

**Mestiza Double Consciousness Structuring the experiences of difference of Latinas in
Amsterdam**

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Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS)

By: Paula Marquina Gurrea

Student Number: 742157

Supervisor: Dr. Rogier van Reekum

Second Reader: Dr. Bonnie E French

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I want to take a moment to acknowledge the ongoing genocides and overwhelming pain and violence that are taking place daily around the world. It is my hope that we can work towards a world of liberation for all, from all systems of oppression.

Una lucha de fronteras I A Struggle of Borders

*Because I, a mestiza,
continually walk out of one culture
and into another,
because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me habitan simultáneamente.
(Gloria Anzaldúa, 1999)*

Abstract

This research project explores the role of Mestiza Double Consciousness (MDC) in structuring the experiences of difference among a group of thirteen Latinas in Amsterdam. As Latinas comprise a small percentage of the Dutch population and are perceived to be easy migrants, little attention is given to the complex experiences faced by this group. By further understanding Mestiza Consciousness and Double Consciousness as components of MDC, it becomes possible to see how it serves as a tool and space for navigating and moving between contradictory worlds, where constant negotiation and translation are essential. This research project aims to redefine the complex experiences of Latina migrants by combining various methods, including *cafecitos* (resembling interviews), *group picnics* (similar to focus groups), and inventive methodologies, by composing a textile exquisite cadaver, and autoethnographic reflections. The overlapping experiences that display MDC are further explored in four main themes: first, the desire and rejection of privilege, especially noticeable through changes in social class and one's own race. Second, belonging and identity, which highlight experiences of othering and (self-)sexualization. Third, MDC negotiating with silence, conformity and constant proof of deservingness as migrant debt. Lastly, MDC as a strength and empowering form of living. Taken together, these sections highlight the powerful and distinct perspectives MDC provides, showing that although some feelings and experiences can be shared and communally understood, there is not only one experience of MDC by Latinas in Amsterdam, but instead continual individual negotiation between distinct identities, histories, and cultures.

Keywords: Latina migration, Mestiza Double Consciousness, Migrant debt, Privilege, Translating

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Introduction

In the face of overwhelming gender violence and deeply rooted patriarchal cultures in Latin America (Pagan & Wilson Center, 2022), many women view countries like the Netherlands as promising spaces to build a better life. It is estimated that approximately 67% of migrant women settle in countries with higher gender equality than their home countries (Marroni, 2012). Approximately 1.5% of the Dutch population and 7% of all migrants in the Netherlands were immigrants from Latin America in 2021 (Dražanová, 2022); of these, women comprise two-thirds of the migrants (Withaar, 2024). Since Latinas do not constitute a statistically significant percentage of the population and appear to be well-integrated into Dutch society (Dražanová, 2022; Withaar, 2024), as good migrants, our experiences are often overlooked and ignored (Withaar, 2024; Solano Doncel, 2014). However, migrating from Latin America is a challenging and complicated experience rooted in colonization that has profoundly shaped our relationships with gender, race, and identity while connecting our societies in common history (Hall, 2021).

The experience of being a ‘Latina’ in Amsterdam is multifaceted. It is through the experience of being Mestiza women that we have what Anzaldúa calls ‘Mestiza Consciousness,’ a framework through which we navigate worlds of ambiguity and translation by embodying both the colonizers and the colonized (1999). These aspects often conflict with one another and intersect with various facets of our identities. When moving to the Netherlands, many of us confront our Mestiza heritage, which reveals our distance from whiteness and the accompanying lack of power and privilege; in this context, we recognize ourselves as brown women, even though we may have previously held a white position within the colorism spectrum that

influences Latin American social hierarchies. In this context, we become migrants who are, visibly and audibly, outsiders from European culture, let alone Dutch society. Through that, our racial experiences are transformed (Dražanová, 2022). From this change arises a form of Double Consciousness, first coined by Du Bois to articulate the experience of living with the knowledge of contrasting experiences of who we are and what society is, explicitly referring to being a person of color in white society (1903).

Through the combination of Mestiza Consciousness and Double Consciousness, Mestiza Double Consciousness arises, which will be referred to, from here on out, as MDC in this essay. MDC is rooted in intersectionality theories to understand multiaxial experiences of oppression (Falcón, 2008). This consciousness is a way of living, a space to move within and between cultures, their histories, and values. It is through this consciousness that we can hold multiple contradictory identities simultaneously, allowing for a deeper understanding of systems of oppression and positionalities that require constant translation and negotiation to coexist (Falcón, 2008).

