The Study of Race and Racism in Mexican Feminist Scholarship:
Analyzing *Mestizaje* through race, class and gender

Anna H. Malmi
Supervisor: Caroline Betemps
Master’s Programme Gender Studies – Intersectionality and Change
Master’s Thesis 15 ECTS credits

ISNR: LIU-TEMA G/GSIC1-A—18/005-SE
Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank my partner Alfonso Mendez Forssell, who has supported me throughout my studies and this project. Your passion for the topic, your ideas and insights as well as your endless patience in my moments of desperation and your belief that I can pull this off have made this project possible.

I would like to dedicate gratitude to all the interviewees who participated in the study and shared their important and vast knowledge and experiences with me. I am greatly indebted also to all friends and acquaintances who supported me and helped me to network.

I want to also show my appreciation to my supervisor Caroline Betemps, whose availability, and guidance have been essential to the project.

A special mention goes also to our loyal furry family member, Chuck, who has kept me company during hours of reading and writing.

Lastly, I want to say thank you for all the feminists out there trying to make sense of the world and changing it step by step!
Abstract

This study explores how feminist scholarship in the Mexican context relate to race and racism. The study is particularly interested in critically reflecting on how race and racism have been problematized and conceptualized in Mexican feminist scholarship. The study is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews and a wide examination of the existing literature on the themes of the study. Of special interest to this study is the concept of mestizaje, used in this study as one of the main analytical concepts to make sense of race and racism in Mexico. The findings indicate that the feminist scholarship on race and racism in Mexico has focused mainly on studying race and racism in relation to indigenous people and more recently black Mexicans, in the process constructing mestizaje as a homogenous category of privilege. However, the findings of the study suggest that there is a blind spot in the Mexican feminist scholarship on race and racism, as it has left unacknowledged how the tone of skin interacts with gender and class in a way that transcends the whole of society and not just certain groups. Furthermore, the study argues that the illusion of homogeneity within mestizaje is among the core problems that hinders the public recognition of racism as a social and political problem. Therefore, it is argued that making visible the diversity within mestizaje becomes an essential strategy for transforming the relations of racial differentiation that characterize social relations in contemporary Mexico.
Table of Contents

1. Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 5

2. Methodological Considerations .......................................................................................... 7
   2.1 My own situadness in the research ............................................................................... 9
   2.2 Method .......................................................................................................................... 11
   2.3 Data analysis ............................................................................................................... 14
   2.4 Ethical Considerations and Limitations ...................................................................... 15

3. Background literature and theoretical approximation ......................................................... 15
   3.1 Mexican feminisms ........................................................................................................ 16
   3.2 Race and the study of race ............................................................................................ 18
   3.3 Feminism and the study of race in Mexico .................................................................... 21
   3.4 Race, racism and mestizaje ............................................................................................ 25
   3.5 Gender and mestizaje .................................................................................................... 30

4. Analytical discussion ......................................................................................................... 32
   4.1 Spaces of privilege and invisibilisation ........................................................................ 32
   4.1 Articulations of gender, class and race ........................................................................ 38
      4.1.1 Beauty .................................................................................................................. 39
      4.1.2 Publicity and media ............................................................................................ 40
   4.2 Academic spaces as institutions of white orientation .................................................. 43

5. Concluding discussion ....................................................................................................... 47

References .............................................................................................................................. 51
1. Introduction

Change is often cited as a key element in feminism and feminist research. Despite variations between different understandings of feminism and feminist research, what unites them is the intention to challenge and change taken for granted power relations (Ramazongulu & Holland, 2011). This commitment to transformation stems from the underlying normative assumption that there are injustices that derive from unequal relations of power between genders (Guanratman & Hamilton, 2017; Ramazongulu & Holland, 2011; Robinson, 2000).

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that feminism is only concerned with women, gender relations or deconstructing gender. Rather, every context has different norms, concepts, experiences and other systems of power that interrelate with gendered power dynamics (Ramanzongulu & Holland, 2011). Focusing only on gender might even be a shortcoming, as it risks leaving aside other experiences of injustice and subordination, as well as ignoring the power relations within gender. In this thesis, I aim to look at the ways in which feminism in Mexico discuss, perpetuate and/or transform racial relations that I argue, penetrate, organize and categorize the whole Mexican society and intersect with gender and class relations.

The way I came up with the theme for this essay ensued when I began trying to make sense of something that I observed on various occasions. The first instance was when skimming through a popular Mexican tabloid, shocked by its visual imaginary; one white woman after another leaning on a red velour couch in a golden room expressing how much they adore their husbands. Then I saw the recently launched advertisement for a local higher end ware house promising diversity and freedom from normalized norms, though only through white bodies. I started to follow more closely the Mexican media and advertisement landscape, that appeared to be almost exclusively white. I was puzzled about the obvious dissonance between the visibility of white people and invisibility of non-white people in the Mexican media, when the majority of the persons in the country are non-white with darker skin tones, morenos. Simultaneously, race and racism in Mexico seemed to be a non-issue - or an issue analysed only in relation to particular groups such as the indigenous groups and more recently, black mexicans. Despite the significant importance of such studies, I started to suspect that the racial relations and racism in Mexico were more penetrating,
transcendent, complicated and understudied, and therefore needed an analysis that would extend beyond particular groups. Of special interest to this study is the idea of mestizaje, which in the Mexican context has been employed traditionally to denote “racial mixing” between Spanish and indigenous populations, leading to the creation of a “new-citizen” or a “cosmic race”, superior to any other population in the world (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016; Navarrete 2014; 2004). Mestizaje has been criticized to serve the purpose of a post-race ideology and an all inclusive political agenda of exclusion cherishing whitening of the race through mestizaje, and hiding and justifying the marginalization of indigenousness and blackness (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016; Navarrete 2014; 2004).

Feminism has been in the forefront of challenging racial hierarchies and capitalist exploitation. Most notably by Chicana and black feminist theorizations of intersecting systems of oppression including race, gender and class in the United States; as well as by the de-colonial and post-colonial feminist critique toward colonialism, capitalism and dichotomous gender binaries challenging the idea of a shared gender consciousness or identity politics based on the experiences of white middle class women (Mendoza, 2016; Ruiz-Trejo, 2016; Lugones 2010; Lykke, 2010; Mohanty, 1988). Sara Ahmed (2017) uses feminism to denote a collective movement; a subjective consciousness; every day practice; a discipline and a critical theory; to take a step to see, insist and end what has not ended. What has not ended is gender inequality, sexism, sexual oppression and sexual violence, which cannot be isolated from racism, capitalist mode of production and colonial histories (Ahmed, 2017). This is also the reason I find it relevant to explore Mexican feminisms’ relation to race and racism. I believe that it is not possible to transform gender relations without thoroughly acknowledging and de-constructing racial relations and subsequent power imbalances.

The purpose of this study is to critically reflect on the de-politicized ideology of post-racial social relations in the Mexican context and explore the complexities of racialization and racial positionings in the society. The study aims to contribute to the discussion on race in Mexico by providing a critical analysis on the ways that Mexican feminisms in particular address and relate to race, mestizaje and racism, and in this way reproduce or resist racisms. I find this important because mestizaje is constructed as a homogenous category of privilege which hides the joint articulation of colour of skin, class and gender that concerns the society as a whole.
The guiding research questions for this study are the following:

- In what ways does Mexican academic feminist knowledge production conceptualize and problematize race and racism?
- How does Mexican academic feminist knowledge production on race and racism shape, reproduce or transform racial dynamics in Mexico?

In the next section, I will outline the methodological approach guiding the study. This is followed by the elaboration of the theoretical and conceptual ideas underpinning the study after which I will proceed to the analytical discussion which includes first-hand testimonies of scholars who interviewed for this study. I have chosen to merge the background literature together with the theory underpinning this study. During the writing process I found these two parts strongly overlapping, therefore I consider their separation unfavourable for the fluidity and understanding of the subject matter. In the concluding section the main findings will be summarized.

2. Methodological Considerations

This research departs from the assumption that knowledge production is inseparable from historically situated power relations. In other words, what is studied, through which methodological approaches and methods and how the results of the study are interpreted, are all choices and decisions that in a capillary motion filter power to the knowledge produced (Haritaworn, 2008; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). This premise is evident in the research questions of this study that aim to critically reflect on the knowledge produced by feminist scholarship in Mexico about race and racism and the realities this knowledge creates, sustains or challenges. The study rests on the epistemological foundation that the knower and the context are always historically contingent and inexorably linked to the society (Lykke, 2010; Haraway, 1988).

The study accepts that it is possible to reach partial objectivity and claim authority over the knowledge produced. This is in order to avoid recurring to universalizing empiricism or to a depoliticized and ambiguous relativism that overlooks material and bodily realities (Lykke, 2010;
Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Neither of the former positions enable to see clearly the power dynamics that divide and structure the world (Lykke, 2010; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Haraway, 1988). The first one relies on an idea of a scientific “objective” master narrative of the nature of reality, research as distant and detached from subjects who it aims to study, ignoring their embodiments in historically situated locations, power dynamics, discourses and politics (Lykke, 2010; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). The second position denies any criteria and truth about the world, all perspectives and explanations being equally valid. It slips easily into all-encompassing de-politicized relativism that impedes from seeing structural power-dynamics that divide the world and frees researchers from their moral and political responsibilities toward their research results (Lykke, 2010; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). Therefore, to avoid falling into these pitfalls, this study departs from what is called “situated knowledge” (Lykke, 2010; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002; Haraway 1988). It denotes the self-reflection and accountability of the researcher’s own position, research technologies, history and context towards the research and the research results (Lykke, 2010; Haraway, 1988). In other words, this means clarifying how the researcher is positioned toward his/her research and the part of reality the researcher can see from her specific position (Lykke, 2010; Haraway 1988). In this approach, the researcher and the researched are not part of distinct realities, but are parts of the same world (Lykke, 2010). My situadness in the research will be discussed further below. Furthermore, what is often either ignored or not explicitly stated in research projects on race, is that doing research on race is simultaneously doing race (Best, 2003). For example, the interactional context of interviewing and the process of interpretation of results are instances in which relationships that create difference and racialized identities of the self and those interviewed are managed, negotiated and solidified (M’charek, 2010; Best 2003). Furthermore, consider a research on race that studies a particular group of people: the study does not only establish narratives of the identities of those studied in the research, but directly or indirectly also makes statements about the persons to which it relates to and contrasts the identities of those studied.

Ramazogolu & Holland (2002) maintain that strict rules of a universal validity and reliability might not be desirable nor relevant for an ontology and epistemology that refuses the existence of a single objective truth and the possibility to know it, but rather endeavours to deconstruct assumed normative truths and knowledge. Yet, some form of criteria needs to be established to avoid falling
into a relativism that does little more than maintain the status quo (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002). A research process inevitably includes unconscious and conscious moments of applying different forms of criteria when choices regarding the study are made (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, pp.154-158). The application of these criteria will directly link to the knowledge that is produced through the study, judging some form knowledge or narratives more “valid” than others (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, pp.154-158). Thus, by making at least some of these choices and reflections explicit in the research, the validity of the study can be established without applying a universalizing principles nor falling into relativism (Ramanzogolu & Holland 2002, pp.154-158). The choices made during this research in relation to the method, sampling, theme and context of the study will be discussed in subsequent sections.

2.1 My own situadness in the research

In this section I want to elaborate on my own situadness regarding the research in line with the methodological considerations discussed previously. I am white, half Finnish and half Italian, in my thirties and I identify as a woman. Despite my skin colour being white, I have some other physical attributes that make me look foreign in Finland where I was born and raised. Since childhood I have been questioned about my origin, nationality and language. I would not say I have experienced direct discrimination due to my non-typical Finnish phenotype, but I have been Othered and “exoticised” due to my appearance. My family and cultural background differ quite a lot from the normative idea of a Finnish nuclear family and I was ashamed of my background until my early 20s. I adopted a kind of identity in which I was at a crossroads, or on the border between two opposed cultural universes, not feeling entirely home in neither of them. When staying in Italy, I was never quite accepted as a true Italian. My fairly traditional relatives considered me and my sister as outsiders and not representative of the “true Italian cultural identity”. I have lived in different contexts throughout my life and wherever I have gone, I have always been somehow a surprise or disappointment to people when revealing that I come from Finland. I am not the stereotypical Nordic blonde with blue eyes and did not quite match the expectations of “Finnishness” either in Finland or abroad. Politically I sympathize with the left. I am highly educated and come from a context with a strong social democratic tradition, which has influenced my values and ideas about collectivity, development, strong state, equality and non-discrimination and right-based citizenship. The knowledge I produce is necessarily normative and is influenced
by this value framework. Even if my parents both come from poor families and have struggled through times that have been economically and socially tough in Finland, I have enjoyed a good quality of life and I do consider myself privileged as I have received many advantages such as education, health care, social protection, free mobility; only because I happened to be born within certain borders.

