiculturalism is to see populations and recognize that they "must enjoy a series of specific rights, referring to the elements that distinguish them from that culture that until now has been the official one" (Cumes, 2007, p.8). Under this conceptual approach of multiculturalism, I highlight the importance of considering that this research aims to explain the structures that produced *ladina* identity and the possibilities of *mestizaje*, in dialogue with identities that are ethnic.

Returning to the central point of the multiculturalism discussion proposed by Cumes (2009), the *ladina-mestiza* political identity should acknowledge the undeniable fact of racial injustice. *Ladina* and *mestiza* women have lived and benefited from a series of privileges built on the racist and segregationist ideology of the national building project. Therefore, the historical inequalities between the *ladino* and indigenous population have made us, *ladina-mestiza* women, experience gender oppression in a differentiated way from Mayan, Xinca, Garífuna, Afro-descendant and other indigenous peoples women. I suggest that this fact is exactly why keeping the vision solely on gender oppression, from a multiculturalist and liberal feminist perspective, contributes to reproduce the racial hierarchies created by the

State. My perspective is that within multiculturalist discussions, there is a desire for self-identification and vindication of differences. However, in its liberal political practice and discourse, it does not always aim for the construction of alliances between different sectors of society. In a nutshell, it lacks the political horizon in which struggles for justice and equity are collective.

To undo that liberal trap is why according to González Ponciano (2006) in the Guatemalan context, *mestizaje* has a powerful breaking potential of challenging the status-quo; as a deep shame persists in the country for everything considered racially inferior, while the aspiration for a eugenic *mestizo* that whitens the population is maintained. In contrast to the shame for the impure, this cult of whiteness prevents mobilizing a pride for *mestizaje* that is capable of assuming its indigenous past. The repudiation and violence exerted by the middle class towards *mestizaje* account for their permanent desire not to be equal to the lower classes of indigenous and poor *ladinos*. Not being *cholero* (low-class and bad-taste), *shumo* (low-class and indigenous), *indio* (indigenous) portrays the self-hatred that the ladino group feels for itself as a result of hegemonic white supremacy that naturalizes racial hierarchies in the country. Regardless of the social class, this internal contradiction of the *ladino* paradoxically leads him to underestimate himself by denying the *mestizo* origins. *Ladino* people deny themselves reflecting on their colonial heritage of racial hierarchies. For the author, the absence of discussions about *mestizaje* have negative implications in a country marked by racist and servile relations (González Ponciano, 2006).

However, *mestizaje* can be helpful in terms of strategic coalitions. Hale (2018) notes that exploring commonalities and how they can work together is a promising strategy. As he recalls that “this scenario would entail ‘counter-hegemonic’ use of dominant system tools of struggle, directed in support of the goal to forge ever stronger bases of autonomous power to confront the structural conditions and consequences of racism” (Hale, 2018, p.498) I agree with Aguilar (2019), González Ponciano (2006), Hale (2018), and Segato (2010), as *mestizaje* can be fertile if it starts by recognising its diverse roots and its historical privileges. To follow the *mestizaje* category grounded in historical pluralism (2010), could be one way to address not only racism, but the possible commonalities within different groups. As commented by Aguilar:

“My perception is that to acknowledge the colonial and dispossessed past in *ladina* and the emancipatory political position of the *mestiza*, is an exercise in honesty, an exercise in transparency with my own genealogies and with my political

community which is feminists.” (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 13, 2022)

To open this pathway would require *ladina*, *ladina-mestiza*, and *mestiza* groups to face the history with the transparency and honesty that Aguilar refers to. Following the *mestizaje* category grounded in historical pluralism (2010), could be one way to address not only racism, but the possible commonalities within different groups. This process would require an honest conversation on the reasons why *ladinidad* reproduces racism, as Regina comments in her following quote:

"I think it is a thorny issue for many people. It is not easy to talk about it because it goes through so much; it makes you see yourself through other lenses. See your reality and the opportunities you have had and how those opportunities, in some way or another, are the result of many injustices, merely fortuitous. Didn't we do anything to deserve where we are? I was born where I was born. I am identified in some way because it already gives me a certain advantage not to wear certain clothes. All of what that generates, and people do not like to see that. So it is not an easy discussion." (R. Solís, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

As Regina noted, despite its difficulties, to enter the *ladina-mestiza* discussion could be a way to seek horizontal justice aiming to use our positionalities from anti-racist perspectives. Instead of the reproduction of the whitening aspirations of the liberal nationalism (Cumes, 2009; Aguilar 2019). If we, *ladina-mestiza* women, know that we embody the emptiness of the state's power, we can also simultaneously learn to walk new pathways that allow life, memory, coexistence and harmony. In this regard, this unlearning and relearning were present in the debate groups and interviews, *ladina* and *mestiza* feminists have made reflections to deconstruct the Western feminism influence, (Monzón, 2015). As the author notes, these theoretical and political learnings and points of tension have mainly been around gender and social class oppressions. As Aguilar recalls about the women's movement history:

“There were attempts within in the feminist movement to debate between why feminists didn't understand the cosmovision and why Mayans were not feminists. But with those starting points you didn't get anywhere because you were

always in the claim. And there is a type, there was a moment of feminism in Guatemala where you could get to that point. Why do feminists have in our skin much clearer the gender oppressions and what happens in our bodies and in our changes in sexualities? But why don't we understand this racism?" (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, debate group, June 13th 2022)

Morán also remarks how the debates on ethnicity, identity, and race have been part of the movement and changed through time:

“Dr. Cumes makes a very strong critique of the left and feminism from the perspective of Eurocentrism and the feminisms of North America. That is to say that we, *ladinas* and *mestizas*, feminists started to learn from those feminisms. And fortunately today there are all the constructions of popular feminisms, of community feminisms, of Afro feminisms, etc. And they are trying to get out of there. I think we are in a different moment in terms of understanding of how to live it, how to feel it, and how to act. This is a different moment, back then it was a very tense and very difficult moment in the women's and feminist movement; intense, difficult, sad but necessary moment. It made radical ruptures that still remain to this day.” (S. Morán, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022)

Both quotes demonstrate how the path for *ladina* and *mestiza* women to reflect about racism has required work and energy, and therefore needs to continue. Resuming Anzaldúa's (1987) warning, if we as the Guatemalan society continue to use confrontational tactics instead of recognizing our differences to address our historical and political conflicts, we will perpetuate the violence that the state has administered to a diverse population (Richards, 1997).

How will we find exits to racial hierarchies if we can not negotiate identities? I fear that some answers to this question will come from the violence we have learned to respond to as a society, from power struggles and an "us-versus-them" model (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.566). A very Western logic, that can only admit one winner and one loser . Our "self-image and history are not carved in stone but drawn on sand and subject to the winds. New *conocimiento* (insight) can threaten our sense of what is real when it is up against what is real to the other" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.566). I believe that what we can do as *mestizas* or *ladina-mestizas* is to unlearn and relearn to live on the earth, acknowledge how our privileges

work, and support indigenous vindications. According to Chacón (2021), *mestizaje* can be understood as a journey to the lost family and although it is a process that will require time, future generations will be able to acknowledge that we mended our pathway and be grateful to their ancestors. To be able to walk that path, we need to acknowledge why it is necessary to reflect on it from a feminist standpoint. We, *ladina-mestizas*, know that the *criollo* oligarchy has historically benefited by the differences they created to fragment us.

6. Contemporary feminists thoughts about *ladinidad* and *mestizaje*

“Nothing is pure, nothing is complete by itself. We live all together mixed, intermingled. Always”.

Aguilar Gil (2015)

In this final chapter, I will address the heart of the question about *ladina-mestiza* consciousness through the voices of feminist *ladina*, *ladina-mestiza*, and *mestiza* Guatemalan women who participated in the group debates and interviews for this research. What have been their own trajectories to reflect on *ladinidad*? How do they understand *mestizaje*? What does this exercise imply in their lives? I will locate *ladina-mestiza* consciousness in contemporary middle-class, educated, Guatemala City feminists in terms of geography and positionality. I do while acknowledging that belonging to the middle class in Guatemala has represented material and emotional sacrifices for many families, and from a justice perspective class differences need to be questioned and dismantled. How can *ladina-mestiza* women hack the imposed identities and use them as a vehicle to debate racial hierarchies in Guatemala? What other starting points can we use to question our profoundly discriminatory history and the vindication of our roots, not only indigenous, but widely diverse? This debate includes how *ladina-mestiza* consciousness can become a political strategy to collectivity and coalitions in the Guatemalan context, taking into account its implications for articulating new feminist horizons. For whom is it valid or invalid that we question ourselves and delineate the possibility of proposing new political identities? I will finalize this chapter by providing my learnings in the overall writing process and approaching some closing thoughts that are not and can not be conclusions on such a lengthy discussion as political identities in Guatemala.

a. Collective reflections of a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness

i. Acknowledging privileges, transitioning to *mestizajes*

In the following three quotes, I briefly portray a debate group conversation and the participant's positions, as they reflect the process thinking of contemporary young feminists regarding *ladinidad* and *mestizaje*. I have selected them because they demonstrate how they see this debate and the angles from which the debate group discussed a *ladina-mestiza* consciousness.