This project aims to explore MDC in the personal narratives of twelve Latinas who spend most of their time in Amsterdam, and myself, as a Mexican Latina living in Utrecht, problematizing the notion of Latinas as easy migrants by illustrating the internal complexity of our experiences. I aim to re-describe these narratives in an empowering, decolonial manner by combining material gathered through *cafecitos*, similar to interviews, and *group picnics*, resembling focus groups, with inventive methodologies, such as creating a textile exquisite cadaver and autoethnographic reflections. The research question this project aims to answer is: *How is Mestiza Double Consciousness structuring the experiences of difference for Latina women in Amsterdam?*

This question will be explored through a theoretical framework that brings together different components from MDC, specifically within the context of migration, migrant debt, and the sexualization of Latinas. Next, the methodology used and the reasons for selecting these techniques will be expanded upon, as well as my positionality as both a researcher and informant. The analysis of the collected material is divided into four main sections: first, the desire and rejection of privilege as they coexist in our daily lives; second, examining the connection between belonging and identity, their mutual influence, and the role of self-sexualization as a tool for belonging; third, migrant debt, the invisible price of migration, which is paid with silence and continuous exploitation to prove deservingness; and lastly, viewing MDC as a strength, a space of empowerment derived from our multiple identities and the tensions in which we live and move.

Nonetheless, before proceeding, some disclaimers and clarifications are essential: a) the term “Latina” has been problematized as a colonial term that generalizes (Kelsall, 2012); nonetheless, the use of it in this paper is intentional, as it recognizes the inherent colonial relationship that complicates the diaspora. Moreover, in this research, it will be used to refer to the geographical region of Abya Yala, today known as America, delimited by México as its northern point, extending through Central and South America and the Caribbean; b) as Latinas are not a racial group but rather the mestizo offspring of various racialized groups (including Africans, Indigenous peoples, and Europeans), the terms Latina, Mestiza, brown women, and women of color are used interchangeably in this paper, yet with care to ensure that their unique historical connotations are not overlooked (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2014). When using the term Latinas in this text, it is not a generalizable claim but specific to the informants; c) the term woman is used and assumed to be true and universal to those who identify under it beyond its

performativity and role in maintaining the patriarchy; d) I will write this thesis in the first person, as I, a Mexican Latina, inform and participate in this research alongside my informants.

Theoretical Framework

The central component of this research project is MDC, which combines Double Consciousness and Mestiza Consciousness. To fully understand MDC, it is essential to comprehend each of its components and their origins. To attain that, Double Consciousness will be explained and connected to the specific context of this research project, followed by historical notes around the term Mestiza and an explanation of Mestiza Consciousness. Combining them in a latter section to expand on what MDC is. Finally, explaining migrant debt and its connection to MDC, as well as briefly discusses some theories on the sexualization of Latinas and its internalization.

Double Consciousness

Double Consciousness was first written about and coined by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903. The term was initially applied in the context of African American people in the predominantly white United States (Du Bois, 1903). Double Consciousness works in various ways; for one, it recognizes that race, despite being socially constructed, has tangible effects (Bowker & Leigh Star, 2000). The struggle presented by Double Consciousness highlights an inherent opposition between conflicting aspects of identity (Bruce, 1992). However, true understanding emerges when we accept these contradictions and allow them to coexist without assigning value or superiority to one over the other, instead seeing them as insights into who we are and what the world is (Bruce, 1992; Du Bois, 1903). By living in tension and translation between these contradictions, a new, truer version of oneself arises, one which encompasses knowing the objects of both (Du Bois, 1903). Concerning this project, it highlights being noticeably ‘out of place’ and thus being made to feel like the problem, as a person of color in a predominantly white society.