When living and spending time in countries such as Argentina, Peru, Bolivia, Colombia and El Salvador, as well as in Burkina Faso and Kenya, I step by step became very consciousness about my whiteness, my European background and the position I enjoy in the world system. This has been further strengthened through my experiences working with migrant communities in the Nordic countries. Independently of what I consider my identity and my values to be or what my personal biography has been, I embody privilege, colonialism, western hegemony, neo-liberalism, development, appropriation as well as aspiration. My first reaction to this realization was frustration and defensiveness as I did not identify with the features people attributed to me based on my skin colour. Perceiving my privileges made me feel uncomfortable. Then I came to understand the deep and profound need for that frustration and acceptance rather than its denial: it racialized my whiteness. I racialized myself. It made it possible for me to understand through affective emotional responses what it means when a body is ascribed a set of assumptions about qualities, personal traits, historical narratives and expected behavioural patterns. Even if I had somehow understood this regarding my gender, and despite my experiences of being othered in Finland during my childhood and adolescence, I had taken my whiteness as the norm and never questioned it before my experiences abroad. It made me conscious that racism cannot be tackled nor understood without a discussion of whiteness as a racial ideology or white as a race, and by the way of understanding that race is a relationship created through diverse historically situated socioeconomic and political processes. Not discussing whiteness would mean blindly accepting white as the superior norm to which everything else is the inferior other, analogous to only discussing gender in relation to women affirming man as the universal norm.

I chose this topic for a variety of reasons, but the major two were: me having spent a lot of time in Mexico and moving there permanently; and being intrigued about the complicatedness of racial relations in Mexico and identifying the absence of a discussion of racism and race that was not in
relation to indigenous communities or black Mexicans. I felt race in Mexico was something that organized the whole society and that ordered everyone into a hierarchy of pigments and phenotypes. I consider myself to be in a position to my research that is in a way at the crossroads of difference and similitude, allowing me both to participate and observe, to be an insider and an outsider (Aull-Davies, 2008, p.71). The reason I feel this way is because there are some sociocultural similitudes with Italy as well as Argentina and El Salvador where I lived at quite a young age and which, so to speak, became a part of me. Some people often assume that I am from Mexico and others ask me directly from which country I am from. Sometimes I am treated as similar and in other instances as different. My accent is difficult to precise as it does not sound necessarily very foreign. On the other hand, I sometime I find myself embracing my Nordic side, which I feel differs quite strongly from my Italian side. This position might allow me to see from the outside what might be difficult to envision from the inside, in the same way that my participation changes me and my vision, leading me to new insights and observations (Aull-Davies, 2008, p.71).

2.2 Method

In order to deepen the analysis on feminism and race in Mexico, this study complements the background literature and theoretical elaborations in the following section with qualitative semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted with scholars who in one way or another are dedicated professionally to issues related to feminism and/or race. The two primary criteria employed in the selection of the interviewees was their dedication, expertise and specialization in either feminism and/or questions related to race; and the diversity of perspectives in terms of backgrounds. The interviewees included persons who self-ascribed themselves as white, mestiza, dark skinned and black. All the interviewees considered themselves of privileged position due to the fact that they had been able to study and make a career in academia. The interviewees included women, a man and non-gender conforming persons as well as people who affirm have different sexualities. Secondly, the criteria used in sampling was through access and making the contact. In the beginning it was particularly challenging to gain access to interviewees, however in few instances I succeeded establishing contact via emails I found online. Some scholars simply did not respond, and others did not follow up after the initial contact was established. I do not consider my approach to have been an issue, as the invitation letters, formulation and language, were revised
and contextualized by a third party who is Mexican. However, I succeeded in gaining access to interviewees through personal contacts. The interviewees were asked to initiate a chain referral process, also referred to as snowball sampling (Bryman, 2008) by providing names and contacts of persons they felt were influential and relevant within feminist and racial studies in Mexico and could contribute to the study. Unfortunately, one of the interviews had to be cancelled due to medical reasons.

In total 6 interviews were conducted and they lasted between 1-2 hours. I chose to employ semi-structured interviews because of its usefulness when a study has a clear focus and objective (Bryman 2008). Unlike structured interviews, semi-structured interviews allow openness and flexibility and do not attempt to squeeze or format information in pre-determined categories, and therefore have been developed and used in much of feminist research (Devault, 2011). Bryman (2008) points out that semi-structure interviews are characterized by an interest in the interviewee’s point of views and the unstructured nature of the interview allows the interviewee to reflect, pause, develop and add in insights or issues she deems important. During the interviews the respondents were allowed to make questions and reflections that would go beyond the actual question posed.

Four interviews were conducted face to face and two by Skype video calls and all the interviews were recorded. In the interviews a topical interview guide was used to help me organize my prior knowledge on the topic, facilitate the flow of the conversation as well as keep the interview around the topic of the study (Wizel & Reiter, 2012; Aull-Davies, 2008). All the interviews were conducted in Spanish and no translator was used. I have almost native skills in Spanish and have talked the language for over 10 years; in many occasions my private and professional life has taken place in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries. I started all the interviews by explaining the purpose of the research and my interest and situadness toward the topic in order to contextualize the interview as well as to create a relationship of trust with the interviewee. I consider that reflecting in the interview situation on researcher’s own position and location is not only ethical but it is also necessary, especially when interviewing persons that come from different contexts than the researcher which is also affirmed by Devault (2011, p. 215). Furthermore, I find it would be pretentious and unhelpful to assume a complete similarity with the interviewees. Rather I consider it more accurate also to point up differences, as argued by Devault (2011, p. 215) is helpful in
establishing better relationship in interviewing situations in which the interviewer and interviewee come from different contexts.

The interviews were based on an active interview approach proposed by Holstein & Gubrium, (1995, pp. 38-52). This approach accepts and encourages the interviewers influence at all stages of the research (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, pp.7-19). The active interview emphasizes equality in power relations between the researcher and the interviewee (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, pp.7-19). It underlines that meaning and knowledge is created in the interactional interview situation, rather than seeing the interviewee as some external source from which to extract experiential information (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, pp.7 - 19). I saw the interviews more as conversations or encounters between two persons with common interests who would share and create knowledge, rather than a researcher-researched setting (Devault, 2011). I see this approach consistent with the overall methodology for the study that sees researcher, knowledge production and the subject/object of the research as always tied to the social context of the research and the parties involved, as well as to power relations. The social conditions affect both the interaction in the interview as well as the text that results from the processes of production and interpretation that take place between the interviewer and interviewee in the interview situation (Aull-Davies, 2008, p. 99). The differences between the parties –be it racial, gender, age, status, class, ethnicity– have implications for the access to resources in the wider society and will influence the interaction during the interview which undermines equality in the interview (Aull-Davies, 2008, p. 99). In general, I do not think I was in a position of power in the interview situations. As the interviews were based on the expert positions of the interviewees, from the outset this already situates the interviewees in the position of power. However, I do exercise power when choosing what material will be used; analysed; written; concluded; and presented. For example, already the research questions guiding the study necessarily guide my analysis and sight to a certain direction, which despite my attempts to be open, might impede me from seeing other relevant issues in the data. Furthermore, even if I do not see my interviews as sources from which I only extract information, in a way I do as it is me in the end who benefits from doing the study as I will potentially be awarded a degree, perhaps a possible publication. Of course the highest purpose of my work is to give back and produce knowledge in order to enhance social transformation and change, but it would be naïve for any research or researcher to deny that there are also personal interests and gains mixed in the process.
2.3 Data analysis

After the interview, the recordings were listened to and the material was transcribed. The transcription was detailed but I did not transcribe everything word by word. I only transcribed word by word the parts that in their content focused on the topic of the study and which I would use for more detailed analysis. The parts that went somewhat off-topic were marked on a few sentences in the transcription sheet. The reason for choosing to do it this way was the focused aim of this study, within the time limits I did not consider it necessary to transcribe word by word the parts that went off topic. Unfortunately, the recording of one interview (interviewee 4) failed and the sound was not recorded properly. I resolved this situation by writing transcription based on the detailed notes I took during the interview. The transcription was followed by a first cycle coding that was used to make initial sense of the material (Saldaña, 2013). I read the material several times and started to mark descriptive codes on the margins of the transcription excerpts, see annex 2 for an example of coding (Saldaña, 2013). Furthermore, some conflicts emerged in the data set and therefore I included a few versus codes along the descriptive codes which helped me identify different narratives in the data (Saldaña, 2013, p.115) Simultaneously, I began writing analytical memos about my initial ideas, impressions and findings based on the descriptive codes (Saldaña, 2013). I found writing analytical memos useful and in line with the broader methodological considerations underlying this study. Writing analytical memos helped me think critically and reflect on what I was doing: how I related to the interviewees ideas and if I share her/his experience or have a different experience; how do my own thoughts intertwine and shape the research; what I see and what I do not see; why I chose a code for a specific part; how does it link with material I have read; how do the codes link with each other (Saldana, 2013, pp. 41-56). During the second phase of the coding, pattern coding was used to identify the major themes emerging from the data (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 207-242). The way I understand second cycle coding is that it takes the first cycle codes to next level. In other words, its purpose is to link the codes that emerged during the first cycle coding and to develop conceptual, thematic and/or explanatory ideas that give the data meaning (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 207-242). I chose pattern coding because these aim to develop themes, explanations, relationships and configurations present within and between the data sets (Saldaña, 2013). I found pattern coding accurate as my research questions aim to look at the relationships and themes present in the discussion of race in feminist scholarship in Mexico as well as to provide some understanding that can explain why the discussion on race and racism has, or has not, a certain
form as well as the implications this has for the reproduction of racial dynamics in Mexico.

2.4 Ethical Considerations and Limitations
All the interviewees were informed about the purpose of the study, the use of the material as well as the possible use of the material in publishing an article based on the thesis. Everyone was asked if they wanted a written consent or if they were satisfied with an oral consent. Every interviewee was fine with an oral consent. The interviewees were informed that they could contact me anytime in case they had any concerns or if they wished their material not to be used. The interviewees were provided the opportunity to review their transcripts if they wished to do so. Confidentiality was guaranteed in all stages of the research process and I chose to maintain the interviewees anonymous which I also told the interviewees. I chose to do it this way because I wanted the interviewees to feel completely comfortable in saying what they felt they wanted to express. Many of the interviewees are nationally and internationally recognized scholars so therefore I wanted to protect the confidentiality of their testimonies that at times included personal and sensitive information or critical reflections toward the institutions in which they had or were currently pursuing their careers. I think one of the major limitations of this study is that it did not include scholars from indigenous communities. Having perspectives from indigenous communities would have enriched the study. Unfortunately, despite my attempts, I did not manage to establish contact with any indigenous scholar. This shows also how my own situadness gives me access to certain circles, while it restricts my access to others, and thus has implications on the information gathered. I also consider that the literature review, while being wide in scope, could have been even more extensive and include a more profound gaze into older feminist texts. However, in the scope of time for this thesis it was not possible, but hopefully I am able to develop on it in my future projects.

3. Background literature and theoretical approximation

In this section I will go through the main arguments of the literature and theory that has informed this study. I consider it important to highlight that the literature presented in this section does not attempt to claim to be exhaustive. Within the scope of the thesis, this would not be feasible. Rather, I have attempted to select some of those texts that closely relate to the topic of this thesis. More specifically I have chosen texts that provide historical insights into Mexican feminisms that
elaborate on race and racial relations in the Mexican context and in some way look at race in Mexico from a gender perspective.

3.1 Mexican feminisms

In her article, Más de un siglo de feminismo en México, Cano (1996) gives an overview of the historical evolution of feminism in Mexico, starting from late 19th century to 20th century when the word feminism started to be consolidated. In the beginning the feminist demands centred around gender equality, specifically in the domains of the right to education and equal intellectual capacity (Cano, 1996, pp. 345-346). Intellectual subordination was considered the main reason for gender inequality (Cano, 1996, p.345). Securing women’s access to education would facilitate women to perform their role as wives and mothers as well as increase women’s influence in the family; though, also the revaluation of the significance of feminine attributes such as motherhood, emotional capacity and moral superiority, emphasizing gender difference (Cano, 1996, p.345). In the epoch of the Mexican revolution, the feminist demands increasingly centred around women’s political engagement, civil rights and suffrage1 and women increasingly as part of the revolution, occupying positions in spheres traditionally considered to be male (Cano, 1996, pp.347-348 ). This is affirmed also in Rodríguez Bravo’s (2015) and Duarte’s (2012) reviews on Gisela Espinosa Damian and Ana Lau Jaiven’s book, Un fantasma recorre el siglo. Luchas feministas en México 1910-2010 published in 20112, which gathers the different feminist claims, debates and movements in a historical perspective.