“I am currently going through a personal, political phase of not naming myself. I don’t see the need to name myself because I think I have become very complex to name myself now, like my inner self.”. (L. Méndez, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Lucía’s quote poses an essential question to the debate on a possible *ladina-mestiza* political identity. What are the reasons why some women with different positionalities in Guatemala do not want to identify themselves? Is it because *ladinidad* itself represents for many the privileges of a few, a whiter skin color, or the pain of hidden ancestors? Is it because the Guatemalan state has failed these women so that the communities in which they find connection and care are too distant from what the state has imposed? Is it because the racial justice conversation seems too distant amid the struggle that represents living and surviving in the current conditions of Guatemala as a country? In the following quote, Vera proposes a similar stream of thought:

“Lately, I am avoiding having to talk about issues of my own identity, and I don’t know if I want it to be a phase or I can avoid it for the rest of my life”. (V. Rodas, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

If Lucía’s quote demonstrated how some young women see themselves amid the identitarian conversation, Vera’s quote produces other vital questions. For example, what are different possible categories through which young women could identify themselves that are not from the *ladina* or *mestiza* identities? And if so, what could be the motivations for young feminists to insert themselves into the racism and anti-racism discussion? The following quote points out this dilemma:

“I find it interesting, and I can completely understand not wanting to be part of this conversation at this moment. Because it is very dense, it affects you a lot; you also recognize yourself in some terrible villainesses. You see how you have reproduced attitudes that you have not even questioned. And you think, I don’t know if I feel comfortable at this moment being part of that conversation or having to position myself in some way or another. But, you’re going to interact with other people, and they’re going to make a reading of yourself. And to the extent that you don’t fill those categories of meaning, is someone else giving them meaning for you?

So I do think it's a necessary conversation. I think there is no definitive answer. And that's the richness of it. This is still being woven". (R. Solís, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Regina's quote brings to the centre of debate why for some young feminists, it can be uncomfortable and difficult to acknowledge the implications of *ladinidad*. There can be many reasons why family and personal histories do not want to touch on the question of *ladinidad*'s meaning. From a class perspective, this quote also presents the challenge of appropriating a possible *ladina-mestiza* political identity: choosing an anti-racist position is no easy task for many middle-class families, as they have also struggled to achieve financial stability through generations of hard work. And despite the many reasons why some women do not see a possibility within the *ladina* or *mestiza* identity for new conversations, as Regina's quote demonstrates, there is a group of women that wants and feels the need to question the imposed *ladina* identity, as they have had embodied experiences of internalized racism. As Lugones (2010) points out, decolonial feminism speaks from the colonial difference with a "strong emphasis on ground, historicized, incarnated subjectivity" (Lugones, 2010, p.746). It is no coincidence that as mentioned by both Monzón (2004) and Aguilar (2019), *ladina* and *mestiza* women's reflections on ethnicity have been from their embodied selves. As Aguilar commented in a group debate:

"Since feminist practice has helped us women to see ourselves, the practice that helped me to say: I woman, yes, I have lived in the patriarchy and I learned this, internalized this, I have these mandates and I want to deconstruct them. Why wouldn't my feminist practice also help me to question a condition of discomfort that had no words at the time, but that was still a condition of discomfort, of guilt other times? (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, debate group, May, 2022)

As Aguilar quote notes, to ground and historicize the contemporary Guatemalan feminist debate the issue of racism is to study the possible trajectories of feminists, young and historical, that have reflected about it. Those feminist circles enabled them to "understand their situation without succumbing to it" (Lugones, 2010, p.747). Aguilar's interpretation of feminism also states that a feminist practice and tools can help to untangle the knots *ladina* racist identity carries. In the next quote, Gabriela narrates how her incarnated self recovered her agency regarding racism in a feminist discussion space:

“Until studying at the university, feminism had been something that had not been for me. I felt it wasn't for me. I didn't see the point of getting into these movements. When I participated, I thought: “Wow, seeing myself reflected in other women's experiences”. I definitely needed to be a part of that space to see myself more critically and feel my experience was validated by other women's experience. Really, what led me to go deeper or have a better understanding (on racism) was getting into a circle of feminist women.” (G. Maldonado, personal communication, interview, June 12, 2022)

Gabriela's quote is powerful because in her resistance to the hegemonic *ladinidad*, she also recovered the *ladina-mestiza* women's agency to reflect, acknowledge, and to heal in collectivity. Both quotes refer to the relevance of discussing *ladinidad* in feminist spaces and why healing is a personal and collective matter for these women, who share similar positionalities. As described in the methodology section, the positionality of this *ladina-mestiza* new consciousness is grounded in urban, feminist, educated, middle-class women of Guatemala. I appeal to this group specifically, because they are already reflecting on gender oppressions, and question women's agency. Can we also we discuss *ladina-mestiza women's* agency from the an anti-racist perspective deconstructing the racist discourses and practices we have internalized?

In chapter 1, I briefly recalled relevant breaking points in how some feminists approached their own *ladinidad*. In this section, I focus on the implications of acknowledging a racist genealogy. To exercise resistance subjectivity is to recognize that in our “colonized, racially, gendered, oppressed existences we are also other than what the hegemon makes us be” (Lugones, 2010, p.746). How to link the *ladina-mestiza* political identity with resistance? Cumes (2007) and Rodas (1996) suggest that by assuming political participation by peoples, we can fall if we have not already done so, in the idea that collective rights can be claimed only from those ethnic identities. By turning the Mayan people into a people, the *ladino* people are implicitly created and "it places political relations in strict and solely ethnic terms” (Cumes, 2007, p.10). To perceive the *ladino* population as one group, would repeat the process of homogenization designed by the state, “ignoring the great differences and the great injustices that exist within the ladino People” (Cumes, 2007, p.10). Should all *ladino* people place themselves as ethnic oppressors, dominating and exploiting indigenous populations, mainly Mayans and Afro-descendants? (Rodas, 1995)

To do so would also impede a resistance process based in understanding the imbrications of “racialization, colonization, capitalist exploitation, and heterosexuality” (Lugones, 2010, p.747). Following the author, to acknowledge *ladinidad* as oppressive and to not substitute it with *mestizaje* requires a framing it from a decolonial standpoint, which the feminist *ladinidad-mestizaje* debate can stimulate. Recognizing this, can simultaneously lead *ladina-mestiza* women to disaggregate oppression unveiling “what is obscured” (Lugones, 2010, p.747) and make visible the colonial difference that occurred in Guatemala. as Aguilar’s following quote remarks:

“If you're not on the side of the victim on issues of racism, you're inevitably on the side of the victimizer, right? And it's not easy to put yourself there. Just as for men, the issue of violence against women is a slippery one. To ladino people, the issue of racism does too. (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 12 2022).

Aguilar’s quote demonstrates how invisible the issue of racism and its privileges is for *ladina-mestiza* women. And although the main point of this research is not to compare *ladina* women’s and *ladino* men’s attitudes, her comment inevitably implies how many *ladina* women hold on to their privileges. As Silvia comments in her following quote, she realized how this was the case for her:

“I believe it is also necessary to say that part of what I am telling you about not having thought about it before or not caring so much about it. Because, it is precisely related to the privilege that power groups often experience. Generally, these groups do not have or do not feel the need to think of themselves in particular identities. In Guatemala, this happens as generally, the *ladinos* do not feel the need to think about their ethnic identity”. (S. Ramos, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Despite that possible indifference about racism, within the women’s sector in Guatemala there was a concrete unveiling moment of the *ladina* identity as what has been obscured by colonialism. As Sandra commented in a debate group:

“I have been part of the Women's Sector since its inception in 1994. When the peace agreements were signed there was a recognition of four peoples, *ladino*, Maya, Garífuna, and Xinca. We as a collective were born in the framework of the agreements and we followed up on all of them. Then I believe that in 1998 or 1999, we decided to have national meetings in the four cardinal points of the country. In the south we said: well, and here who are the people then? We thought, well, but the south is more *ladino* so we opened the discussion. It was the first time we recognized that one of the characteristics of being *ladino* was racism. And it was very heavy for us. All of us there from the sector and Mayan *compañeras* (partners), *ladinas*, *mestizas* opened the space and we recognized that being *ladina* is being racist. All of us were thinking, how is it possible? Because from our perspective as women, we were oppressed. And then, the moment of realizing that we embody, let's say, oppression. We said that it was very important to open this up, because if we didn't start the discussion, we wouldn't start to deconstruct it. And that was a starting point to talk about it collectively.” (S. Morán, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022)