Historical Context of the Term Mestiza

Colonial violence is often denied and reimagined by colonizers as a time of happiness in mingling (Ahmed, 2012). To counter such narratives, addressing the origin and historical baggage of colonialism is essential. The term Mestiza originates from mestizaje, the colonizing strategy of Spain in Abya Yala; thus, it carries historical baggage that cannot be ignored. The term Mestiza holds a history of colonial genocide against various peoples and cultures with effects that remain today. As it promotes a culture dominated by Western values and rejection of the Indigenous, the term was initially used to represent mestizaje, the process of ‘whitening’ prehispanic cultures and Indigenous peoples in order to ‘save’ and ‘purify’ their souls used by Spain (Bonfil, 1987; Banks et al., 2006; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2014). Through mestizaje, the perception of Euro-American superiority became part of the culture and was internalized by the population of these territories, perpetuating systems of oppression (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2014). The effects of this are still visible in various aspects; for one, those in power in Latin America are primarily descendants of colonial settlers (Bonfil Batalla, 1987); moreover a structure of colorism rooted in racism remains (Castro, 2021) and maintain an idealization of Europe. There is a denial and silence regarding the role of race in relation to social status in Latin America, which is perceived to be an essential component in maintaining the materiality of race in Latin America (Banks et al., 2006). Especially enacted by denying and invisibilizing racism as a natural consequence of capitalist class difference and seeing oppression as independent rather than intersectional. This remains in place through silence, especially among those who do not perceive it as problematic but rather as natural, rooted in their privilege and power (M’charek, 2013).

Mestiza Consciousness

Mestiza consciousness was first coined by Gloria Anzaldua in 1987 in her book *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In this book, Anzaldua explains Mestiza Consciousness as a way of living with multiple consciousnesses, characterized by contradiction and ambiguity, especially for Chicanas who reside on the border between the United States and México (Anzaldúa, 1999). This form of consciousness emerges from the tensions inherent in various cultures and their histories, resulting in self-fragmentation (Anzaldua, 1987, as cited in Bettcher, 2014). A significant contradiction within Mestiza Consciousness is the ability to see ourselves reflected in both dominant and oppressive narratives (Villenas, 1996). We accept dominant paradigms while holding onto our oppressive histories, which makes us members of various groups and identities (Anzaldúa, 1999; Garcia 1997). Therefore, we are constantly translating and living in the borderlands between identities and their cosmovisions. This involves continuously walking out of one culture into another while being in both simultaneously, holding both worlds and the contradictions between them (Pérez, 1999). These worlds can exhibit opposing ideologies, yet mobility between and within them creates a new space to negotiate histories that transcend dominant ideologies (Pérez, 1999). It is through constant negotiation that Mestiza Consciousness arises as a space to create something new in the borderlands, where racial, ideological, cultural, biological, historical, and current realities intersect and cross-pollinate, transcending subject-object dichotomies (Anzaldúa, 1987, as cited by Pérez, 1999). We hold knowledge and wisdom from both ancestry sides as the colonizer and the colonized, as mestizas, where “Knowledge without wisdom is adequate for the powerful, but wisdom is essential to the survival of the subordinate” (Collins, 2000, p.257), and we must embody both and translate

between them. In the words of Villena, Mestiza Consciousness is characterized as living as a walking contradiction with one foot in both worlds (1996).

Mestiza Double Consciousness (MDC)

Sylvanna Falcón first used this term, which merges Double Consciousness and Mestiza Consciousness to address best issues around gendered racism and intersectionality (2008). She uses it specifically to describe the experiences of gendered racism by Afro-Peruvian women (Falcón, 2008). This term is used to highlight the intersectionality within consciousness experienced by Mestiza women in and from Latin America, encompassing the historical complexity of our identities as Mestizas, in addition to being women of color within Latin America or elsewhere. For Latinas in the Netherlands, it is through our diasporic experience that we experience a form of MDC. Diaspora communities migrate to new geographical locations and develop new cultural forms by integrating cultural elements from their original culture with those of the host society (Withaar, 2024). As we move back and forth between our cultures and identities and those that surround us in a context that highlights our race, we grow our embodied knowledge and gain a new combination of these diverse identities, which in turn generate new identities. It is in the confrontations with our own contradictory identities that we simultaneously construct ourselves and the other (Villenas, 1996). Through this, we generate a shared cultural identity, which is shaped by our shared history of Spanish colonization, our experience as women, and the diasporic experience that sets us apart as women of color in the Netherlands, allowing us to recognize parts of our histories and build shared points of identification that form our cultural identities (Hall, 2021). Moreover, it is through MDC that we continuously live with the knowledge of constructing worlds less organized by single axes of domination (Haraway, 1988). As we resist a hierarchical choice of identity and instead negotiate and utilize our multiple