Coming to the 1920s and 1930s, the Mexican Feminist Council was established, which meant increased international contact with feminist organizations in other countries (Cano, 1996). The feminist anxieties proposed by the council amplified to include three domains; equality in economic conditions including equal wage and protection during motherhood; social protection for the working class women and prostitutes; and civil and human rights (Rodriguez Bravo, 2015; Cano, 1996, p.349). Despite the increasing presence of feminism in the public and political discourses, the term feminism during the 30s was overshadowed by Marxist approaches that

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1 Women acquired civil rights 1947 on municipal level and 1953 on state and federal levels (Cano, 1996)

2 I was unable to find the book online or in the local bookstores, and therefore had to rely on reviews.
considered feminism to be something pertaining to upper class women, and not relevant for working class women and men (Cano, 1996, p.351).

In the 70s feminist ideas in Mexico were inspired by the women’s liberation movement in the United States demanding the recognition of the link between the personal and the political (Cano, 1996). Sexuality, the invisibility of lesbian women and the everyday relations between men and women in Mexico acquired new importance as well as women’s control over their bodies, sexual violence against women, sexual and reproductive health and rights and different sexualities (Rodriguez-Bravo, 2015; Cano, 1996). Also, the right to abortion and gender-based violence and its links to structural inequality between genders and the failure to guarantee justice to victims of sexual violence and abuse became central to feminism (Rodriquez-Bravo, 2015; Duarte, 2012). However, feminism continued to be largely attached to middle class and highly educated women until the 80s when “popular feminism” surged among working class women, peasant women and indigenous women who intended to consolidate earlier feminist concerns with women’s needs in different classes and highlighted the diversity of women within Mexican feminism (Rodriguez-Bravo, 2015; Duarte, 2012; Cano, 1996). In the 90s, feminism began to disperse also in academic institutions and specific programs dedicated to gender and women’s studies (Ruiz-Trejo, 2016).

According to Duarte (2012, p.213), one of the disputes that has characterized Mexican feminism has been between its institutionalization versus its autonomy. The institutionalization of feminism in women’s institutes, efforts of gender mainstreaming, and the transformation of women’s demands to rules and laws are claimed to have done little more than insert feminism into masculine and patriarchal structures, forgetting the political roots and emancipatory goals of feminist movements (Duarte, 2012, p.213). An example would be the reduction of feminist theorization on the body into programs of reproductive health (Duarte, 2012). Race and racial relations seem to absent both in the chronology provided by Cano on Mexican feminisms and the overview given on Gisela Espinosa Damian and Ana Lau Jaiven’s book. Regarding the latter source, I am unable to say if race and racism are present in the original book. However, even if that was the case, it not being mentioned in the reviews is in itself telling of something about the invisibility of racial issues.

In the next section, I will first proceed in first exploring race as an object of study and then continue with the examination of the Mexican feminist scholarship on race.
3.2 Race and the study of race

Race is not a theme or object of study that can be somehow neutrally or objectively studied, rather it is in itself a discourse and a relation of power that has been historically produced and consolidated through academic knowledge production and which forms the present practices and relationships in the academia, as stated by Peter Wade,

race and ethnicity are not terms that refer in some neutral way to a transparent reality of which social science gives us an ever more accurate picture; instead they are terms embedded in academic, popular and political discourses that are themselves a constitutive part of academic, popular and political relationships and practices (Wade, 2010, p. 4)

It is possible to distinguish in Wade’s understanding of race as embedded in the social context two different levels in which race operates: the discursive level, ideas, sayings and language and the level of practices, doings. These two levels of ideas and doings are linked together through discourse – understood simply as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world) (Philip & Jorgesen, 2002, p. 1) – denotes the inseparability of language and reality. Reality does exist as a physical and material entity independently of language as well, but it is given meaning in discourses that are constituted of language. Language constitutes the reality including social identities and social relations, and through language reality can be changed and transformed (Philip & Jorgensen, 2002; Hall, 1997). There is never only one meaning, but a series of systems of language and discourses where meanings are located (Philip & Jorgensen, 2002; Hall, 1997). Discourses are a product of the ways humans categorize the world through historically situated social interactions between people. In these interchanges, common truths, falsities and knowledge are created and put in competition with each other (Philip & Jorgensen, 2002). This is the process in which discourses are formed embodying different social understandings of the world, thereby also making some actions possible and others unthinkable (Philip & Jorgensen, 2002, p.6). I find that it is important to note the way that discourse is linked with practices and doings because otherwise it would be impossible to critically reflect on practices of knowledge production. The latter does not take place in a political or discursive vacuum, but it is the very discourses that make some doings and thoughts possible and others not.

In his book, Race and Ethnicity in Latin America (2010), Peter Wade looks at how race has evolved throughout times as part of what he calls “an enterprise of knowledge” (2010, p.5) situated within
power relations. Wade (2010) demonstrates how until the 19th century, “race” as a term was not widely used to denote or study human difference—which can be partly explained by religious and biblical ideas about monogenism—but it was explained through environmental factors that affected social and political institutions and bodily differences (Wade, 2010, p.6). Even if race as a term may not have been used, the social, political and economic conditions of explorations of Africa, the conquest of the New World, colonialism and slavery, formed the conditions in which the knowledge production of human difference took place (Wade, 2010, pp. 4-14). Ideas of the superiority of whites and Europeans were present and justified by Biblical references to the inferiority of black people, and further enhanced by the emergence of Europe as an entity defined in opposition to Others and drawn together by mercantile capitalism and technological advancements (Wade 2010, pp. 4-14). In the 19th century, scientific racism intensified in which the inferiority of certain racialized people was tried to be established through adapting ideas about evolutionary change into ideas about racial types that marked different stages in the development of human kind (Wade, 2010, pp.4-14). This implied a hierarchical ordering of what was called racial types in which the basis of the hierarchy was conceived to be biological (Wade, 2010, pp.4-14). The intensification in the use of race as a term and as an explanation of human difference coincided with the abolition of slave trade and the need for new theories to justify white dominance over colonized spaces and people, as well as with imperialism and utilitarian ideas of collective good reached through the authoritarian rule of the most rational (the white colonizers) over those less rational (the black colonized) (Wade, 2010, pp.4-14). Coming to the 20th century, the scientific bases for race started to be dismantled by science itself which, coupled with the atrocities of the Nazi regime and the WW2 followed by several social movements including the feminist and black civil rights movements, challenged the basis for scientific racism (Wade, 2010, pp. 4-14). The biological explanations for racial differences have almost unanimously been deemed as failed, races do not exist and it is agreed that races are social constructions (Wade, 2010; Gall, 2004). “The idea of race is just that – an idea” (Wade 2013, p. 12) or as one of the interviewees for this study stated, “race is not an essence of people, it is a social relation that depends and is immersed within social relations and power dynamics. It is a relational dynamic that is not essential nor absolute (Interviewee 1)”. However, it is important to note that even though race is socially constructed and does not exist as such, it has material, affective, emotional, social, economic and political consequences (Wade, 2010; Gall, 2004).
Races do not exist, but *racialization* does, which is the process by which the beliefs about the existence of race are activated or created and bodies and facial features of persons are given a value (Moreno Figueroa, 2013). The curious thing about the social constructivist approach to race is that, while in my opinion accurate, in its understanding of races not as biologically given but as social constructions that translate the variations in physical features (phenotypes) onto the social sphere, it simultaneously dismisses that the “variation in phenotypes” is in itself socially constructed (Wade, 2010, pp.12-13; Gall, 2004). The variations that are considered as important or the features treated as the markers of racial distinctions are not some neutral markers of difference but reflect European colonial histories that established certain differences as signifiers of difference, making it so that only certain variations count as markers of racial difference (Wade, 2010, pp.12-13; Gall, 2004). Or in other words, only certain physical differences have been racialized while others have not (Wade, 2010; Gall, 2004).

Olivia Gall (2004) in her article *Identity, Exclusion and Racism in Mexico: Theoretical Considerations*, differentiates between what she calls *racism of inequality* and *racism of difference*. She attributes the former to ideas of modernity and refers to racism in which the dominant group in power sees the groups of people it defines as the “others” as inferior due to their assumed biological difference – a logic that governed much of the intercultural relations between majorities and minorities in Europe and the US as well as characterized the colonial processes. In contrast, the racism of difference refers to logics of discrimination and exclusion that takes *culture* and *cultural differences* as the justification for discrimination and in this way masks the racist characteristics of it (Gall, 2004, pp. 238-240). This differentiation is useful in the analysis of racism in Mexico, as it has evolved from what could be called *racism of inequality* during the colonial era to *racism of difference* in the post-revolutionary era marked by a political discourse of mestizaje, which will be elaborated more profoundly in the subsequent sections.
3.3 Feminism and the study of race in Mexico

Marisa Ruiz Trejo’s article *Critical Feminist Studies in Social Sciences in Mexico and Central America* (2016) demonstrates the influence feminism has had in challenging western biases of social sciences both in Mexico and Central America and brought also questions about race to the forefront of academic inquiries and knowledge production. The author shows that the entrance of women into the production of academic knowledge and research has made science more accessible to the people (Ruiz Trejo, 2016). At first, it was European women, white women and mestiza women that joined the academic space, followed later by indigenous women who transformed some of the western scientific premises of measurement, quantification and objectivity and separation of the “subject” and “object” of the research (Ruiz Trejo, 2016, pp. 2-3).

Indigenous-black and popular movements as well as Mexican and Central American feminist theories, have questioned the universality of western and Europeanized ideas of the category “woman” denoting a white middle class heterosexual woman ignoring the experiences of indigenous and black women as well as working class and peasant women (Ruiz Trejo, 2016, pp. 3-6). Feminism criticized not only the sexist character of social sciences but also the racist tones of it by ignoring that social reality in the Latin-American context cannot be limited to a material historical analysis of class relations and position in the production chain (Ruiz Trejo, 2016, pp.3-6). It should be seen also through the construction of subjectivity, authority and knowledge production and the way these articulated through race, gender, sexuality with class (Ruiz Trejo, 2016, pp.3-6). In order to denote the joint analysis of race, gender and class, in this study, I have chosen to employ articulation instead of the often popular term intersectionality. I see that the idea of articulation captures better the inseparability of gender, race and class. These are not separate entities detached from each other but a result of changing practices that establish a relation between these elements as well as modify the identity of each element (Jorgensen & Philips, 2002, p. 28). Furthermore, I would like to highlight an understanding of articulation of different elements that does not only limit itself to national level but includes an understanding of the ““glocalizing” dynamics- interpenetrations of global and local that construct gender, race, class, and sexuality”

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Since the mid 20th century, deliberate state policies steered toward creating a unified nation with a single language and culture, also referred to as indigenismo, inducing female researchers in the region to problematize the situation and inequalities faced by indigenous and working class/peasant women and the migratory contexts (Ruiz Trejo, 2016). Violence and the use of sexual violence as a tool of genocide in conflicts has been an important theme tackled and analyzed by Mexican and Central American feminist scholarship (Ruiz Trejo, 2016, pp.10-12).

According to Gargallo (2009, pp. 31-32), during the 1970-1980 the feminist movement in Latin America was trying to find its place and its identity, as if it was necessary to have one fixed identity, apparent in the white hegemonic feminist tradition (Gargallo, 2009; Sandoval, 2000). In this search for a unified feminist identity, tensions raised between those who emphasized liberation from roles dictated by the patriarchal rule and focused on individuality, free choice and liberty from communitarianism, whether it denoted the family, the ethnic group, religion or political group and indigenous and black women (Gargallo, 2009, p. 32). Many indigenous and black women took distance from what then became the hegemonic feminist identity or “white and mestiza feminism”, given that they negotiated between finding their own identity as feminists as well as their collective identities as part of socially, ethnically, racially and culturally marginalized groups (Gargallo, 2009). What they demanded was a feminism in which a mixed and plural political resistance that would not require the denunciation of collectivity over individualism associated with western values of the colonizers (Cargallo, 2009, p. 32).

In Mexico indigenous feminisms have been at the forefront of lifting race and racism to the public and academic discourses. Race is understood and defined as a historical construction of a system of classification that departs from biological difference, skin colour and phenotype, and based on this assigns people characters, competences, personalities, qualities and esthetical and human value (Gargallo, 2014, pp. 230-231). Racism then is an expression of the process by which individuals and communities are deprived of their identities and humanity through establishing relations of superiority and inferiority based on the creation of difference called “race” based on biological features (Gargallo, 2014, pp. 230-231). Race and racism in Mexico and Latin America are inseparable from the colonial history and oppression that established the domination of a
hegemonic culture (Gargallo, 2014; Gall, 2004). Racism is expressed and experienced in every day interactions, structural practices and systematic exclusions that are legitimized through the values given to physical characteristics as a result of racialization (Moreno Figueroa 2010; 2013; Gargallo, 2014; Gall, 2004).