Putting in perspective Morán’s comment, the first discussions that *ladina* and *mestiza* women had about *ladinidad* implications occurred barely 20 years ago. When a person discovers their own internalized racist mandates, through moments like Morán memory, I recall that a crucial aspect of resisting colonial domination is the “subjective and intersubjective construction of it” (Lugones, 2010, p.747). I see this resistance in *ladina-mestiza* women, when they follow a personal and collective process to realize the implications of the *ladina* identity. With this, I imply that through their new political positioning, women reflecting at the individual and collective level are exercising three key aspects of feminism: agency, collectivity, and resistance. I contrast these traits to what many of the participants of the debate groups and interviews described as uncomfortable and, many times, painful processes when walking away from the *ladina* identity. As Yolanda noted in the next quote, it took her years to transition to a political perspective on the issue of *ladinidad*:

“The gender oppressions are very clear for women’s movement, but I remember a participant, and it is written in *Femestizajes*. She said, but this thing about being a *ladina* or *mestiza*, it is circumstantial, isn't it? We didn't really know what to

answer because it wasn't so clear, we didn't even have words to name it. So I began to reflect on the lineages, how we learned that in our families there was very clear racism. If we were not the part that suffered racism, then who were we? And although I am an anthropologist, the truth is that I was never interested in getting involved in the discussion of the *ladino* and the Indian. It seemed very dichotomous to me. So, well, that's how it started not so many years ago, about 12 or 13 years ago, and it could have had more or less reflections until it was finished *Femestizajes* in 2019.” (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022)

In both cases, Morán as a *mestiza* & Aguilar 's as a *ladina-mestiza*, their journey to their new political identities was done in feminist activism spaces in Guatemala. For both was a surprise and a struggle to confront their family and identity lineages. For other interviewees this moment arrived until they experienced racism abroad. It was in their foreign-beings in Global North countries in which they came to question with more rigor their positionalities and privileges in Guatemala. As Gabriela comments, it happened until she realized her positionality in the United States context through a feminist circle:

“I hope I understand (the issue of racism and *ladinidad*). To understand each other within this system of oppression and privilege. For example, while being in the United States it didn't matter if I named myself that way or not, the system already looked at me as a person of color and treated me as such. And the system included the people who are becoming part of this system. In other words, it was either against me or in favor of not naming myself and not recognizing myself. Because then, I was unconsciously participating in that racist system. So the truth is that if I didn't ask myself these questions about my position within the system, then I was probably going to be part of the oppressive system. And in fact I was.” (G. Maldonado, personal communication, interview, June 12 2022)

For Regina, it was a similar trajectory of living abroad to face how her racialized self in a European country was privileged in the Guatemalan context:

"I think I went much deeper into that when I left the country. In short, it made me see who I am and how the rest of the world reads me. When I left the country, I had to be on the other side, that is, I had to live certain oppressions, outside of what

many people live here inside where they are supposed to be citizens". (R. Solís, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

For many participants, there were breaking points in their process of acknowledging *ladinidad* and *mestizaje*. Some of their contributions named how some conversations with their relatives influenced their past and present perspectives on the issue.

ii. Confronting their *ladino* families

It was not only how these feminists arrived at the racism conversation from the situated *ladina-mestiza* selves, but also the turning point in which when relating to their families they found difficult denials of their ancestry, along with racist discourses and practices. As Sandra commented, a very usual practice for participants of this research was to track back their family trees with the hope of finding more answers, as many previous generations constantly rejected, erased, and excluded any diverse members. This is clear in the following quotes:

“I wanted, for example, to have my family tree that didn't go much further than my grandmother who sent me to hell, when I asked her if I was indigenous. She told me to go to hell a thousand times because she had an impressive racism. And I told her that the only indigenous source in my family could be her, because the other ones are Spanish, Basque, etc. And the last name Morán is also Irish. But then on the other side, the Mayan part, where does it come from, right? So that's where it comes from, but so racist, so impregnated. So there was an absolute denial, but also a total rejection. My dad's mother died when my dad was nine years old. It's a tragic, terrible story of violence. But also, prior to that violence with which she died, is that she, my grandfather, on my dad's side, was marginalized because my grandmother was black. She was of African descent. So that family marginalized him because he married a black woman.” (S. Morán, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022)

As Morán's quote points out, the act of tracing the past confronted her with her grandmother and demonstrated how families exclude members based on racism. On the other hand, for other feminists the search in the family tree is no longer determining how they identify themselves politically. For instance, Aguilar in the following quote explains how this is secondary in her *ladina-mestiza* embodiment:

“Although I've wanted to do my family tree beyond my great-grandmother, I've never gone beyond that. But I've never found it because I looked at all the ramifications, especially the maternal ramifications, and I didn't find any indigenous ancestors. But suddenly I let go of that expectation. We have 500 years since the invasion and in 500 years 17 generations have passed. I may have had it at the beginning, but at this point I don't care anymore. Because there are many indigenous people who have become ladinizated. I'm not really interested anymore. I think we are capable of constructing ourselves as political subjects in other ways, not from the imposition”. (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 13, 2022)

To approach *ladino* families from the *ladina-mestiza* standpoint is no easy task. As Gabriela, married to Oscar, a Mayan K'iche' man, recalls in the following quote:

“With Oscar, my husband, we named our children in Maya K'iche'. For my family it was like: “what are those names?” And my grandfather said: “I can't, no”. My first son's other name is Fabian. So he was Fabian for my grandfather because he couldn't say the name, although now they even call them by their Mayan names. And with Kalel, we didn't name him in Spanish. We thought: “No, now they (my family) have to learn”. Although I still don't have those spaces of clarity, tools, and courage to confront my family in these cases of indirect racism, I feel that at least the presence of Oscar in my life and my children has confronted a little bit of the racism in the family as well.” (G. Maldonado, personal communication, interview, June 12 2022).

As Gabriela noted, for some *ladino* families to face the reality of integrating indigenous people in their families is complex. As Regina recalls on the other hand, the lack of -evidence- of indigenous names often leads to claiming *ladinidad*:

“I saw that my parents were *ladinos*, that my brothers and sisters identified themselves as *ladinos*. I kept asking my grandmother and you, who are you? “I am *ladina*, look at our last names, we don't have indigenous last names”, she told me and still tells me that. It is going to be a difficult conversation at the family level as well.” (R. Solís, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Lucía for instance, notes how for her family there were many implications and feelings to acknowledge their ancestors:

“I also saw that in the family history, as if there was a lot of shame to be named indigenous, because my family was also a migrant family that came to the city. We have indigenous last names and there was a kind of shame to name those last names as well. And I name myself and recognize myself as a *ladina mestiza* woman as a political category again with my family, because I believe that my family and I have gone through this process of identity erasure. [...] So I feel that there has been a lot of shame, a lot of guilt and a lot of fear in my family of naming themselves and recognizing where they come from.” (L. Méndez, personal communication, debate group, June 12 2022)

The shame to acknowledge the past, as Lucía comments, was present in many of the contributions in the debate groups and the interviews. And still, these conversations were possible because these feminists or their relatives were courageous enough, moved by feelings of family affection, nostalgia and the desire to feel a sense of belonging to address them. As Silvia comments in her following quote:

“I worked on the exhibition: *Why are we the way we are?* Racism was the central theme of the exhibition. So I began investigating and found many ladinos' history in Guatemala: the family that denies and hides the truth from the ancestors. Then I investigated a little bit more about my own family. At some point, I come closer to Mayan origin, my grandmother and great-grandmother, Kaqchikel Mayas, from San Raimundo. My grandmother did not wear the indigenous dress, but many of the things she did had to do with a strong rootedness in the Kaqchikel Mayan culture. My great-grandmother, who did wear their clothing and spoke the language, owned looms and other things. However, the interesting thing about this process is that I learned about it from a relative who now lives in the United States. I am no longer *mestiza* because it is the politically correct answer, but because I really feel it and assume it this way”. (S. Ramos, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Silvia's experience summarizes this section, as she set herself the task of researching her past through the sources available to her. It is a quest that can lead to different stories about ladino groups' colonial past. To question the hegemonic narratives about Spanish heritage is not only to recover the indigenous ancestry, but to learn about colonization processes in other territories and people.

iii. Against identity appropriation

As Anzaldúa (1987) notes, the task of rebuilding new worlds implies building spiritual and political communities where the focus is in personal and collective justice. That aim for social transformation, also changes the relationship one has with herself, other sentient beings, and the world, “and when that happens, you change the world” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.572). To aspire to social justice, the *ladina-mestiza* political identity would dismantle *ladinidad*, yes. But it would also provide content to the elements of *mestizaje*. This political stance would be simultaneously, to what Lugones (2010) calls perceiving and relating double, aware as a colonized subject of the tension and conflict produced themselves. This decolonial double vision of reality would also acknowledge that to appropriate a neo-indigeneity would be denying the possibility of reflecting profoundly on our history and how we are constructed as *ladina-mestizas* until the present.