identities in a way that welcomes contradictions, this can be liberating (Villenas, 1997). We learn to negotiate parts of our identities, becoming what Hale calls Border zone dwellers, being people who live at the edges of multiple, overlapping identity categories in a difficult space to inhabit (Hale 1998, cited by Bettcher, 2014). Allowing us to exist within yet beyond the borders of dominant ideologies (Sandoval, 2000). It is only through intersectionality that we can comprehend the oppressive positions and interconnected nature of distinct yet intersecting systems of inequality that make Latinas complex and multifaceted beings and communities (Clonan-Roy, 2018; Lugones, 2011).

Thanks to MDC, we can better understand and dismantle systems of oppression by embodying a multifaceted process of being both the oppressor and the oppressed in different contexts, as well as within ourselves (Peña et al., 2023; Kelsall, 2012). We must acknowledge that we cannot separate these perspectives and experiences to achieve false objectivity, nor can we take them beyond the limited location and space in which they exist (Haraway, 1988), generating situated knowledge of each MDC. Thus, it is important to note that this is only some forms of MDC, as experienced by Latinas in Amsterdam.

Migrant Debt

The motivations for Latina immigration are varied, including economic and political instability in our home countries (Marquez, 1997), hopes for better educational and professional opportunities, the desire for family reunification (Withaar, 2024), and most importantly, gaining safety, especially as a woman (Solano Doncel, 2014). Additionally, there are idealizations within Latin America about Europe as an egalitarian ‘modern’ society (Bhambra, 2009; Khader, 2019). As a peaceful, cooperative, and post-racial society (Lentin, 2011) that promises a better life and thus draws Latinas to migrate. However, the reality is far more complex and has a hidden cost:

migrant grief and migrant debt. Migrant grief involves processing the loss of tangible and abstract elements that were left behind (Casado, et al., 2010), a phenomenon of separation which affects all migrants (Nektarios, 2020). Migrant debt involves internalizing values, assimilation, and continuously proving deservingness become a continuous debt to be repaid through assimilation, minimizing attention to the negative experiences of racism, staying quiet about societal problems, and always being loving and grateful towards the host country, without ever challenging the abusive system that provides them (Ahmed, 2012).

Latinas are often perceived as good migrants who easily assimilate (Withaar, 2024); however, this narrative undermines the challenges we face. The notion of being a ‘good’ and ‘unproblematic’ migrant implies a moral judgment as positive or negative, which involves refraining from asserting our culture and placing the responsibility entirely on the migrant to integrate into society (Ahmed, 2012; Wekker, 2016). It implies that migrants must not only understand Dutch values but also fully internalize them (Wekker, 2016). In other words, to be the minority that does not even perceive themselves as such (Ahmed, 2012). In Dutch society, behaviors like being rude and coarse serve as tactics to dismiss racism as ignorance, concealing the lasting traces of four hundred years of imperialism (Wekker, 2016). Making racism difficult to speak about, given that we have the freedom to talk about it, but if we exercise that right, we will paradoxically lose it (Ahmed, 2012) as a form of perpetuating coloniality. Coloniality, in this context, refers to the continued effects of colonialism in which race dominates power and, through that, marginalizes and excludes racialized groups, naming them inferior and powerless, maintaining whiteness (Lugones, 2011) and ultimately, normalizing differences within societies and between groups as respected yet excluded (Withaar, 2014). This is further intensified by migrants having to pay the emotional tax of continuously proving worthiness and deservingness

(Okwenje, 2019). Leaving assimilation as the goal and silence as a sacrifice necessary to pay for the privileges and benefits of migrating and living in a ‘first world’ country.