By just looking through the index of the book, *Feminisms since Abya Yala* (2014) by Francesca Gargallo, the words race and racism appear in every chapter. Constructions of race and practice of racism survive due to the belief in a single universal paradigm of development and progress and the inability of white persons to acknowledge their privilege in a patriarchal and racist world system (Gargallo, 2014, p. 35). Even if many feminists are able to identify patriarchy as a system of privilege, power and oppression, they re-produce their particularity by universalizing their ideas of individuality and women’s liberation thereby reproducing racism (Gargallo 2014; Hernandez, 2001).

During the 1994 Zapatista uprising, indigenous women throughout the country and from different organizations of indigenous women came together to articulate their demands (Hernandez, 2001, pp. 206-208). The political agenda of indigenous women’s organizations, whether these identify as feminist or not, stem from both a critique toward economic oppression and racism inherent in the “integration” of indigenous communities into the national project as well as their questioning of sexism, harming practices and inequities within their communities and the ethnocentrism of the hegemonic feminism (Hernandez, 2001, pp. 206-208). Even if some of the demands of the hegemonic, white, mestiza and urban feminism were shared by indigenous women, these were re-interpreted and re-articulated through the specific experiences of intersecting dynamics of race, gender, ethnicity and class, that formed the gender experience of indigenous women (Hernandez, 2001). In the indigenous women’s demands, an analysis of class, privilege and racism was always present, whereas it was absent in the hegemonic feminist political claims regarding gender equality (Hernandez, 2001). Already in the 70s indigenous women started to question the discourse of a unified mestiza nation, which will be looked at more closely in the following section (Hernandez, 2001).
Garallo (2014) localizes one of the main divisions between mainstream feminism and indigenous feminism in *Latinamérica/ Abya Yala* in the conceptualization of freedom and transformation. While white and mestizo feminists see feminist or women’s liberation in individual autonomy and freedom from any authoritarian structures, indigenous feminists conceive women’s freedom through communitarianism. The community is seen as a socio-affective space that creates reciprocity of networks, hence women’s wellbeing is inseparable from the community’s wellbeing (Garallo, 2014, pp. 202-209). Both women and men shall be part of the process of depatriarcalization of the whole community, which means also standing together against patriarchal actions and structures of the government (Garallo, 2014, pp.202 - 209). This rupture can be located in the different ontological bases of hegemonic feminism and indigenous feminism (Garallo, 2014). While the former perceives the world though contradictions and dichotomies, the latter sees it through continuities, feminine and masculine as inherently complementary rather than assigned or interdependent (Garallo, 2014, pp. 202-209). Social relations are formed through complementary continuities that are not exclusive or antagonist (Garallo, 2014). To achieve this, it is necessary to reduce the value of individuality in which the hegemonic feminism centres on (Garallo, 2014, pp. 202- 209).

Related to the previous, in her essay *Toward a Decolonial Feminism. Hypatia* (2010), Lugones challenges her reader to problematize the widely accepted and normalized even de-politicized notion of gender. She argues that the role of a dichotomous gender system in the process of colonization, and in the still ongoing process of (gender) coloniality, cannot be left unacknowledged. Rita Segato (2001 cited in Mendoza, 2016, p.117) sees that low intensity patriarchies were transformed into more hierarchical and high intensity patriarchies under colonization of the Americas. This change was accompanied with the separation and gendering of public and private spheres (Segato 2001 cited in Medoza, 2016, p.117). As a consequence, indigenous women not only lost their power in their communities, but also were domesticated and privatized (ibid.). In the de-colonial feminist approach gender is perceived as analogous to the hierarchical dichotomy that separates humans from nature typical to the narrative of capitalist modernity (Lugones, 2010). The dichotomous logic of gender –woman human, man human– served as a method to first de-humanize and consequently “humanize” those colonized justifying “euphemistic mask of brutal access to people’s bodies through unimaginable exploitation, violent
sexual violation, control of reproduction, and systematic terror” (Lugones, 2010, p.744). The different anti-colonial schools have been protagonists in contributing with important insights to the discussion on race in the academic spaces in Latin America (Mendoza, 2016). Race and the process of racialization is at the core of de-colonial theorizations that distinguish coloniality from colonialism (Mendoza, 2016). The latter refers to a specific point in history whereas the former to long-term and continuous pattern of power that emerged in the process of colonialism, also referred to as Anibal Quijano’s coloniality of power (cited in Mendoza, 2016, p. 101). The coloniality of power operates through creating hierarchies based on systems of racialized difference, systems of knowledge and systems of culture that together:

redefine culture, labor, intersubjective relations, aspirations of the self, common sense, and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer. Surviving long after colonialism has been overthrown, coloniality permeates consciousness and social relations in contemporary life (Mendoza, 2016, p.114).

Central to the de-colonial thinking is the idea that European modernity and capitalism is inexorably linked to the colonisation of Americas. Mendoza (2016) argues that despite different approximations toward what types of political projects should be the focus of de-colonial thinking and/or debates on what types of interventions would best lead to decolonization in Latin America, these approximations are united by the very same commitment to a project of decolonization that is necessarily political. This includes the role of academic knowledge production both as a vector of change and also as the object of study challenging colonizing impulses within academic knowledge production (Mendoza, 2016).

3.4 Race, racism and mestizaje
The discussion on race and racism in Mexico has to some extent recently taken a broader perspective that extends the discussion on race and racism beyond particular groups, such as indigenous and black Mexicans, and looks at racism through the sociocultural project of mestizaje. The meaning of mestiza and the way the idea is employed in the Mexican context is very different from the project Anzaldúa (1999), Sandoval (2000) or Lugones (2010) propose: mestizaje as a resisting, plural, and transformative idea. Mexican-American feminist Anzaldúa’s (1999) idea of the borderland or mestiza consciousness introduced in her classic book Borderland/La Frontera,
has been very influential among de-colonial, radical US feminist of colour and third world feminism, queer of colour scholars, and has formed intersectionality as a political and analytical framework within the Chicana and Latina feminism (Collins & Bilge, 2016). It refers to the consciousness of the mixed blood, to a subjectivity that is born out of and lived at the “crossroads” between genders, nations, races, sexualities, cultures, nations and languages. The consciousness of Mestiza requires travelling across meanings (Sandoval, 2000) and its work is to smash the arbitrary splits governing our lives and the categorical dichotomies and subject/object dualities (Moday, 2017; Anzaldúa 1999).

Rather as Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar (2016) write, the mestiza project in Mexico serves the purpose of a *post-race ideology* that characterizes the post-revolutionary period and the creation of a “new citizen” (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016; Navarrete 2004; 2016). After the Mexican revolution in 1910, the State, with the aim of developing a democratic political agenda for social justice, a cohesive national identity and economic growth, promoted the narrative of *mestizaje* (Navarrete, 2016). According to the lore, the encounter of the Spanish with the indigenous heritage led to the creation of a new Mexican citizen (Navarrete, 2016). Through this providential mix came about the “cosmic” or “raceless” race, framed as superior to any other racial groups, which claimed to erase race and consequently racism, though always favouring whiteness (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016; Navarrete, 2016; 2004).

*Mestizaje* at its core is about mixture, its main meaning denoting sexual mixture between people considered to belong to distinct racial groups, but implied is also spatial motilities and cultural interchanges (Wade, 2010). Navarrete (2016) points out as well that *mestizaje* is not reducible to a biological mixing of people, rather it is a cultural, linguistic, social and identititarian change that involves the renunciation of any other cultural understandings in favour of adopting modern, liberal, individualist values. It is a project of “cultural integration” promising social mobility through the abandonment of the cultural “chains” of indigenous ethos. This economic thrust makes the migration to urban settings, the adoption of a consumerist global identity and the incorporation to free market labor activities central aspects of *mestizaje* and necessary avenues to become a mestizo (Navarrete, 2004). It is a historical process of class mobility, a promise of a *better life* through opportunities of growth by leaving behind an identity perceived as an obstacle to the
improvement of individual and societal conditions (Navarrete, 2004). *Mestizaje* has had different meanings through the colonial history of Latin America, including Mexico (Moreno Figueroa, 2010; Wade, 2010). It has evolved from something that was seen by the Spanish to threaten the colonial social organization of a tripartite division between whites, indigenous or “indios” and black people (Wade, 2010) to a political ideology of a unified identity defined by political and intellectual elites in the last half of the 19th century, to finally becoming the main ideology of governance during the post-revolutionary Mexico (Moreno Figueroa, 2010; Navarrete, 2004). The mixing of people and cultures has resulted in the *mestizo* that embodies superiority toward other groups of people hiding the marginalization of indigenousness and blackness (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016, pp. 520 - 524). Thus *mestizaje* is rooted in the nation-building process of Mexico which has meant equating citizenship, national identity and belonging with *mestizaje* (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016, pp. 520-524). A Mexican citizen is a mestiza –it marks those who are on this side and those who are on the other side– the blacks and the indigenous (Moreno Figueroa, 2010, pp. 396-399). It is important to note the inexorable link that colonization has with *mestizaje* as a symbol for the new modern Mexico: a united nation in which everyone is mixed and matched but have a homogenous mestiza identity, as opposed to the disparate racial relations during the colonial era (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016; Wade, 2010).

According to Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar (2016) the political agenda of inclusive *mestizaje*, supposedly geared towards inclusion as opposed to an old colonial caste-like system based on scientific racism, has become an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion. Wade (2010, p.94) shows *mestizaje* contains an idea of transformation: it implies the change of blood, appearance, culture – toward inclusion. However, the context and space where the transformation takes place remains intact and is organized along racialized hierarchies that simultaneously provide the opportunity for exclusion (Wade, 2010, p.94). This is easier to understand if we include the equation the idea of *blanqueamiento/whitening* (Navarrete, 2016; Moreno Figueroa 2013; 2010; Wade, 2010; Gall, 2004). The ideal of whiteness is explicitly implicit in *mestizaje* and the direction of transformation that the mixing shall take is toward whitening of the race, as Moreno Figueroa (2010) says “whiteness is a core-structuring motif obscured by the homogenizing racial logic of mestizaje.” (Moreno Figueroa, 2010, p.10). Thus, in the Mexican context, the colonial categories of race remain somehow intact in a social context that is discursively constructed as a raceless and in which people are not recognized as racialized subjects, despite living in an everyday presence marked by
racialization and racist practices (Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016; 2013; 2010; Wade, 2010). The possessive investment in whiteness through *mestizaje* has, according to Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar (2016), allowed political and economic elites to maintain a particular social order that favours privileges of a minority over the majority and to justify racialized positions within the Mexican society. One of the most important points to understand with *mestizaje* is that it is an extremely imprecise and fluid category, as Moreno Figueroa (2013) says people are not white or black, but rather, they are whiter than or darker than others, the category of mestizo (a mixed race individual), which epitomizes the subject of national identity, the Mexican, is relative (Moreno Figueroa 2013, p. 2).

Susana Vargas (2015) uses the term *pigmentocracy* to denote the relation between power and skin colour, which according to her establishes the domination of persons with white or light skin over persons with darker skin tones. Whiteness is not necessarily always tied to a white body, and not all white persons for having a white skin acquire a position of privilege and legitimacy, in other words not all white bodies occupy a *space of whiteness* as privilege (Vargas, 2015; Ahmed, 2007; Moreno Figueroa, 2010). Also there are non-white bodies that inhabit white spaces but their non-white appearance is rendered more invisible when we perceive the space as a white space; simultaneously when they do not pass as whites they acquire hyper visibility (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 159-160). Whiteness is a category that does include the skin colour but is simultaneously more than that (Vargas, 2015). It only exists in relation to other social categories, of which Susana Vargas (2015) elevates class, cultural and historical context. In Mexico, transitioning towards whiteness or “improving the race” (*mejorar la raza*) persists as a desired goal which Moreno Figueroa calls a “non-spoken rule of social stratification” (Moreno Figueroa, 2010, p. 391). Becoming white or passing as white is connected to the liberal aspirational idea of upward social and class mobility (Navarrete 2016). This mobility depends on one’s ability to adopt, perform, imitate a white bourgeois body, but the extent to which one is able to inhabit such a body depends on what that body has behind (Ahmed, 2007, pp. 159-160). The situation is certainly very different if you inherit class privilege, which gives you more resources to be transformed into social and economic capital that thrust you upwards, than if you do not inherit class privilege let alone the racial privilege of a white body (Ahmed, 2007). However, whiteness is not static, but can be taken away if the way that whiteness is inhabited is precarious, which makes the experience of whiteness in Mexico very
ambiguous (Moreno Figueroa, 2010, p. 398). For that reason, I find it useful to employ Sara Ahmed’s idea of *whiteness as an orientation* which sees whiteness as a position that makes certain things, objects, capacities, aspirations, habits, techniques, resources, available while making them unavailable for those bodies that stand out or that are unable to “pass as white” (Ahmed, 2007).