“How can we not culturally appropriate something that perhaps we should not see? I believe these are moments in which we must also go very slowly, questioning many things without guilt. Always from the point of view of not producing harm, from the point of view of good faith. But also, how can we return without appropriation? Because I believe this is a fundamental issue, we must always keep it in mind. I feel that the practice of recognizing myself as *mestiza* or not *mestiza* is from a mixture and diversity of topics”. (A. Bermúdez, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

As Ana comments, to have the humbleness to question *ladinidad* and/or to acknowledge *mestizaje* requires patience, humbleness, and an active capacity to listen to others from curiosity and not from imposition. Therefore, discussing *ladinidad* becomes a matter of not producing and reproducing more harm on the wounds that colonialism left in our bodies and souls as *ladina-mestiza* women. As Yolanda’s following quote shows, it also requires active participation in building the future:

“What happens with the *mestizo* middle classes, I think, is that there is an aspirationalism because you don't have anything of your own. [...] Because it is not so easy to build. To do the work of permanently thinking about what is one's own. So that seems to me to be the work. Because to construct oneself. Well, if I deconstruct racism. But how do I do it? Or, I haven't even started to think about it, have I?” (Y.

Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 13, 20022)

Ana and Yolanda's comments demonstrate a present concern regarding cultural appropriation of indigenous cultures and cosmovisions among some of the women who participated in this research. As *mestizaje* becomes a term to acknowledge indigenous roots, it could also become a vehicle for consuming content from other cosmologies. As Yolanda mentions, to appropriate something, in this case the meaning of Mayan identity just because of having Mayan ancestors somewhere in the family tree, would impede *ladina-mestiza* women to collectively dismantle racism. A task for *ladina-mestiza* women would be to approach decolonial political proposals committed with life; but, without filling the void of *ladinidad* with them.

As Chacón (2021) notes, we *ladino* or *mestizo* people should not ascribe ourselves as indigenous people just because we want to. We have not lived history nor were socialized in the same way Mayan, Afro Descendants, and other indigenous communities have. He wonders if we have the right to claim an indigenous identity if we do not live with the oppression it implies? A possible *ladina-mestiza* consciousness would not self-proclaim Mayan or indigenous for the same reasons that Chacón mentions. Appropriating another identity would be denying our history as *ladina-mestizas*. As Yolanda commented in the interview when asked about her identity:

“There is a lot of diversity in our roots, but I'm not Mayan, I can't feel like something I'm not. Once a colleague of mine, because all the *mestizaje* advisors of *Femestizajes* were indigenous women, asked me, but why don't you call yourself indigenous? And I got very upset. And notice that I got upset because deep down there is a certain love, a link with my genealogies. My genealogies are what they are, I cannot deny them. And what if I deny myself? If I deny my genealogies, I'm denying myself. There's love and hate. On the one hand, I don't like certain historical forms, but I can't deny them. Right? Today, I'm no longer at fault. I'm not there anymore. I'm here. This, the *ladina-mestiza*, is an identity that can be transitional". (Y. Aguilar, June 12, 2022)

In Aguilar's comment there is struggle, but also a profound reflection of what needs to be changed first has to be named. Which implies that to dismantle racism and to construct anti-racist practices, this debate is urgent. “To effectively combat the racism that

persists in the midst of regimes of cultural recognition and in progressive intercultural coalitions, we need more race not less: more critical race theory that yields sharper analysis of institutionalized racism, deeper understanding of the work that racism does” (Hale, 2018, p.498). In the different interviews and group debates, there were some feminists that stated that their quotidian lives as *ladina-mestizas* or *mestizas* is through anti-racist practices and discourses. In the next quote, Silvia contributes with a different perspective on what the *mestiza* identity implies:

“I do not see in the *mestizo* or *ladino* identity an element of cohesion or articulation. In fact, I would be suspicious of it. And I say suspicious, because I find it hard to think why a group of *mestiza* and *ladina* women would want to organize around that identity? In fact, maybe I would even be distrustful, as I said. I wouldn't understand why, because I can understand it much more in Mayan women. But that's another discussion. But what I do believe is necessary to name ourselves. But for example, in the educational field, I do see the need to give content, let's say, to the topic of *mestizaje*”. (S. Ramos, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Silvia's quote brings to the center of the conversation that to generalize that all feminists find in the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness and articulating potential would be to universalize their experiences and political horizons. That would also nullify the intersectionalities that produce differentiated experiences between feminist women from one territory or another, with highly different religious affiliations and economic and political relations. As Aguilar (2019) points out, the first task is for *ladina-mestiza* women to be able to attend to that internalized colonization and how our bodies and our sexualities reflect it. So that we can understand to what extent they permeate our relationship building and whom we elect to do so. Within this analysis, other lines should and could also address their implications in the national configuration; for example, the articulating potential from territoriality, religion and social class and not from the political identities associated with the racial debate. As Ana Lucía states in the following quote, although *mestizaje* as a political identity could not be mobilizing enough, it is still necessary to explain Guatemalan society:

“I do not see this articulation through the *mestiza* as a political identity either, otherwise I cannot visualize it, let's say at this moment. And the other thing I wanted

to comment very quickly is what the need is to give content and meaning to this notion of *mestizaje*". (A.L. Ramazzini, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

As both quotes demonstrate, some *mestiza* women find the potential in *mestizaje* more as an ethnic category than a politically mobilizing identity. Nonetheless, they suggest its importance in educational terms at a national level. From my perspective, fostering a more precise political, social, and symbolic concept of *mestizaje* proposed by Segato (2010) within the education system would eventually lead to populations learning about historical memory. This intuition still demonstrates the anti-racist potential of *mestizaje* and the great need to provide content to a category that can identify different groups in Guatemala besides *ladinidad*. If such was the case, what would be the possibilities of decolonizing *mestizaje*? According to Lugones (2010), addressing the colonial difference would be making visible the populations who have been epistemologically erased or silenced from Western discourses and tradition. For *mestizo* populations in the country, it would be emphatically learning about the colonial resistance of indigenous populations instead of reproducing the hegemonic habit of erasing it through the category of *ladinidad*.

iv. Anti-racist perspectives, discourses, actions

To have a decolonial perspective on the *ladina-mestiza* political identity would also imply what some feminists commented in the debate groups and interviews: to have clear quotidian personal and collective anti-racist perspectives and actions towards solidarity with indigenous peoples. To choose a political position becomes not only important for *ladina-mestiza* women, but also the only way to aim for social justice. Yolanda, for instance, notes her daily life practices and the work Q'anil does to approach *ladina* participants:

"In my daily life I try to constantly build that *ladina-mestiza* political identity. Everything I do in Q'anil is very much linked to the fact that we work with queer, mestizas and mestza-ladina women. In Q'anil we do position very much this spirituality, this political identity. Because otherwise there is this void that is also reproduced in social transformation spaces when you don't take charge of the things you propose, you just let others do it. But what is your political positioning then?" (Y. Aguilar, personal communication, interview, June 13, 2022)

For Gabriela, to choose a political positioning implies acknowledging the Mayan K'iche' culture and cosmovision in her family's practices:

“My partner is Maya K'iche' and I also feel very important in many places to mention him as Maya K'iche', to mention the names of my children who are in Quiché and I don't know how to try to show from that side that I am not subscribing to *ladinidad* as violence or as a denial of the indigenous, but as accepting it and recognizing it as an essential part of my family. It has been perhaps another practice, besides being the word that you use, it is another way in which shows how I live this *mestizaje*”. (G. Maldonado, personal communication, interview, June 12 2022)

As Gabriela portrays, the anti-racist perspectives of *ladina-mestiza* women lie in finding commonalities. To conform families, intimate relationships, affects, and other relationalities breaking the aspiration to whiteness could be another element of a *ladina-mestiza* consciousness.

v. Body, sexualities, embodiments

“The coloniality of gender enables me to understand the oppressive imposition as a complex interaction of economic, racializing, and gendering systems in which every person in the colonial encounter can be found as a live, historical, fully described being” (Lugones, 2010, p.747). As the author notes, the coloniality of gender has also been conformed by long capturing processes of the subjectivities of the colonized. This has created dichotomies as references of a normative civilization and progress, such men/women, nature/culture. From my perspective, with the creation of the race, the category of woman, and the creation of *ladina* women we learned and internalized colonial mandates, that a possible *ladina-mestiza* consciousness has to identify as they continue to operate in our lives and bodies. To problematize the *ladina* identity is also to understand the magnitude of how coloniality impacts intersubjectivity as *ladinas* and *mestizas*. By seeing how gender has also been also imposed on us, as *ladina-mestizas*, we could recognize our internalized reproductions of that coloniality. As Aguilar (2019) points out, to question the *ladina* identity is a first step into decolonizing our inner selves.

I also suggest that, to have this breaking point in the dichotomies: men/women, *criolla-ladina*, *ladina*-indigenous, human-not human, we would disaggregate the colonial hierarchical system (Lugones, 2010). And therefore, the disaggregation of human and

non-human categories would lead us closer to indigenous peoples in two ways. The first one would be acknowledging the binary human-non human as colonial. By doing this, as *ladina-mestizas*, we would have a vehicle to conceptually dismantle the differences created by modernity in terms of humans and nature-sentient beings. This would simultaneously foster a new perception of our role in the cosmos and our integration to it. This first step could potentially also disaggregate all other binaries created by colonial anthropocentrism.