Institutions function as spaces that orientate and are shaped by what is inside them, they are not neutral or given but are constituted by a sum of decisions made through times and the ways resources are allocated within them (Ahmed, 2007). Ahmed (2007) says on institutions and orientation:

Institutions too involve orientation devices, which keep things in place. The affect of such placement could be described as a form of comfort. To be orientated, or to be at home in the world, is also to feel a certain comfort: we might only notice comfort as an affect when we lose it, when we become uncomfortable. The word ‘comfort’ suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it can also suggest an ease and easiness. Comfort is about an encounter between more than one body, which is the promise of a ‘sinking’ feeling. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting the surfaces of bodies disappears from view. White bodies are comfortable as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape. The bodies and spaces ‘point’ towards each other, as a ‘point’ that is not seen as it is also ‘the point’ from which we see (Ahmed, 2007, p. 8).

There is very little public discourse on racism in Mexico. According to Moreno Figueroa (2010, p. 389) academics, official, popular and media discourses avoid using the term race or talk about racism, when they do it is only in relation to indigenous or black Mexicans. Discriminations that take place are usually discussed in socioeconomic terms explained by class, or referring to ethnicity-related terminology or discourses of “cultural differences” (Navarrete, 2016; Saldivar; 2014; Moreno Figueroa, 2010). In the absence of a debate around racism, racist practices are normalized in every day interactions and are institutionalized in policies that favour uneven distribution of resources (Moreno Figueroa, 2010, p.399). This silence about racism in Mexico can partly be explained by the seeming disconnect between racist practices and ideas of what race is or is not, as it has been erased through *mestizaje* and the history from which these have emanated (Moreno Figueroa, 2010, p.395). This can also be used to explain why racism in Mexico has for a long time been considered as emanating from personal faults rather than perceived as a structural phenomenon, which makes also the experience of racism in Mexico a specifically individual embodied experience (Saldivar, 2014; Moreno Figueroa, 2013).
3.5 Gender and mestizaje

Gall (2004) and Ruiz (2001) argue that women’s bodies have been crucial instruments in the creation of the homogenous mestiza nationalism. The mestiza consists of the modern, liberal, intellectual, rational and active (considered a white man) on one side, and the passive, feminine, traditional, emotional, nurturing (indigenous) woman on the other side (Navarrete, 2004; Gall 2004; Ruiz 2001). Women are the carriers of the tradition and the past of the new revolutionary Mexico *mestizo*, thus should embody a special kind of femininity of traidonality and naturality but not feminism (Gall, 20014; Ruiz, 2001). Women could adopt modern ways of behaviour and values when needed, but, unlike men, could never abandon their indigenous past (Gall, 2004; Ruiz, 2001). Gall (2004, p.247) argues that *mestizaje* was never intended for indigenous women, who instead squeezed to the bottom of the society through an extreme form of sexist and paternalist racism that has had particularly violent consequences for indigenous women.

Ruiz (2001) looks at the role of gender and feminism and race in the context of Mexican nationalism and nation-building. The author shows how in the Porifirian era studies considering women’s hymen were used to convert patriarchal and moral anxieties over women’s purity and virginity into scientific terms. Such studies were presented internationally and functioned as tools to enhance the national and international image of a modern Mexico combining objective and quantifiable knowledge with public health concerns (Ruiz, 2001). During the Revolutionary period and throughout the 1920s, distance was taken from scientific and biological facts deemed false and old-fashioned, to emphasize their re-definition through anthropological notions of culture (Ruiz, 2001). Accordingly, women were the source of pride for the Mexican nation embodying *femininity* that marked the specificity of Mexican women as different from “*feminists*” (associated with white foreign women and colonialism) and “*servants*” (Ruiz, 2001, p.149). The *feminine* woman was the ideal type of womanhood that would lead to the best material and intellectual development of the nation (Ruiz, 200, p.149). Race was also something that became important in sustaining the optimal Mexican femininity that existed due to a “strong, virile and resisting race” (Ruiz 2001, p.151).

According to Gargallo (2009), in the 19th and 20th century Latin American feminism took *mestizaje* as the point of departure for a liberation that could not be omitted. Doing that would
mean blindness to the domination over and violence against the women of the Americas (Gargallo, 2009, p. 31). The colonization established the hierarchical value system in which white and Spanish were put on the top, and the indigenous communities were overshadowed and their knowledge obliterated (Gargallo, 2009). Indeed, mestizaje during the colonial era was shaped by gender, race and class. White men had the power to control both the white women through marriage and sexuality as well as abuse and maintain informal sexual relations with darker skinned, lower class women (Wade, 2010, p. 27). However, according to Gargallo (2009) what happened in the process of institutionalization of the hegemonic feminism was that it became mestiza. This is to say, a feminism that accepted or tolerated indigenous and black feminists, but did not give space or consideration for their claims. Chicana feminist Norma Alarcón (1999 cited in Ruiz, 2001, p. 156) states that the feminist analyses have accepted a universal notion of a women which has also been crucial to the nationalist appropriation of the indigenous woman.

Saldana-Tejeda (2013) and Moreno Figueroa (2010) underline the importance of studying racism in Mexico beyond specified groups such as indigenous communities or black Mexicans, which the authors argue has characterized the scholarship on race in Mexico. Moreno Figueroa studies the everyday experience and workings of racism by exploring the feelings of beauty within the mestizo population that is the majority in Mexico and sets itself as the privileged point of reference (Monica Figueroa 2013, p. 139). She sees it as necessary for feminist research to study the experience of racism within mestizos and “name” the population that has gone unnamed (Monica Figueroa 2013, p. 139). According to her, this is important to make racism public and viewing it as a social and political problem that runs across the whole of society rather than as something that only affects a particular sector of society (Monica Figueroa 2013, p. 139). She concludes that feelings of being beautiful interact with racial discourses and the construction of the feminine (Monica Figueroa 2013, p. 149-150). Beautifulness or ugliness are not material, fixed, ahistorical properties of the body but produced in moments of interaction that take place in a particular racialized and gendered social context (Monica Figueroa 2013, p. 142). In her study on race, mestizaje, racism and gender among domestic workers, Saldana-Tejeda (2013) shows that the racism, discrimination and violence experienced by domestic workers is not limited to indigenous or black Mexicans. The majority of the domestic workers are not indigenous or black Mexicans, but identify as mestizas, yet they still experience racism, racialization and discrimination. The author argues that despite the
enormous importance of studies regarding racism among domestic workers who are indigenous or black Mexicans, the little interest by feminist and sociological scholarship in Mexico regarding racial issues among mestiza domestic workers only feeds into sustaining an idea of a false mestiza homogeneity (Saldana –Tejeda, 2013, pp. 79-80). She explains the indifference towards race and racism among mestiza women through a resistance towards reflecting on the subjective position from which the studies on race and racism are produced (Saldana-Tejeda 2013, pp. 75-76). Extending and recognizing racism among mestiza women would imply a questioning each scholar’s own position in the racial, gender and class hierarchy that would indeed destabilize the all-inclusive category of the mestiza (Saldana-Tejeda 2013).

4. Analytical discussion

4.1 Spaces of privilege and invisibilization
The study of race and racism that would address the functioning of racism within the mestiza population is not very widespread in Mexico. The response I got from everyone except one doctoral student, when asking about the existence of studies that would look at gender, race and class dynamics in the mestiza population, was that indeed such studies did not exist, except a few exemplary studies such as the work of Monica Moreno Figueroa (see background literature) as illustrated below.

No, no, no…there is no studies. That’s why the work of Monica Moreno Figueroa is so important and marks a turning point, as well as the work of Peter Wade who started talking about the complexity of mestizaje. But in Mexico, it was Monica who has done exemplary work on the issue and started to sort all this out. In Mexico there was a time after 1994-1995 when the academia poured over to the indigenous issue. There was nothing else a researcher could do, she had by all means study indigenous people. This is why no one was able to see the racism within mestizaje, and this is the huge importance of Monica’s work. (Interviewee 5, 8.7.2018)

I later requested the doctoral student (interviewee 2) who answered positively to my question whether she had come across feminist studies dealing with race and mestizaje, to send me some of the literature she had on the topic. However, none of the literature she provided me discussed race and gender beyond indigenous populations. The reasons for this could be that she misunderstood my question, though I find this unlikely as our conversation prior to the question had evolved around the historical construction of mestizaje and the inherent racism within the ideology of
mestizaje and blanqueamiento (whitening). However, something I took notice of in the interviews with interviewee 2 and interviewee 3, was that at times when I attempted to talk about race, racism and mestizaje, they would turn the discussion back to racism faced by indigenous communities. It seemed to me that despite acknowledging during the interviews that racism exists also within the mestiza population, they were unable to discuss race in any other way that in relation to indigenous people. This appears very clear in the following excerpt with interviewee 3.

Interviewer: Is there racism also toward mestizas? Or is it something that is only perpetuated toward indigenous people and black Mexicans?

Interviewee 3: One of the things that studies have shown is that there are social classes also within indigenous communities and between them. And that is when intersectionality can be useful. It is not only that you identify as indigenous, but other conditions add up to it. Advantages and disadvantages that form your place in the world. Intersectionality is not just a sum of pressures but it has also to do with the form that intersectionality and privileges are lived. This is something proposed by many indigenous women; to be indigenous; a woman and poor, is a material, lived and corporal condition that cuts across your life which positions you in the social organization (13.6.2018).

The citation above gives important insights into how intersectionality is not merely an abstract and discursive sum of social categories or pressures, but a lived condition by real subjects – a material and corporal experience. What I found intriguing in this excerpt was the obvious dissonance between the posed question and the answer. The interviewee did not answer the question but turned the focus to indigenous people and the articulation of different forms of discrimination based on intertwined social categories. Another interesting point that emerged in the interview with interviewee 3 was they way she attributed intersectionality as a tool of analysis that can be employed outside the capital urban area. In the below quote she talks about her intention to employ an intersectional perspective in her post-graduate study.

So I worked with young people, close to here there is an internment facility for young women who live in precarious situations. So I decided to work with them and I wanted to include the intersectional dimension in my thesis but I don’t think I succeeded for the type of young people there was, almost everyone was from Mexico City (13.6.2018)

The interviewee seems to conceive intersectionality as a tool of analysis applicable to a certain type of people but not others. In this case, she failed in her attempt to make an intersectional analysis because the objects of her study were from the capital area. Even if she admits that these young
women came from precarious conditions and therefore lived in the internment facility, making a claim of their gender (they are women) and class (they come from precarious conditions), she does not identify an opportunity to perform an intersectional analysis. Therefore, there is something that is absent in her object of study for her to be able to do an intersectional analysis, which I argue is race. It is not possible to do an intersectional analysis because these young women “lack race”. If we take into account the previous citation on page 33, we can see that the interviewee associates intersectionality as something useful for studying indigenous communities. She also talks about the class difference within indigenous communities. The only difference between her objects of study seems to be race. According to my interpretation, this resonated with a statement made in other interviews in the sense that racism has been conceptualized and studied as forms of discrimination toward indigenous people and communities as shown below.

In Mexico, racism started to be treated around the 80’s and 90’s and it was always racism against indigenous people and to a lesser extent against black Mexicans, because the majority do not even think that the latter exist, which is the craziest thing. It is interesting because those studies assumed that the only objects of racism where people and communities that were historically racialized. So there was not even a criticism against the processes of racialization of those groups. Actually, for a long time there was reluctance to even talk about racism because the aim of indigenismo was to convert everyone to mestiza, so a set of tools were adopted to deal with the “cultural problems” that impeded the transformation of indigenous to mestizos. On the contrary inequalities and discrimination analysed within the mestizo population, was treated as a class issue. They are peasants or proletariat, explained in Marxist or liberal terms as non racial social relations. There were no racial divisions but there were class divisions (Interviewee 1, 24.5.2018).