The second way would be that this acknowledgment could be the vehicle to bracket the dichotomies created by judeo-christian religions god-human, pure-impure. Both ways could open the door to integrate spirituality. And as some of the women who participated in this research mentioned, to integrate Mayan spirituality. Gender in our intersubjectivity “can enable us to understand the organization of the social in terms that unveil the deep disruption of the gender imposition in the self in relation” (Lugones, 2010, p.50). In the light of what Lugones points out, I suggest that the potential of this *ladina-mestiza* consciousness is to read not only gender as a binary marker of our positionality, or as a colonizing way of ourselves. Moreover, I suggest that understanding the coloniality of gender could help us break the binaries that have separated us from what we call in the present, nature. And by doing this, we would come closer to not only think, but to feel a *ladina-mestiza* consciousness that enables us to heal our own internalized racism, as Lucía mentions in her following quote:

“For me, now the debate is not only about how the economic threads that give way to the Guatemalan Nation state are intertwined. For example, But also to the feeling. That is, how I feel. And I think that is where I also find meaning with the political category (of *ladina-mestiza*) that Yolanda says, *mestizaje* as a category and political posture. Because I think that I also go through the feeling. Beginning to appropriate what I call the body territory is one of these practices that again do not represent the lifestyle practices associated with *ladinidad* or *mestizaje*. [...] To appropriate my body territory, for me, is fundamental. Because I have seen that I and my family have been deprived of it.” (L. Méndez, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

As communitarian feminists propose and resuming Lucía's comment, we could recover and perceive the body as territory by understanding how the coloniality of gender operates in our quotidian practices. The second aspect of *ladina-mestiza* intersubjectivity could be read as what some participants referred to as the moment to create a new term to

identify ourselves. From this perspective, a category or notion away from the *ladina* and *mestiza* colonial identities. These terms are inevitably inscribed in the colonial difference. The term *mestiza* in this regard has a nuance for what Segato (2010) describes as the third notion of *mestizaje* mentioned before. However, abandoning colonial terms to identify ourselves is another unexplored horizon we still need to walk through. To use new terms would enable us as feminists to transform the modern/colonial world system and its imposed identities. As Lucía comments in her next quotes, the reflections about *mestizaje* can be pragmatic, and an initial step towards new possibilities:

"Not knowing (family genealogies) produces a deep sadness in us because although we want to know, we do not know and that generates anguish, or at least it generates it at some point. So for me, *mestizaje* works, but it does not fit. So I have come to ask myself in the last few years, why do I want to name myself from there? However, for practical terms of discussions, it works again as pragmatism comes out. What works for me is the recovery of the body- territory, also in the case of my family history. I think we recovered an origin, particularly a political origin associated with social class and class demands. For me, my practice currently goes through decolonial feminism.." (L. Méndez, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

As Lucía comments, like the *ladina-mestiza* political identity, other dissident political identities against the race-capital colonialist system can be invoked with their emancipatory political horizons. For those *ladinas* and *mestizas* who do not find meaningful answers or a feminist practice in a possible new *mestiza* consciousness, there are other frameworks to articulate and build collectivity. For instance, an example that different participants of this research brought up was to think of identity in terms of territory, religion, or solidarity work; as Ana comments in her following quote, her territorial identity was a much more critical marker for her:

"My local identity as part of Amatlán continues to impact me strongly. I feel that it has become more vital than my identity as a *mestiza*. However, there comes a time when I can link the two from discussions in which the municipal and the *mestiza* linked that local identity with the ethnic identity. Therefore, for me, the local identity is very relevant, while it is also essential to look for family origins." (A.L. Ramazzini, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

As Ana Lucía portrays, the intersectionality of different identities conforms to the different positionalities of *ladina*, *ladina-mestiza*, and *mestiza* women. In the next quote, Ana, another participant invokes new terms and understandings, in which once again the territory is more mobilizing for her:

“I would no longer call it *mestizaje*. I would invent another word because I also believe that using it as a socio-historical category constructed in my great-great-grandfather's century also carries a burden and that burden implies a structural violence of what *mestizaje* means at a social level, not only at an individual level. So I would like to start to play a little bit with those categories and start to use the same categories used by people and above all, by men who invented them. What do I know at what moment in life and also a little bit my question now is to go back, to go back to the territory”. (A. Bermúdez, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Both participants' contributions are relevant because they show how different identities intersecting have the potential of politically mobilizing different *ladino* groups. My perspective is that although some positionalities or identity markers can also politically and socially mobilize people, they would not address the issue of racism if they do not intersect with the *ladina* identity. Nonetheless, as there is not only one pathway to emancipation, these different identities can work and be articulated together to build broader political coalitions. Maybe this territorial identity and sense of belonging would be able to mobilize *ladino* populations to resist mega-projects or other local manifestations of colonialist and capitalist oppression. In any case, I suggest that the *ladina-mestiza* political identity would be one among a pluriverse of different *mestizo* counter-hegemonic identities. And, I imply that they would acknowledge racism, capitalism, and colonialism resisting and collectively organizing to build horizons based on social justice. As Mignolo (2000) points out, the colonial difference aims to transform the colonial system. I also suggest that these anti-racist different political identities would aim to transform the modern world system in Guatemala.

b. New horizons: *ladina-mestiza* feminist political articulations

As Hale questions, "on what basis might *ladinos* ally with would-be Mayan radicals in solidarity? (...) To abandon the very term '*ladino*', assuming an identity as '*mestizo*': to extend a bridge to Maya people, to express solidarity while refusing to let '*mestizos*'

re-assume their previous claim of the indigenous” (Hale, 2002, p.524). The author also notes the potential of borrowing the *new-mestiza* concept from Gloria Anzaldúa, through the bottom-up (Espinosa Miñoso, 2014) approach to discuss progressive politics in the region. Through Hale’s perception of what new *mestizajes* can be, fulfilling this new consciousness with content would have a clear purpose: to express solidarity and openly anti-racist discourses and practices. Previous academics that have studied Guatemalan society have mentioned the potential of *mestizaje* too. However, besides the book *Femestizajes*, there is still a pending discussion in the women’s movement. In both the interviews and debate groups, there was a continuous feeling that we still have a long way to go to build a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness, and simultaneously some shared the perception that it can be a powerful political tool.

It is actually an attempt to formulate a strategy that allows us to question ourselves, as remarked by Yolanda (2019), how we *ladina-mestiza* women have been constructed from our positions of gender, class and race and how that has led us to internalize and reproduce racist and exclusionary mandates and practices at a personal and collective level. This series of racist and mainly segregationist practices are sometimes reproduced within the women's movement in Guatemala. My perspective following Brah (2004) and Cumes (2009) is that understanding how these oppressions of gender and race interconnect and articulate allows us to challenge them as a whole and abandon the essentialisms on which certain political ideologies insist, without pointing out that they reproduce the stagnant categories of the colonial matrix.

To discuss that *mestizaje* can be a political tool as commented by Gabriela in the interview, could be part of the *ladina-mestiza* new consciousness in the midst of the heterogeneity of *ladino* groups and to have a clear stance on anti-oppression:

“As a *mestiza* you can have some cultural practices, because those of us who are *mestizos* in the end are very diverse. So what practices can gather us today? Can they unify us? It would be interesting to note *mestizaje* more of a political stance. I feel that there is more clarity of focus, although it can be seen in many ways in the actions, but it is to understand the system of power, of privileges and oppressions, and to seek to change, that is to say, to truly destroy this system. I feel that if you look at it in a political way, the focus could not be clearer. Although in terms of actions it could be seen in many ways, because many ways are required to change a system that is of

political, socio-cultural, and economic oppression”. (G. Maldonado, personal communication, interview, June 12 2022)

According to Aguilar’s perspective on *ladina-mestizas*, "when we decide to take charge of ourselves, of our desires and lives, the permanent accusation of perversity resurfaces. According to the system, it is impossible to live our lives from a place other than the assigned one" (Aguilar, 2019, p.97).

“The relationship between neoliberalism and the dominant bloc endorses multiculturalism. The ladino-indigenous dichotomy is a threatening construct, a deployment of power and knowledge with debilitating effects in Guatemala's struggle for racial and economic justice” (Hale, 2002, p.523). With this the author refers to the fact that plurality within the territory now called Guatemala exists. Therefore, to perpetuate the power of the state would be reproduced by two things. The first one, using only the political-ethnic category of ladinidad as the only identity option to refer to an entire population with extremely diverse origins. And the second one, that it legitimizes the whiteness aspiration of a colonialist state.

Instead, allowing space for the construction of "new world views" (Cumes, 2009, p.43) would be an alternative. According to the author, “alliances and joint constructions between women require reviewing the conditions of inequality, power, and domination among women” (Cumes, 2009, p.34) . Although it can be painful, it is a critical path toward decolonizing our subjectivities as *ladina-mestiza* women. Following the author, feminism of critical difference would make it possible to establish differences, not from hierarchical inequalities but vindication and horizontality. Applying it to the *ladina-mestiza* political identity suggested by Aguilar (2019), this would imply that this identity does not seek to reproduce racist and segregationist schemes that create a them and an us. In reality, this identity claims the right to change the present; which allows us to recover our agency as political subjects. As Morán commented in the debate group, the *ladina-mestiza* discussion is a collective pending task in terms of how the women’s movement relates to the state:

“I tell my *compañeras* (companions) well: “the Mayan *compañeras* have been discussing the topic of identity and everything has an indigenous peoples' perspective. The young *compañeras* are building community feminism. The Garifuna *compañeras* are building Afro feminisms and they see themselves more towards the Caribbean. What are we going to do as *mestizas*? Last year we were in

the women's sector national meeting that was held on citizenship, in which several meetings were held and there we talked about the identities of citizenship in a plurinational state. Let's imagine what that would be like. We started to have discussions about that. So then there is a need to do it because we really need to define the mestizo people and their identity. We need to create it so that the construction of the Plurinational state has an answer and a proposal from that identity. Because the Plurinational state brings the possibility of making proposals from those identities and we are not going to build it from the identity of the (*ladino*) void, that is to say, from the idea of not being. We cannot build anything from not being true. (S. Morán, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022)

Through Morán's quote, it is clear that this issue is being discussed in some groups of the women's movement. Filling this new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness with content would have a clear purpose: "to strengthen the possibility of our social articulations and challenge the categories that historically "used our difference as a justification for their validity" (Cumes, Aura 2009, p.44). In the light of both Morán and Cumes, to propose new approaches to *lo mestizo*. In other words, it does not intend to respond as an ethnic category to the gaps in acculturation that the *ladino* population has experienced over two centuries. It is an attempt to build new content and meaning of that *ladina-mestiza* consciousness. To enable discussions and to dismantle the colonial matrix of power. To see that it has hierarchized us and placed us in different positionalities, justifying significant social inequalities for the benefit of very few. The political horizons of a *ladina-mestiza* consciousness are anti-capitalist; they are rooted in the values of social justice and transformation, demonstrated by different indigenous and *ladino* groups through the country's history. As Morán noted in the quote above, this discussion is not only the responsibility of a group of feminists, women, or just some sectors of society, and yet, it is a discussion related to how *ladina* and *mestiza* women live their oppressions and privileges:

“With people in the women's sector we have been talking about reopening these spaces to talk about racism, because the truth is that although we say that we have to talk about it, the truth is that we don't talk about it. I mean, there are situations where we should get together and finally we don't do it. And, we don't do it because Yolanda said, unfortunately when the man is the oppressor, why would

we get together? Why would we? Those who get together are the oppressed because they are suffering and see how they can get rid of that oppression. But the oppressors wonder why they need to have this awareness. We don't gather, do we? Because it is not only an issue of feminists, of women. It is a need of the country. Because, if we are talking about the Plurinational state, we as a movement recognize that the four peoples are in the movement.” (S. Morán, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022).

Let us suppose that conservative voices of criticism towards *mestizaje* are stronger, as Cumes (2007) notes. In that case, we face the risk of essentializing specific identities, which in the case of Guatemala is the Mayan identity, demonizing the *mestizo* background of *ladinidad*. For the author, “it is suggested that the purer, the more rights one has. In this operation, and due to the discreet and self-contained character given to indigenous peoples, the association of culture and identity can be reinforced, always leaving an undefined or strange segment” (Cumes, 2007, p.10). The interest in *ladina-mestiza* consciousness stems primarily from the fact that it runs through our bodies. From a decolonial perspective, this proposal does not want to enter into a dialogue or a recognition of the hegemonic state. I do not believe that the horizon of collective political articulation based on the *ladina-mestiza* identity is its institutional recognition; instead, it is the reflection on the production of subjectivities and how these may or may not contribute to the regeneration of a social fabric from an anti-racist perspective. With this approach, it is intended to insinuate that there are dissident political identities of the race-capital colonialist system and the network of hierarchies that it sustains.

In terms of the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness, this unintentional oppression can be related to the mistake of ignoring our racial positionalities, as women. And secondly, to exchange *ladina* for *mestiza* without profound reflections can make the tension between *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* again from dualism and opposite poles even bigger, as it carries two risks. The first is reproducing Western binary thinking that needs fossilized categories and identities to legitimize its power structures. This invisibilizes the differences that generate inequalities within the heterogeneous ladino population concerning itself and concerning indigenous peoples, recent and diverse migrants in Guatemala. The second risk is to allow the discussion of a *ladina-mestiza* political identity to become an equivalent and substitutable term for *ladinidad*. In other words, falling into the dichotomy that *mestizaje* can only be an ethnic category leads to reading it as a neocolonial and politically correct way of substituting

ladinidad. Encountering totalizing visions of *ladina* and *mestiza* confronts us with two issues. First, the understandable distrust of some indigenous women towards *ladina* women precisely because of the lack of historical reflection. Secondly, the urgency of having a more complex reading of reality, as Morán commented in the debate group:

“I also had a tragic, tragic experience. It was when we were organizing the National Women's Forum committee. I was the representative of women's and feminist organizations. There were four Mayan *compañeras* (companions) and political representatives. When the discussion became tense, all the Mayan women got together and left me on the other side with the government representative and the CACIF (Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations) representative. They left me on that side because I was not Mayan and they did not consider me an ally. They put me directly on the other side. I also suffered it, at that moment, when I left that meeting; and for a long time. I thought we had to discuss the issue of *mestizaje* because I will never ally with the *criollos*, who are the damned of history. Non-indigenous implies that you are *criolla* or you are there. About a month later, I thought, how is it possible that the Mayan comrades do not look at me as an ally; when I come here representing the women's and feminist movement? They looked at me and put me in a situation of an enemy? Later, I talked about it with those women because they were my companions in the struggle, and they understood me. However, this issue of identity all of a sudden is risky. We must create a political discussion on *mestizaje* that brings us closer to a strategic alliance with the native peoples because that is where we come from. (S. Morán, personal communication, debate group, May 31, 2022).

Sandra's experience in a totalizing vision of non indigenous-indigenous subjects opens the discussion for the critique of "the totalization of the global capitalist system" (Segato, 1999, p.110); as it sustains the unequal relations of power and the distribution of wealth. Following the author, there is a set of internal relations typical of the Guatemalan state, which on a global scale occupies a peripheral place and its relationship with powerful states. To the extent that there is "a localized hegemony, in the sense of a concentrated capacity for directing, inducing and regulating the transit of people and cultural goods through developed countries" (Segato, 1999, p.112), we cannot lose sight of that the

negotiations of our political identities are not only in tension with hegemonic national constructions but also with current global impositions.

As a receiving country of modernity, Guatemala responds to the power and prestige established by the superpowers (Segato, 2010). Undeniably, the country is still controlled by a few oligarchic families, many of whom have been descendants of colonizer settlers or European migrant families of the last two centuries (Casaús Arzú, 1992). The criollo elites benefit from the *ladino*-indigenous dichotomy and the *ladino* aspiration to whiteness, as they constitute the status quo from which these elites profit.

Some *criollo* and *ladino* -leaders- would like to pretend that as a country, we can erase our historical differences to become a uniform Guatemala. To refer to Guatemalan men and women, in a racist and heteronormative way. As González Ponciano (2006) points out, even though the white and *ladino* populations are a minority in Guatemala, these groups have been "quite successful in mobilizing the repudiation of indigenous *mestizaje* and the unwritten norms that criticize equality, and symbolically organize the hierarchy that defines the place of each person in society" (González Ponciano, 2006, p.136).

Some would prefer to maintain a discourse of *ladino* identity as synonymous with Guatemalan identity, order and progress, but because they want to maintain the position of class and prestige that differentiates them from all that is inferior and backward, and therefore distantly indigenous. This leads Guatemalan society to participate as a country in a globalization that refers only to nationalities and, therefore, to a monoculture. However, "if we have a particular history, we have to work, elaborate, strengthen and give voice to the existing historical forms of alterity and inequality" (Segato, 1999, p.118). In this way, we would be able to revalue our historical memory as it has configured the characteristic conflicts of Guatemalan society. From my perspective, in the framework of the global multiculturalism assimilation agenda of differences, pretending that these identity negotiations are only in dialogue with the state would be to continue operating within the logic of modernity. As Ana comments in the next quote, the right to enunciation is an open question:

"Very complex processes of antagonisms are taking place and that is complicated because they are very violent processes and we are already a very violent society. If we add to this having such antagonistic positions around certain issues. Personally, I would not enter into a debate like this. But I also wonder, who owns the word on issues such as ethnicity or racial self-determination?" (A. Bermúdez, personal

communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

Although the debate can be complex, as Lugones (2010) remarks, a dialogue that can resist dehumanization would allow for joint emancipation through new conversations within the women's movement. To foster humble and open dialogues based on mutual understanding could politically articulate us as *ladina-mestizas*. Moreover, this dialogue could touch us spiritually, integrating us into being in collectivity. Finally, it would allow us to build new relations, values, and narratives for the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness and us as members of a diverse society. As Regina comments in the following quote, the debate will be a necessary journey:

“I believe that what Yolanda proposes in the sense of saying not only *mestiza* but *ladina-mestiza* gives us a chance to recognize a history in which we have also been oppressed. In which we have also exercised certain privileges that we did not ask for. Moreover, we did not ask for them, because we were born there, we are categorized there, but we exercised them and we benefited, for example, that *ladina* people could have access to land, that *ladina* people could have access to administrative positions within the state. That is to say, all this gave us certain advantages. And to recognize it in the *ladina-mestiza* category, is well, conceptually this is what we have today. We have not yet come up with anything else. Maybe it will occur to us but it has not happened yet”. (R. Solís, personal communication, debate group, May 30, 2022)

“One does not resist the coloniality of gender alone. Communities rather than individuals enable the doing; one does with someone else, not in individualist isolation. The passing from mouth to mouth, from hand to hand of lived practices, values, beliefs, ontologies, space-times, and cosmologies constitutes one” (Lugones, 2010, p. 754). As the author questions, how do we build collectivity by listening to each other, instead of harming each other? While we perceive the pathway will be long, while we witness in the present-day its urgency? To enable a dialogue and revisit ourselves will be a process. To bracket logic and incorporate feeling, perceiving, creating. To exercise one of the principles of Mayan Spirituality, to listen and understand, to understand and question, to speak and transform, humbly.