The confusion discussed above seems more understandable when examined from a historical perspective: a form of internalized idea of racism as something that is connected to ethnicity/culture which should be discussed in relation to indigenous persons and communities. As the discussion on race and racism does not concern mestizas, it is automatically turned towards indigenous when race and racism is taken up. There could also be a perception that if racism is not discussed in relation to indigenous, it is invisibilized or downplayed. The above quote by interviewee 1 affirms the statement made already in the background literature for this study: social discrimination taking place within mestizos has been and continues to be something conceived as a class issue, but which does not link with racism and which will be discussed further in the following paragraph.
In the literature review conducted for this study, it is possible to observe that women seem to be grouped in three categories: white and mestiza women; peasant and working class women; and indigenous and black Mexican women. In this tripartite division of the female existence the first category of white and mestiza womanhood is associated with racial and class privilege, while the third category of indigenous and black Mexican women are attributed racial discrimination, victimhood of racist practices and underprivileged class status and are also sites of class, race and gender articulations. Also, in the interviews the interviewees repeatedly referred to feminists who were not indigenous or black feminists, as white and mestiza feminists. The latter were equated with positions of power and western feminist ideas. Very little in general is said about working class feminism. What I find particularly intriguing in the discursive classification of women into these three categories from which their existence emanates, is that it implicitly makes claims of the racial belonging of the first and last group of women. The white and mestiza are grouped together as a synonym for hegemony, upper class socioeconomic privilege and liberal values and is considered by the interviewees to represent the normative idea that is imposed as the aspirational standard in the Mexican society which should be critically questioned. By referring to their occupation of the white or mestiza categories, a comment is made about their appearance and the position that this appearance entitles them to. In other words, white and mestiza are constructed as a space of privilege, which it no doubt can be. On the other hand, the indigenous and black are constructed as existing in direct opposition to the aforementioned category. They are victims of racism and different forms of discrimination articulated through race, gender and class. Mestiza in contrast to indigenous then becomes a term to denote privilege and power, constructing a binary between mestiza women and indigenous and black women. This is also affirmed by interviewee 1 who challenges these binary understandings between mestizo and indigenous that create a false assumption of homogeneity of each category.

In this contraposition indigenous – mestiza, there is always this underlying assumption that all the indigenous are the same, which is totally false, and on the other hand it is assumed that all the mestizos are the same. What I recognized was that there was also a huge social, cultural and historical diversity within mestizos that was completely neglected due to the idea of mestizaje (24.5.2018)

The peasant and working class women are only defined by their gender and by their class position or occupation. No comment is made on their racial positioning in the society, which I find risks
excluding them from any racial analysis that seeks to make oppression visible and understand how it operates. Of course peasant and working class women include also indigenous and black women, but the majority are women who do not form part of neither of the two categories. The women who are working class and peasants are only discursively categorized and interpellated based on their gender and class position, however at the same time they are considered to be mestizas, which is constructed discursively as a position of privilege in contrast to indigenous and black Mexicans. Their social positioning is analysed solely through their class and situadness in the production chain, as if they were completely detached from the historical construction of class relations that run along hierarchical organization of racial relations. I find that attributing a form of universal and unquestioned privilege to mestizaje risks making invisible the heterogeneity of social relations within that very category. What concerns me is that the complex discriminatory mechanisms – articulated through gender, race and class– experienced by women from lower classes will go unnoticed.

It is because of that why I prefer to use the tone of skin as the analytical category. I do not want to put everyone inside one category of race or ethnicity, because I want to look how these tones of skin interact with class. If you take what is considered socially peasants and/or working class women and dress them in different clothing and put them in upper class neighbourhood, then they may cease to be perceived as if they were in a subway. Or if you take someone eating in a fancy restaurant in an affluent neighbourhood in Mexico City and change their clothes and put them to the countryside, perhaps you will see them differently. It is all a perception, and our perception has been historically constructed through discourses of what it means to be indigenous, or mestiza or working class or peasant. Instead of talking about race, I try to look into the tone of the skin, but foremost I aim to focus on how the perception of the tone of skin or pigment is always perceived in relation to other social attributes, the class (18.7.2018)

Interviewee 6 makes an important observation that elucidates the way that different skin tones operate within mestizaje but which is difficult to perceive due to the totalizing nature of mestizaje as an ideology. Moreover, the interviewee points out the significance of class in the analysis of skin tones. She does not want to use race as a category because she considers it too rigid and static, disallowing the analysis of the hierarchical organization of different degrees of pigments or skin tones and the ways these interact with class. Thus in a way reproducing the blindness around the racial dynamics in the Mexican context. In this sense, mestizaje does not allow to view how social dynamics are organized along a hierarchical structure based on pigment of the skin, because it embraces a horizontal reading of society. That is why classism has been the go-to category to
explain discriminatory practices in Mexico: if everyone is ‘racially’ equivalent, then there is only class to orient oneself by. However, a pigment-oriented reading of social standing allows to ‘racialize’ class by ascribing patterns of status, economic and social positioning to certain skin tones. The research conducted by The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) released on 2017 substantiates this point. It consisted of an exercise of self-ascription based on a palette of colours which went from fair white to dark skin simultaneously asking the respondent information about her/his position on the labour market. The results showed that, indeed, the lighter the skin tone, the more affluent and well-positioned the people in Mexico tend to be (INEGI, 2017).

In this section I have argued that outside a few exceptions, the study of racism within mestizos has not yet been very popular in the Mexican feminist scholarship, which has focused on studying race and racism within particular groups – the indigenous communities and more recently black Mexicans. Social discriminations taking place within mestizos have been analysed solely as class issues. This is exemplified by how women are divided into three categories in which white and mestiza women as well as indigenous and black women are discursively constructed as existing in binary opposition to each other. I have observed that these two categories include a comment on the racial positioning of the women included in these categories, whereas women who are categorized as working class or peasant women disappear from any racial analysis, as they are categorized only based on their class position. This is problematic as it ignores the interplay between tone of skin and class dynamics as well as consolidates the idea of mestizaje as a homogenous category of privilege which –as shown in the literature review– makes it difficult to recognize racism as a political and public problem affecting society as a whole and not only groups that have been historically racialized (Moreno Figueroa, 2013). No doubt, many mestizos and especially the lighter skinned mestizos do enjoy a position of privilege in the Mexican society in contrast to indigenous and black persons. However, if the privilege was universal and homogenous, and if racism as a form of social discrimination disappears when one becomes mestizo, it would then mean that anyone could enjoy a position of privilege if she/he decided to become mestizo by adopting a certain identity, values and ways of being. However, this is not the case. It ignores the inherently racist logics of mestizaje on which it is founded and which will be further explored in the next section.
4.1 Articulations of gender, class and race

It is an ideology that assumes the domination of white men over women who are darker skinned. *Mestizaje* is based on the brutal myth of Cortez who violated Malinche. It is a celebration of the masculine power, even today this idea that a group of Spanish men could create a new race by engaging with a lot of indigenous women is insane. It is supposed that the Spanish had 100 partners each and they inseminated everyone… it is like this colonial male fantasy. I think that in there is like an elimination of indigenous masculinity. For example, if you read Octavio Paz’s *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, the only indigenous man that is talked well of is Cuauhtémoc who is dead and then he talks about how all the indigenous women were violated even in the cases when the women might have wanted to sleep with the Spanish. The women have no agency whatsoever, they are portrayed as lacking any capacity to decide who they want or do not want to be, the only thing that matters is the dominant male desire, the female desire is absent. Indigenous masculinity disappears, what can exist is mestiza masculinity and indigenous femininity (Interviewee 1, 24.5.2018)

Interviewee 1 demonstrates how *mestizaje* is a patriarchal ideology founded on the superiority of a man over a woman, implying specific ideas of gender, gender roles, femininities and masculinities. According to him, *mestizaje* is based on a patriarchal ideology that establishes the dominance of white men over everyone else, especially the black or dark-skinned women. In the process, the possibility of an indigenous masculinity is erased, only able to exist in the past. However, despite the erasure of the indigenous masculinity, the interviewee observed that what did exist was a profound distrust towards men who are *morenos* and from lower classes, who are attributed an immoral and aggressive masculinity. The last part of the quote resonates also with Gall’s (2004) claim that *mestizaje* was never intended for women, who were seen as passive and unable to ever distance themselves from their indigenous past, and who had to indeed play the part of preserving the tradition and the indigenous values crucial in the creation of the superior race that *mestizaje* is believed to be. From a de-colonial perspective, I find that de-constructing *mestizaje* becomes essential for a strategy of liberation from what Lugones (2010) calls “the coloniality of gender”. Furthermore, the de-colonial options suggest that *coloniality* works through the creation and reproduction of racial hierarchies of difference. These hierarchies redefine all spheres of life and society in a way that positions the colonizer and the white as superior (Mendoza, 2016). As I have shown throughout the paper, *mestizaje* has not abolished relations of racial discrimination that emanate from its colonial history. Rather the ideology of *mestizaje* has masked them by adhering to explications that take class or culture as the point of departure for analysing social difference while simultaneously maintaining systems of racial differentiation somewhat intact (Navarrete,
2016; Mendoza, 2016; Moreno Figueroa & Saldivar, 2016; 2013; 2010; Saldivar; 2014). In the following paragraphs, I will discuss further how mestizaje reproduces racial hierarchies of difference by offering some more concrete examples on how gender, class and race interact in Mexico through the spheres of beauty and publicity.

4.1.1 Beauty
Racialized beauty standards were taken up in several interviews as an important mechanism of exclusion and reproduction of unequal racial and gender relations.

If there should be gender equality, the first that should be done is to de-racialize female beauty. I mean, as long as the positive stereotypes of female beauty are associated with whiteness, and there is no recognition of the value of non-white bodies, there cannot be gender equality. This is a work that has to be done also by women. The feminist movement in Mexico should be the first one to be working with issues related to racialized beauty norms because these are ideals that exclude de facto 80% of the women in Mexico. These beauty standards are oppressive in the whole world but in Mexico they are twice as oppressive, because you have to be both anorexic and skinny but also white and the majority of women in Mexico simply do not align with these ideals and so they are excluded from femininity or are relegated to a “second class femininity” (Interviewee 1, 24.5.2018)

The citation gives a clear example on how racialization operates. As seen in the background literature, racialization occurs when bodies and facial features are organized in a hierarchical value system. Racialized beauty standards contribute to de-valuation and de-humanization of non-white female bodies which translates into gender inequality and in its most extreme form into gender-based violence. Mestizaje and the aspirational idea of blanqueamiento/whitening transform the characteristics of a minority to become the norm for the majority, and those of the majority as something other and inferior to be compared against the norm. However, dark skin can be perceived as beautiful and desired as well through its “exoticisation” exemplified by interviewee 3 in her personal account.

when I was a child, that was when it hurt me but afterwards I understood that it was something exotic and it helped me with getting laid and so. Nowadays I consider myself super beautiful and I love myself very much (13.6.2018)

The way the interviewee’s perception and appreciation her physical appearance has changed over times echoes similarity with Moreno Figueroa’s finding on the fluctuation and relationally of beauty (Moreno Figueroa, 2013). Ideas about what is beautiful or what is ugly are not static nor unchangeable or an inherent property of a body but are produced in the interaction of the individual
with the social in a particular gendered and racialized moment of relations (Moreno Figueroa, 2013). Furthermore, the “exotism” of the dark skin expressed by interviewee 3 can also be related to the idea of hyper visibility of non-white bodies in a beauty context that is orientated towards whiteness. As elaborated in the background literature, *mestizaje* is about engaging in processes of whitening and of “passing” to “this side” rather than remaining on the “other side” (Moreno Figueroa 2010), or what Ahmed (2007) calls whiteness as an orientation. While whiteness is the beauty standard as well as the normative aspiration – the norm is not to be white but to be dark skinned, as most people in Mexico have darker skin tones. One would then think that being white would mean standing out and being hyper visible. Indeed, this is the case in the sense that, as will be seen further on, in Mexico the publicity is almost entirely white. White is visibly overrepresented in media and white skin gets often noted in public spaces. However, this is different from the hyper visibility attached to dark skin. A non-white body becomes hyper visible as it stands out in the spaces –such as the space of beauty– that is discursively constructed and oriented around whiteness and usually only available to those who are able to pass to “this side” (Ahmed, 2007). A dark skin then does not have a value of beauty per se, only through its occasional acceptance as “exotic” and different, through its standing out in a space that is oriented toward whiteness. In this sense challenging beauty standards becomes an important space for political action and transformation.

### 4.1.2 Publicity and media

In all the interviews, publicity and media were raised as an important space in which racialized beauty standards and the hierarchies of racialized difference were reproduced. Even if it is not specific to the Mexican context, the absence of other than white and middle and upper middle-class persons in the publicity is certainly striking in Mexico. Interviewee 5 advances as an example how ideas about motherhood and norms of good mothering are formed and circulated through advertisements and media.

Publicity in Mexico is extremely racist, for example there is a clear discourse in which the “good mother” in Mexico is a mother who consumes and buys. Consumerism and motherhood, is something analysed extensively in Anglo Saxon countries, but in Mexico this good mother is the one that consumes the most and best. It is crossed by race because in Mexico the advertisements define this mother as completely Anglo Saxon. I mean, they are not even white Mexicans or mestizas. Or you might find female figures that are mestizas, but generally that is only when they live in these closed house blocks, living in these areas makes you more white somehow. It is a green eyed white moth er that is beyond the white Mexican woman, and that is the model you should aspire to be. The white privilege is everywhere and in everything. So of course there is this pressure
on motherhood that has to do with middle class motherhood that not everyone has access to…in this country having babies successfully means having white babies (Interviewee 5, 8.7.2018)

She denotes how gender, race and class interact in the ways that motherhood is valued based on the capacity of the mother to consume, and the mothers who can consume successfully are white mothers. Motherhood and reproduction are no doubt attributes that are strongly linked to femininity and tied to womanhood. In a context where 43.6% of the population lives under the poverty line, and where as stated by interviewee 2 “poverty is both racialized and sexualized” (Interviewee 2, 13.6.2018), the women unable to fulfill the white upper middle class consumerist ideas about the good mother become excluded from femininity linked to positive motherhood. The interviewee makes also a comment about residential areas that have a “whitening effect”. The interviewee argues that usually women in the publicity are not even Mexicans but Europeans and when mestiza women are represented in publicity they are portrayed in spaces or around things that “make you more white”. This is an excellent example of how whiteness is not necessarily tied to the skin color but to inhabiting spaces of whiteness that entitles those occupying these spaces to privilege. However, it is important to note again the importance of “passing” and engaging in processes of whitening implied in mestizaje. This is because this possibility to pass denotes the ambiguous and fluctuating nature of whiteness in Mexico. This very possibility means that there is also a possibility that the privilege you have managed to gain by yourself can be taken away if you do not inhabit whiteness well enough (Moreno Figueroa, 2010).

So yes, there is a process of a complete invisibilization of diversity, or rather a visibilization of one type of body, one type of being and behaving, and that is the norm. It is bad, because if you don’t talk about it, if you don’t see it, if you don’t denounce it, well you legitimate it a lot and then these types of discrimination that people with darker skin tones are not let into the restaurants for example are reproduced (13.6.2018)

The public sphere, of which media ostensibly is part of, is seemingly “open” to everyone, yet shaped by relations of power (Sisyanga, 2014). It is a space that is both idealized and exclusionary, where ideas are shaped and made available as well as voices made heard or un-heard (Sisyanga, 2014). This is debated by interviewee 2 who expands on how the lack of diversity and representation in Mexico’s advertisement and media landscape both normalizes exclusion and reproduces structural racism and translates it into everyday interactions. In the broad category of media, I find that advertisements should be examined carefully. Advertisements are repetitive, almost impossible to ignore and they intervene in other communication processes (Freitas, 2013),
which in my opinion inserts an extra dimension to their powerfulness. What is advertised, for whom, when and where, are no doubt steered by commercial and political aims. It is typical of advertisement that it aims to create a dissonance between the factual reality and a fictional elsewhere, an idea of change, where the viewer should aspire to reach (Freitas, 2013). Often, advertisements are focused on feeding their readers with continuous information about the parameters of what is valued in a society, what we ought to be and should hope for. This is also raised by interviewee 2 who claims that what is considered as the aspirational model is “the white, the European and the American, of which the advertisement landscape is a great example of” (13.7.2018). Indeed, mestizaje is constructed around a liberal idea of social mobility, change and transformation that is not available only through biological mixing, but rather through a cultural, linguistic, social and identitarian change (Wade, 2010; Navarrete, 2004). Yet, as noted by Wade, the context in which this supposedly inclusive transformation that is accessible to anyone who decides to become part of it takes place, is still organized along racial hierarchies and oriented towards whiteness. This makes mestizaje an extremely powerful methodology of coloniality that sustains the contemporary social relations of race in Mexico (Moreno Figueroa, 2010).

In this section I have attempted to expand on the racist logics on which mestizaje is built on, rather than being a horizontal and inclusive system of social organization or an automatic door to a better life. I have tried to illustrate the workings of mestizaje by giving examples on how beauty standards and publicity work together to reproduce hierarchies of differentiation based on skin colour and its relation to class. Mestizaje implies a desire and a personal responsibility toward upward social mobility through processes of blanqueamiento/whitening, which positions the white at the top while in vertical lines organizes other tones of skin as inferiors, de-valuating and de-humanizing non-white bodies. At the same time, mestizaje has succeeded in hiding the apparent racism and processes of racialization by binding Mexicaness or Mexican national identity to being “mixed” and thus equal. However, as it will be seen in the next section, the illusion of homogeneity within mestizos has impeded recognizing that these logics of differentiation organize the whole society and affect everyone, which has limited the study of race and racism in Mexico. I will now proceed to the last part of the analytical discussion and zoom into the role of academic feminist knowledge production, in particular its production of certain discourses on race and racism while excluding others.
4.2 Academic spaces as institutions of white orientation

For example, the abortion issue… in Guanajuato you are sentenced to 30 years in prison, but if you look at who are the women that are sentenced, they are not middle class whiter mestiza women. The white middle-class mestiza woman can abort in any state of the country with no problem and with a private and adequate safe service but the poor woman on the contrary is sent to prison…and there is a pattern of colour there. There is a tremendous discrimination in terms of health and access to justice, a discrimination that is not talked about, it is not named and that is the problem because then it is not possible to fight against it either (Interviewee 5, 8.7.2018)

Interviewee 5 asserts that the obstacle for mitigating racial discrimination is the absence of discussion about it. She illustrates how racial discrimination in Mexico is also structurally institutionalized through public policies and exemplifies this by the interaction of class, race and gender in the access to reproductive health services and rights. The power of *mestizaje* lies in its powerful illusion of *homogeneity* as interviewee 1 says “talking about racism within mestizos has been a taboo, because the myth of a supposed homogeneity has been particularly strong (24.5.2018)”. This powerful effect of the mestizaje discourse has also obscured the link between race and class.

I think that lately there has been an increasing interest in talking about racism. Talking about racism within feminism has opened doors for more recent researchers like myself, though there is a shortage of studies that would combine the study of race or race and class. Class is implied but its study together with race and racism is not explicit. So all this work done by feminist in Mexico have allowed me to explore the issues that I think are interesting- talk about class and making the study of it explicit. Also, from my point of view there are lot of studies within the field of gender studies that focus on indigenous women. I think that is very important and should be further studied because they have been very forgotten (Interviewee 6, 18.7.2018)

The feminist scholarship contribution to opening up the discussion on race and racism in Mexico has been vital as demonstrated by interviewee 6. In the literature review, I showed how race and racism were issues that were brought to the discussion, especially by indigenous women. This can partly explain why studies focusing on race and racism in Mexico have focused on indigenous and black Mexican populations. These studies have been extremely important and they should not be neglected. However, what intrigues me is why the academic discussion on race has only focused on historically racialized populations –indigenous and more recently black Mexican populations– even if the academic spaces are repeatedly said to lack the representation of persons from these
groups of people. Indeed, I asked the interviewees to elaborate on problematic aspects of feminist knowledge production in Mexico and two major themes emerged; lack of representation of persons from marginalized groups; and the absence of self-situativeness and questioning of privileges. Interviewee 4 observed that a big problem with feminist knowledge production practices in Mexico, is that it is produced from above. For example, in the department of indigenous studies at X university, everyone in the faculty board is white. There are very few persons from marginalized groups that manage to make it into academia. The interviewee maintained that she does not want to teach the indigenous feminist anything, rather they attempts to criticize the white and mestiza feminist tradition through their experience as black, lesbian, non-binary and fat person. This is not something that only happens in relation to indigenous people but also for example with the trans community. Often, feminism comes and tells what these communities’ needs should be or what actions they should take, but the agendas do not match with the self-identified needs of the trans community (Analytical memo, interviewee 4, 4.7.2018). The interviewee suggests that the feminist knowledge production in Mexico continues to be characterized as top-down rather than emerging from the persons who are the objects of knowledge production of the dominant group (Analytical memo, interviewee 4, 4.7.2018). Academic spaces are spaces of knowledge production but they are also spaces of privilege and in Mexico they are spaces to which most people do not have access to. The majority who are part of the academic communities and produce academic knowledge possess certain privileges that have made it possible for them to participate in the academy, as shown in the quote by interviewee 5 below.

The Mexican academy is really crossed by gender, race and class. All the higher end positions, at least in the majority of the universities, are occupied by men who are those who take the decisions, the principals, or are in other positions of academic power and this has obviously consequences for the academy. And when there are women, generally they are white women or whiter mestiza women. Since three years back, I participate in this network for anti-racist work and I remember how I in a meeting told to one of my colleagues that “hey there is something important we should put attention to, we are supposed to be the network against xenophobia and racism but there is not even one indigenous person in the network “. The only indigenous I saw was the one in the poster. I did not see any indigenous academic in the network. So my colleague replied that “well we have a group for indigenous studies within the network”. I mean the academy is a space for reflection, and we have an anti-racist network and there is no indigenous academic participating… but there

4 The recording of the interview failed and therefore it is not possible to provide a direct quote from the interview. The information is based on the notes taken during the interview.
5 The name of the university is maintained anonymous due to ethical considerations
is an indigenous study group that is not represented by indigenous? Now I do not subscribe to that idea that a white or European researcher for example could not study indigenous communities, like you for example, I do not believe in this kind of situational form or stand point, that you have to represent what you study, but I do think there should be a serious reflection in the academy including feminism who is occupying which positions and who is represented (Interviewee 5, 8.7.2018)

According to interviewee 4, the focus of white and mestiza feminism on gender is problematic, as it classifies the world in binaries typical to occidental thinking. She sees binary thinking as a root cause for oppressive structures based on marking difference, producing the “other” in relation to the norm. Everything else that does not fit the binaries established, for example trans people, are invisibilised and excluded. Also, white and mestiza feminism focuses on gender in Mexico, invisibilising other social categories and structures that form the conditions that non-white and non-mestiza women live in (Analytical memo, interviewee 4 4.7.2018). A focus on gender indicates a strive toward a change in gender relations as the focus of feminist research in Mexico. However, this is unlikely to happen if other forms of discriminatory processes are not taken into account, as said by interviewee 1 “Inequality and racism reproduce each other and they feed each other. Establishing equal relations in whatever sphere, whether it is between genders, classes, cultures…one of the major obstacles is racism. (25.5.2018)”. I want to relate this to what was elaborated in the background literature: race and racism are themes that cannot be studied neutrally, but are in themselves created and sustained through academic knowledge production as well as inform the practices and relationships present in the academia rendering some actions possible and other unthinkable (Wade, 2013). Given that academic institutions are only accessible to a certain strata of the society, of which the majority is white or lighter mestizos, it is difficult to deny that race and racism would not inform the academic relationships and practices in contemporary Mexico. This means that also certain reflection and discourses are possible while others are not. One of the missing reflections that does not seem to be possible in contemporary academic discourses on race and racism is the discussion on racism within mestizos. In several testimonies, this absence was attributed to the lack of self-reflexivity in academic knowledge production in Mexico as demonstrated by interviewee 1.

I think auto-reflection is even discouraged, in my work I always intend to precise where I am talking from, but that is not so common. I have even felt that I have been breaking taboos. It’s part of these unquestioned privileges. If you are in a privileged space, which the university is, then you
tend to think that your privilege is earned and it is not open to discussion. Questioning your privileges is not something that is seen essential for critical thinking (25.4.2018)

Privileges remain unrecognized and unquestioned on one hand because privileges in Mexico are considered to be based on merits, something earned; and on the other hand because the identities of those who do have access to academia have not been historically racialized but have gone unnamed. The idea of privileges as merits appears consistent with the liberal aspirational idea of upward social and class mobility that can be achieved through employing strategies to become white (Moreno Figueroa, 2010). One of the patterns that emerged were the interviewees’ stories and reflections on how they themselves gained a racialized consciousness or a consciousness about race which they lacked as exemplified by interviewee 5.