Closing Thoughts

Based on a decolonial theoretical standpoint and the use of a decolonial approach in some of the techniques for knowledge production (Álvarez Veinguer & Olmos, 2020; Mignolo, 2018; Espinosa Miñoso, 2014), I have discussed, from multiple dimensions, the central question of this research: what is the political potential of mobilizing a new *ladina-mestiza* consciousness as a political identity in Guatemala? In order to do so, I have focused on three subsequent questions to disaggregate the complexity of this issue.

What theoretical knots need to be disentangled to approach *mestizaje* from a decolonial standpoint? I have explained the trajectories of *ladinidad* and *mestizaje* in Guatemala. I have pointed to the implicit racism subjacent of the ladino category, building on previous work of Taracena (2020) and Rodas (1996). I have framed the category of *mestizaje* in the light of decolonial feminism, as proposed by black, chicana, and Latina American feminists like Espinosa Miñoso (2014), Curiel (2007), Lugones (2007), Hill Collins (1990), and Anzaldúa (1987).

Although this research has focused on clarifying *mestizaje* as a vindication of lost genealogies (Segato, 2010). As many research participants expressed in the different spaces, the discussion on *ladinidad* can be uncomfortable as it confronts participants with the racism permeating their personal attitudes, and their family's privileged positions. This realization is an example of the urgency to frame the racism debates in Guatemala as a social issue and internalized mandates we need to heal (Aguilar, 2019). In order to draw attention to this necessary process for *ladina* women, I took a closer look at the trajectories of and tensions between ethnicity and the women's movement in Guatemala.

Another important aspect of this research has been to address the possible cultural appropriation of indigenous cosmovisions, practices, and discourse and the reproduction of colonial categories. As mentioned in previous chapters, the *ladina-mestiza* political identity is a process aiming to be collective and respectful of other peoples' cosmovisions. In that regard, this research has stated that the *ladina-mestiza* is a political identity and not an ethnic identity. Because of these concerns, I emphasize the importance of exchanging ideas and dialogue on this debate based on mutual understanding.

How can the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness contribute to the personal healing and social cohesion of *ladinas*, *mestizas*, and *ladina-mestiza* communities? I have approached theoretical translations from decolonial academics like Gloria Anzaldúa, Guatemalan and communitarian feminists to suggest some elements that can help build a new, partial and

grounded, *ladina-mestiza* consciousness located at the heart of the *ladina-mestiza* political identity. From a decolonial feminist perspective, I have recovered the experiences and theoretical reflections of contemporary Guatemalan feminists. Their contributions to this thesis have been fundamental to approaching possible answers to the central question of this research. Moreover, many of these feminist activists, academics, and thinkers shared their experiences with anti-racist actions and discourses, demonstrating that a group of women is living from a critical decolonial perspective and from a solidarity political position with indigenous peoples. In the discussions, they also approached two essential factors: to acknowledge that their *mestizaje* has been a vindication of their lost or erased indigenous and diverse ancestors, and that it is necessary to question the racial status quo of Guatemalan society.

What political possibilities would the *ladina-mestiza* political identity enable within the Guatemalan women's movement? This question remains open. This research has been a humble exercise of naming a new political identity and its potential to politically articulate women and feminists with shared experiences, personal reflections, and values on the issue of racism in Guatemala. As some participants mentioned, the pathway is still long to break the *ladino* monopoly and approach a bottom-up *mestizaje* identity (Espinosa Miñoso, 2014; Segato, 2010), in which *ladina*, *ladina-mestiza*, and *mestiza* women can begin to collectively discuss imposed ethnic and political identities.

As previous authors have mentioned (Aguilar, 2019; Casaús Arzú, 2014; Segato, 2010; González Ponciano, 2005; Hale, 2002; Anzaldúa, 1987), the political potential of a decolonial understanding of *mestizaje* that is based in the right to reclaim erased genealogies and which is located in historical pluralism is powerful. Therefore, I am critical of the conservative discourses that insist on denying *mestizaje's* potential as a mobilizing category, because they perpetuate the *criollo's* hegemony in Guatemalan society. This patronizing attitude, that tells us, *ladina-mestiza* women, how we should think and behave in political terms works in the oppressors' favor.

To decolonize the *ladinas* and *mestizas* women's movement requires to continue fostering collective debates on these issues, not from a multiculturalist perspective but from a decolonial standpoint. I suggest that the potential of the *ladina-mestiza* consciousness and its political identity lies in recovering our agency and healing from the colonial violence that still exists in our bodies and souls. Therefore, as *ladina-mestizas*, we need space and margins of action to embark on the journey of questioning, from our grounded positionalities, the racial privileges from which we have benefited.

I began this research wondering if other feminists from the women's movement shared my critique of the *ladina* as a racist category and my hope about the potential of *mestizaje* as an emancipatory political identity. After many discussions with the participants, I can say that there is a common need to rename ourselves and create communities in which we can heal from the wounds that centuries of colonialism and racism imprinted in our bodies and intersubjectivities. I finish this thesis believing in the potential of *ladina-mestiza* consciousness and imagining the possibilities of continuing to build emancipatory political alternatives.

This dialogue is only the beginning, as this research has been a brief empiric exploration of the discourses of certain *ladina-mestiza* women. However, many questions remain open for further discussion and research to continue exploring in-depth political alternatives. For instance, how can we appropriate the *ladina-mestiza* political identity as a personal and collective alternative in our everyday lives and relationships? Furthermore, what motivations might *ladina-mestiza* women have to choose an overtly anti-racist political stance? And finally, how do we frame a dialogue that promotes collective healing?

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Appendix I: Summary in Spanish - Resumen en español

Esta investigación pretende explorar la posibilidad de construir colectivamente una nueva identidad política *ladina-mestiza*, dentro del contexto y el movimiento de mujeres guatemaltecas, basándose principalmente en dos perspectivas feministas decoloniales. Primero, la nueva conciencia *mestiza* de Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) y segundo, en la identidad política *ladina-mestiza* propuesta por Yolanda Aguilar (2019). La *ladinidad* es una categoría colonial creada por las élites coloniales en Guatemala, que en el siglo XIX se convirtió en la identidad oficial para incluir a todos los no indígenas, por lo que aspira a la blancura y estilo de vida occidental (Taracena, 2019).

Históricamente, las feministas *ladinas* han hecho reflexiones para deconstruir, en cierta medida, el feminismo occidental que influyó en el movimiento de mujeres en Guatemala (Monzón, 2015). Estos aprendizajes teórico-políticos y puntos de tensión han sido principalmente en torno a las opresiones de género y clase social. Como señala Aguilar (2019), las mujeres *ladinas* han hecho reflexiones personales y colectivas sobre el mestizaje, en las últimas décadas en Guatemala. Las reflexiones sobre quiénes son y de dónde vienen han llevado a algunas a autoidentificarse como mestizas. Sin embargo, aún hay una discusión pendiente en términos de racismo dentro del movimiento de mujeres en el país. Como propuso Aguilar en su libro *Femestizajes* (2019), la categoría *ladina-mestiza* como identidad política ofrece un nuevo horizonte para reconocer críticamente el pasado racista y el presente antirracista. En esta investigación, pretendo arrojar luz sobre la pregunta: ¿cuál es el potencial político de la movilización de una nueva conciencia *ladina-mestiza* como identidad política en Guatemala? Tres preguntas subsiguientes siguen a la central: 1) ¿qué nudos teóricos hay que desenredar para abordar el mestizaje desde un punto de vista decolonial? 2) ¿Cómo puede la conciencia *ladina-mestiza* contribuir a la sanación personal y a la cohesión social de *ladinas*, mestizas y comunidades *ladina-mestizas*? 3) ¿Qué posibilidades políticas permitiría la identidad política *ladina-mestiza* dentro del movimiento de mujeres guatemalteco?

A partir de metodologías decoloniales de producción de conocimiento colectivo (Álvarez Veinguer & Olmos, 2020; Mignolo, 2018; Espinosa Miñoso, 2014), he discutido, desde múltiples dimensiones, la pregunta central de esta investigación: ¿cuál es el potencial político de movilizar una nueva conciencia *ladina-mestiza* como identidad política en Guatemala? Para ello, me he centrado en tres preguntas posteriores para desagregar la complejidad de esta cuestión.

¿Qué nudos teóricos hay que desenredar para abordar el *mestizaje* desde un punto de vista decolonial? Para responder a esta primera pregunta, he explicado las trayectorias de la *ladinidad* y el *mestizaje* en Guatemala. He señalado el racismo implícito subyacente a la categoría de *ladino*, basándome en trabajos anteriores de Taracena (2020) y Rodas (1996). He enmarcado la categoría de *mestizaje* a la luz del feminismo decolonial, tal como lo proponen feministas negras, chicanas y latinoamericanas como Espinosa Miñoso (2014), Curiel (2007), Lugones (2007), Hill Collins (1990) y Anzaldúa (1987).

Esta investigación se ha centrado en esclarecer el *mestizaje* como reivindicación de las genealogías perdidas (Segato, 2010). Como muchos participantes de la investigación expresaron en los diferentes espacios, la discusión sobre la *ladinidad* puede ser incómoda ya que confronta a las participantes con el racismo que permea sus actitudes personales, y las posiciones privilegiadas de su familia. Esta constatación es un ejemplo de la urgencia de enmarcar los debates sobre el racismo en Guatemala como una cuestión social y mandatos internalizados que necesitamos sanar (Aguilar, 2019). Con el fin de llamar la atención sobre este proceso necesario para las mujeres ladinas, me adentré en las trayectorias y tensiones entre la etnicidad y el movimiento de mujeres en Guatemala.

Otro aspecto importante de esta investigación ha sido abordar la posible apropiación cultural de las cosmovisiones, prácticas y discursos indígenas y la reproducción de las categorías coloniales. Como se mencionó en los capítulos anteriores, la identidad política ladina-mestiza es un proceso que busca ser colectivo y respetuoso de las cosmovisiones de otros pueblos. En ese sentido, esta investigación ha afirmado que la ladina-mestiza es una identidad política y no una identidad étnica. Por ello, subrayo la importancia de intercambiar ideas y dialogar sobre este debate a partir del entendimiento mutuo.

¿Cómo puede la conciencia ladina-mestiza contribuir a la curación personal y a la cohesión social de las ladinas, las mestizas y las comunidades ladina-mestizas? Para responder a esta segunda pregunta posterior, me he acercado a traducciones teóricas de académicas decoloniales como Gloria Anzaldúa, feministas guatemaltecas y comunitarias para sugerir algunos elementos que pueden ayudar a construir una nueva conciencia ladina-mestiza, parcial y fundamentada, situada en el corazón de la identidad política ladina-mestiza. Desde una perspectiva feminista decolonial, he recuperado las experiencias y reflexiones teóricas de las feministas guatemaltecas contemporáneas. Sus aportes a esta tesis han sido fundamentales para acercarse a posibles respuestas a la pregunta central de esta investigación.

Según Segato (1999), la transnacionalización y relocalización de nuestras posiciones como mujeres racializadas puede ser un vehículo de reflexión. Como comentaron varias participantes de la investigación, primero tuvieron que habitar espacios de subalternidad en países blancos y occidentales para reflexionar sobre el tema del racismo. En otras palabras, fueron sus experiencias desde el lado oprimido las que nos permitieron revisar nuestras posiciones políticas en un contexto global. Estos encuentros con la blancura les hicieron cuestionar la homogeneización nacional de equiparar al guatemalteco con el ladino.

Además, muchas de estas activistas, académicas y pensadoras feministas compartieron sus experiencias con acciones y discursos antirracistas, demostrando que un grupo de mujeres vive desde una perspectiva crítica decolonial y desde una posición política solidaria con los pueblos indígenas. En las discusiones también abordaron dos factores esenciales: reconocer que su *mestizaje* ha sido una reivindicación de sus ancestros indígenas y diversos perdidos o borrados, y que es necesario cuestionar el status-quo racial de la sociedad guatemalteca.

¿Qué posibilidades políticas permitiría la identidad política ladina-mestiza dentro del movimiento de mujeres guatemaltecas? Esta tercera pregunta queda abierta. Esta investigación ha sido un humilde ejercicio de nombrar una nueva identidad política y su potencial para articular políticamente a mujeres y feministas con experiencias, reflexiones personales y valores compartidos sobre el tema del racismo en Guatemala. Como mencionaron algunas participantes, el camino todavía es largo para romper el monopolio *ladino* y acercarse a un *mestizaje* de abajo hacia arriba (Espinosa Miñoso, 2014; Segato, 2010), donde las mujeres ladinas, ladinas-mestizas y mestizas puedan empezar a discutir colectivamente las identidades étnicas e identidades políticas impuestas.

Como han mencionado autores anteriores (Aguilar, 2019; Casaús Arzú, 2014; Segato, 2010; González Ponciano, 2005; Hale, 2002; Anzaldúa, 1987), el potencial político de una comprensión decolonial del *mestizaje* que se basa en el derecho a reclamar genealogías borradas y que se sitúa en el pluralismo histórico es poderoso. Sobre la perpetuación de un concepto colonial de *mestizaje*, quiero matizar que esa perspectiva de todo o nada, que nos dice a las mujeres *ladinas-mestizas*, cómo debemos pensar y comportarnos de manera diferente: en términos de coaliciones políticas e identidades políticas históricamente fundamentadas, perpetúa la hegemonía criolla en la sociedad guatemalteca.

Para descolonizar el movimiento de mujeres *ladinas y mestizas* es necesario seguir fomentando los debates colectivos sobre estos temas, no desde una perspectiva multiculturalista sino desde un punto de vista decolonial. Sugiero que el potencial de la conciencia ladina-mestiza y su identidad política radica en recuperar nuestra agencia y sanar

de la violencia colonial que aún existe en nuestros cuerpos y almas. Por lo tanto, como ladina-mestizas, necesitamos espacio y márgenes de acción para emprender el camino de cuestionar, desde nuestras intersecciones y los privilegios raciales de los que nos hemos beneficiado.

Comencé esta investigación preguntándome si otras feministas del movimiento de mujeres compartían mi crítica a la ladina como categoría racista y mi esperanza sobre el potencial del *mestizaje* como identidad política emancipadora. Después de muchas discusiones con las participantes, puedo decir que hay una necesidad común de renombrarnos y crear comunidades en las que podamos sanar de las heridas que siglos de colonialismo y racismo imprimieron en nuestros cuerpos e intersubjetividades. Concluyo esta tesis creyendo en el potencial de la conciencia *ladina-mestiza* e imaginando las posibilidades de seguir construyendo alternativas políticas emancipadoras. Sin embargo, este diálogo es sólo el comienzo. Quedan muchas preguntas abiertas para el debate: ¿cómo podemos apropiarnos de la identidad política ladina-mestiza como alternativa personal y colectiva en nuestras vidas y relaciones cotidianas? ¿Qué motivaciones pueden tener las mujeres ladina-mestiza para elegir una postura política abiertamente antirracista? ¿Cómo podemos enmarcar un diálogo que promueva la sanación colectiva?

Appendix II: Questions for debate groups and direct interviews

Debate groups' questions

1. Let us briefly introduce ourselves: who we are and how we identify ourselves politically.
2. At what point did you encounter the reflection on *ladinidad* and recognize yourself as *mestiza*?
3. When and how did you come to think of yourself and recognize yourself as *mestiza*?
4. How do you live your recognition as a *mestiza* from your political position (woman, feminist, gender identity or others).
5. Are there practices, discourses, and ways of life that you associate with recognizing yourself as a *mestiza*?
6. What collective dialogues do you establish by recognizing yourself as a woman, *mestiza* and urban? To whom and for what purpose?
7. What discussions have you engaged in now about being a feminist, urban *mestiza*?

Direct interview questions

1. Comment on your life path to recognize yourself as *mestiza*: being a woman, feminist, urban, lesbian, academic, student or others, from your intersectional being. For example: lesbian, feminist, and academic.
2. What is your personal and/or collective reflection on naming yourself as a *ladina* or *mestiza* woman?
3. At what point did you identify that the *ladina* category legitimized the construction of the hegemonic state?
4. Are there stories in your ancestors' family erased from the family history because they were indigenous like Mayan, Xinca, Afro-descendants or others? Moreover, what did this imply politically? Through *mestizaje* are you recognizing something that was denied?
5. What does *mestizaje* allow you to do, and how do you inhabit it?
6. Are there practices, discourses, and ways of life that you associate with recognizing yourself as *mestiza*?
7. What collective dialogues do you establish by recognizing yourself as a woman, *mestiza* and urban? To whom and for what purpose?