So when I was 19 my parents needed to take me out of the university, there was an economic crisis and we could not afford to pay my studies anymore. So I go to the U.S to work, protected, it was not this kind of very hard migration as some people in Mexico live it. I worked as a nanny and at some point also as a house cleaner. When I arrived in the U.S I realized that I had a racialized identity which I understand now was not only due to me being Mexican but also due to the work I was doing, the nanny job. It was very overwhelming and it made me think that this racialized identity that I had in Mexico, which was super privileged but which I had not noted. Like a privilege of not noticing your race, to not have to name yourself (8.7.2018)

These experiences of feeling out of place and disorientated led to the acquisition of a racialized consciousness, that 3 out of the 6 interviewees for this study had not had before the experience of discomfort when they went abroad or when they did research in indigenous communities. They also considered themselves to be privileged in Mexico, by both their skin colour and class positions. In the testimony above, it is possible to observe how the interviewee was socially ascribed a racialized identity when she went abroad that she had not had in Mexico. I find this to be an essential point because it shows the invisibility of race for those who enjoy its privileges (Moreno Figueroa, 2010; Ahmed, 2007). Consequently, if the majority of persons who occupy spaces of academic knowledge production belong to that group of people who “do not have to name themselves”, it is unlikely that race and racism would be their priority topics, let alone, topics that should be studied in relation to their own racial group, one that is not considered to even exist. As said by Ahmed (2007) institutions, such as academic institutions, function as spaces that orientate and are shaped by what is inside them.
In this final part of the analytical discussion, I have intended to look into dynamics present in academic feminist knowledge production and how that intertwines with larger power structures in the society as well as influences certain discourses on race and racism while excluding others. Indigenous feminism has been an important space in which discussions on race and visibilization of racism has been initiated and consolidated. Also, academic feminism in Mexico has been at the forefront of raising racial issues and racism to the public discussion. However, these discussions have tended to have an exclusive focus on indigenous populations, and more recently black Mexicans. This is curious, as simultaneously the academic spaces remain largely inaccessible for indigenous and black persons, and are spaces that are overrepresented by white or lighter mestizos. In other words, race has been studied especially in relation to indigenous populations by an academia that does not represent indigenous populations. At the same time, the access to academia is also articulated through gender, race and class dynamics present in the mestizos themselves, as the majority of the mestizos producing knowledge in the academia are white or lighter mestizos and not non-white mestizos. It is also argued that the detached and singular focus on gender has held back the discussion on how other social categories of differentiation such as race interact with gender. Furthermore, the feminist knowledge production seems to be characterized by a lack of self-reflection, situadeness and recognition of privileges that can be attributed to: the idea of privileges as merits that characterizes the discourse on social mobility implied in mestizaje; and the non-racialized identities of those involved in academic knowledge production. Based on the interview material and the background literature, it is possible to discern that the feminist scholarship in Mexico does not operate in a vacuum, but forms part of a system that consolidates the illusion of mestiza homogeneity and reproduces ignorance on mechanisms of racial differentiation by overlooking the interaction of tone of skin and class in the knowledge produced; as well as by “outsourcing” the racial problem as something that is only relevant to a part of the population rather than something that penetrates all the social relations in contemporary Mexico.

5. Concluding discussion
To sum up, in this study I have attempted to explore the ways in which the feminist scholarship in Mexico has related to race and racism. I have given insights into the historical trajectory of the development of Mexican feminisms as well as shown how feminists from indigenous communities have been at the forefront of challenging the hegemonic feminism’s blindness to the multiple
systems of oppression, including racism lived by indigenous women and men. I have also elaborated on the development of an emerging, yet narrow scholarship, that has started to approach race and racism by taking *mestizaje* as their starting point rather than focusing on indigenous and black Mexicans, which has characterized much of the scholarship on race and racism in Mexico. The scholars exploring racial relations and *mestizaje* suggest that it is essential to acknowledge that race is the structuring principle of *mestizaje* and that racism takes place also within the so called homogenous *mestizos*. The literature review was completed with first-hand testimonies of six Mexican scholars that specialize in feminism, gender studies and/or work closely with questions related to race and racism.

Based on the literature and the interviews, women seem to be usually grouped in three categories; white and mestiza women, working class and peasant women and indigenous and black Mexican or afrodescendant women. In this division, white and mestiza women are positioned in a space of privilege in contrast to indigenous and black Mexican women who are marginalized, racialized and excluded. It is possible to see how a commentary is made on the racial categorization of both white/mestiza women and indigenous and black women. The peasant and working class women disappear from any racial analysis, since they are only interpellated by their gender and class position. However, the articulation of race, gender and class and the resulting exclusions and discriminations are not limited to indigenous and black women, but extend also to working class and peasant women, which includes indigenous and black women but also mestiza women. Yet, as mestiza is discursively constructed as homogenous category of a universal privilege, this impedes from accurately seeing the workings of power and colour of skin that interact with class and gender present within *mestizaje*. This observation can be considered as unique to this study, or at least it has not emerged in any of the literature read and/or included in this study. Analysing social discrimination in Mexico has usually taken the form of analysing class or cultural and/or ethnical differences that can also be conceptualized as racism of difference. This can explain the still ongoing tendency to exclude mestiza women from lower classes from any racial analysis. This was exemplified also by the confusions that surfaced in the usefulness of intersectionality for the analysis of mestiza women who came from precarious material conditions but who were not part of indigenous communities, confirming the propositions of some of the literature used in this study.
Despite the narrow feminist scholarship that looks into the workings of race, gender and class within mestizos, the articulation of these transcends society as a whole and is not limited to particular groups. The articulation of these were exemplified in the interviews through the workings of beauty, publicity, motherhood, femininity and masculinity as well as access to social services. Furthermore, the organization of bodies and facial features along a hierarchical value system through racialized and gendered beauty standards that affect especially women, and aspirational ideas of blanqueamiento/whitening, are reinforced through publicity, de-valuing and de-humanizing non-white bodies in the process. Whiteness correlates but is not automatically associated with white or light skin colour. It links with inhabiting spaces of whiteness that are spaces of specific characteristics, bodies, values, ways of being and doing that are tied to privilege. This means also that class becomes inexorably linked to racial analysis as the physical attributes gain meaning and fluctuate along class privileges. A person with darker skin can be considered or pass as lighter if she/he has access to and/or adopts the signifiers associated with whiteness, however not everyone can pass or has the socioeconomic resources to become or pass as lighter. For feminist scholarship that aims to transform gender inequalities, I consider it important to put attention to the extremely patriarchal and racist origins of the ideology of mestizaje founded on the superiority of white men over white women, non-white women and non-white men.

As I have shown throughout the paper, mestizaje has not done away with systems of racial differentiation, but has obscured the history from which they emanate under a national discourse of a homogenous mestiza nation, which contains an idea of “improvement” or “change” toward something “better” – the better meaning whiteness. From this perspective, de-constructing mestizaje becomes an imperative for the transformation of colonial practices that persist still today and form the social relations in contemporary Mexico. I do not attempt to state that Mexican feminisms have not studied race and racism. Indeed, I have shown that feminism and especially indigenous feminisms that initiated the discussions on race have been an important field in which racial issues have been brought up, debated and contested. Its impact cannot be emphasized enough. Neither I aim to claim that feminist scholarship in Mexico has not critically reflected on mestizaje and its influence on the discriminations faced by indigenous communities and black Mexicans. However, I find that it falls short in addressing the racial discriminations that take place within the very category of mestizaje. Based on the interviews and the literature review, it is also
possible to conclude that there does not exist much feminist research on racism within *mestizaje*. The combined findings of the literature review and the empirical material collected, indicate that academic institutions are spaces in which *whiteness as an orientation* and the dynamics of power and colour of skin are sustained and reproduced which can explain the lack of studies that would critically reflect on racism and *mestizaje*. The reason that this is problematic is that when racism within *mestizaje* is not tackled, then the position of *mestizaje* as the homogenous category of privilege is affirmed, not challenged. It is the illusion of homogeneity that is at the very core of creating a discourse of a post-racial society where social inequalities can only be analysed through class and culture and which impedes people from seeing the racial hierarchies and racism that persist in the Mexican society as a whole. Inequalities sustain and feed into each other and therefore it is difficult to imagine gender equality without simultaneously confronting racial and class inequalities. This study has clearly established how gender is not an isolated social category but is articulated through race and class. Therefore, studying race and racism should be among the top priorities for feminist scholarship. If racial relations that exist within *mestizaje* (and not only in opposition to it) were indeed made noticeable, would it make a difference to racial relations and racism in Mexico? And what would that mean for gender relations? This is a question that has yet remained understudied in the theorization of race in Mexican feminist scholarship.
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Annex 1

Transcription of Interviewee 1

Yo creo que hasta hace unos 10-15 años, se trataba muy poco el tema de racismo, poco por el mito/ideología de mestizaje que hacía pensar que dentro de la sociedad mexicano mayoritaria por así decirlo, los mestizos, no podía haber racismo porque todos éramos de la misma raza, por un lado y que los grupos que quedaban afuera del mestizaje, los indios o los afro-americanos, esos eran los que eran víctimas de racismo.

Incluso había una reticencia de hablar del racismo contra los indígenas, como finalmente la premisa del indigenismo era de integrarlos, los diferencias entre indígenas y no indígenas no eran raciales sino culturales, hay todo un ambigüedad ahí, que hizo que el tema del racismo se empezó tratar hasta los 80 y 90 en México, y cuando se empezó a tratar, siempre era racismo contra los indígenas y en menor medida hacia los afro-mexicanos, porque la mayoría no piensan que ni siquiera existen que es lo más fuerte. Es curioso porque esos estudios de racismo, asumían que los únicos objetos del racismo eran poblaciones históricamente racializadas. Entonces ni siquiera hubo una crítica hacia los procesos de racialización de esos grupos...

Es un problema de cultura, entonces el indigenismo desarrolló una medida de herramientas para lidiar con los problemas culturales, y covertirla en mestizos. Y en cambio los problemas entre los mestizos es una problemática de clase. Son campesinos, obreros. Eso se explicaba en términos marxistas o en términos liberales, como relaciones sociales no raciales. No había divisiones raciales entre los mexicanos pero sí había divisiones de clase. Todavía hace 15 años existía la idea de que todos los mestizos eran racialmente homogéneos pero que las diferencias entre ellos eran socioeconómicas, ni siquiera culturales.

Lo que he percibido, ese racismo entre nosotros, no solo con los indígenas que no creo que no existe, sino el chiste es que no hemos hablado de eso. Hablar del racismo entre los mestizos era un tabú, porque el mito del homogeneidad mestiza era particularmente fuerte.

En este contraposición indígena – mestizo siempre se asume que todos los indios son iguales, que es absolutamente falsa, y por otro lado se asume también que todos los mestizos son iguales. Me di cuenta que también dentro de los mestizos hay una diversidad cultural, histórica que era negada por la idea del mestizaje.

Ha sido los últimos 10 años que hemos tenido más herramientas de hablar de racismos, últimos 5 años que se admite que el racismo existe también dentro de los mestizos y no solo contra indígenas o afro-americanos.

Yo no soy un experto en la historia del feminismo Mexicano, pero tengo la impresión que feministas Mexicanas, deben haber asumido la idea que somos mestizas, porque aparte todas ellas leyeron a Octavio Paz y lo parecen tomar muy en serio Octavio Paz, lo que se me hace muy curioso, me parece increíble. Y como asumían que ellas eran mestizas.
Annex 2

Examples of coding and Analytical memo

PRIVILEGIO DE NO NOMBRARSE
AUSENCIA DE AUTO CUESTIONAMIENTO
RACISMO PROBLEMA DE LOS
HISTORICAMENTE RACIALIZADOS
SI LA PERSONA NO ES INDIGENA
NO HAY RACISMO
JUVENTUD URBANA NO AFECTADA POR
RAZA
MESTIZAJE
DECIR NO SE DE QUE RAZA SOY
YO NO TRABAJO RACISMO, TRABAJO MESTIZOS
WHITE AND MESTIZA FEMINISM
" DE NIÑA ES CUANDO ME DOLIÓ, Y DESPUÉS ME DI CUENTA QUE FUE ALGO EXÓTICO"

FILTRATION OF RACIALIZED POWER
TO FEMINIST KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

RESEARCH FROM ABOVE
NORMALIZATION OF PRIVILEGED
LACK OF AUTO REFLEXIVITY
LACK OF REPRESENTATION OF HISTORICALLY RACIALIZED GROUPS

CREATION OF RACIALIZED CATEGORIES: STEREOTYPING;
IDEALIZING

IDENTIDAD (NO)
RACIALIZADA

NON RACIALIZED IDENTITIES
FOCUS ON GENDER STAND POINT FEMINISM

RESEARCH FROM ABOVE
Interviewee 2 had not been exposed nor reflected on her own much on the racial questions before her work in indigenous communities in Chiapas. Coming into contact with indigenous communities then she became aware of processes of racism and racialization. She says she had this discourse of Mexico as a indigenous nation, but soon realized that it was a racist indigenous nation. This could be connected to what she mentions previously on the invisibilization of race through mestizaje and the idea of mestiza. She had not reflected about racial issues before coming into contact specifically with indigenous communities, even if she had lived her whole life in a society divided according to racial lines that is more transcendent of being part of a specific ethnicity or not. However, she also considers that when doing research with and on indigenous communities, despite the relation of friendship established, she feels she had been condescending toward them. She somehow still distanced herself from them and positioned herself in a position of superiority. She sees that this was due to idealization of indigenous communities to which many white and mestiza researchers recur. This is important when talking about feminist knowledge production and the perpetuating or challenging racial dynamics. I can myself relate to the feeling of wanting simultaneously to be sensitive and a” good white person” that is conscious about her position in the power structures, instead of treating persons and persons and equals, you recur into this kind over compensating kindness that is more infantilizing and paternalizing than respectful and transformative. It becomes Othering, doing race, making difference.