Context: Identity and Sexualization

To better understand the experience of Latinas in the Netherlands, it is important to contextualize the experience on the discourse around migrants to the Netherlands; which is fundamentally rooted in the process of othering, framing migrants as luck seekers and non-Western women immigrants as passive victims in need of salvation (Solano Doncel, 2014), which reflects the negotiation of power embedded in colonial legacies (Kelsall, 2012). As Latina women, our position in the Netherlands is primarily informed by tropicalism, which encompasses stereotypes around exoticized desires (Vargas, 2010) with seductive and passionate personalities and curvaceous bodies that erase the cultural diversity of Latin American countries (Brooks, 2010; Ramon, 2015). Such representations not only externalize societal views but also contribute to internalizing these perceptions (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2014), adding complexity to our MDC as we negotiate between stereotypes and expectations (Martinez, 2024). As identity is not a product but rather a never-completed process of production constituted within representations (Hall, 2021), our surroundings have a significant influence on it. Even within daily patriarchal contexts, being a woman and fitting within those standards can compel us to engage in self-objectification and self-eroticization to shape our identity by negotiating the meanings of gendered concepts (Kelsall, 2012). These pressures to engage in self-objectification and internalize values that undermine parts of our identities become extrapolated when we experience continuous othering.

Methodology

There were four parts to the methodologies applied to answer the research question: First, *cafecitos*, which resemble interviews with informants. Secondly, group picnics were structured similarly to focus groups. Thirdly, inventive methods in the form of a textile exquisite cadaver. Lastly, quote analysis of the gathered material was subdivided into two sections: analysis of quotes by themes and personal reflections as a form of autoethnographic practice. All work in the field was conducted in Spanish, as it is the native language of all informants. Conducting research in our native language is more than just a language bridge; it is about connecting in our mother tongue and, through it, entering a vehicle of cultural maintenance and understanding (Kelsall, 2012).

Cafecitos

Cafecitos were individual meetings of 60-150 minutes, consisting of open-ended, in-depth, semi-structured conversations, resembled interviews, held at a location of the informant's choice. The emphasis on the conversational nature of the meetings was to highlight the reciprocal nature in which I share my experiences, mitigating the extractivist nature of research in minority groups and facilitating a more in-depth connection based on our shared 'Latina' identity. Individual conversations allowed informants to share their detailed experiences in a more comfortable setting, facilitated by improvised questions based on active listening. This strategy allows participants to maintain a flexible and informal structure, which decreases pressure around sensitive topics, encourages sharing personal stories and honest reflections. All informants attended a *cafecito* prior to the group picnic sessions to establish a common background for all participants and enabled me to best prepare for the group picnics.

Group Picnics

Two *group picnics* took place during this research, each lasting 120-180 minutes. The scheduling of these meetings (time and place) was determined by the availability of informants, indicated by WhatsApp group chat polls. Initially, four group picnics were agreed upon; however, due to last-minute changes, only two were possible, limiting the study. Nonetheless, having this setting allowed informants to build on each other's ideas while fostering deeper connections and finding support in one another. The importance of group meetings lies in the changes in power dynamics that occur in group settings, where individual power is minimized, exploitation is avoided, and empowerment may instead take place (Solano Dolcel, 2014). The setup remained informal, similar to *cafecitos*.

Each informant was encouraged to share ideas on how to make the space more comfortable during the discussion. Thus, an informant-led grounding exercise was essential, as it created a vulnerable space that fostered a sense of human collectivity, allowing us to come together and share similar experiences of connection, especially as women of color (Peña et al., 2023).

Inventive methods: *Textile Exquisite Cadaver*

To make the material available and valuable to the people I am writing for and about, as deemed essential by Villenas (1996), an alternative technique beyond written academic and translated texts was necessary. When discussing this with the group, Lucia (pseudonym) suggested creating something tangible—a communal textile art piece—that could embody our shared knowledge and experiences, making visible and tangible our collective processes and challenges (Marres et al., 2018). Therefore, at the second group picnic, a Mestiza exquisite cadaver was created. This piece combines a French surrealist technique in which different

components are worked on independently, with needlework and textile artisan work, which is deeply connected to Indigenous traditions in Latin America. The implementation of inventive methods enabled informants to shape the research process themselves, making their participation more enriching. Importantly, it allowed an alternative methodology that acknowledged ancestral ways of knowing and validated other knowledge-generating practices, such as unique lived experiences and collective consciousness, to take part in the project (Peña et al., 2023; Collins, 2000). It is through this activity that the project became, in itself, a tool for us to understand our MDC and, through that, resist traditional white, male, eurocentric educational research (Peña et al., 2023). The Mestiza Exquisite Cadaver is depicted in *Image 1*, and an analysis of its symbolism can be found in Appendix A.



Image 1.
Mestiza Exquisite Cadaver by Latinas en Amsterdam

Ethics and Privacy

To maintain a close relationship that allowed for more vulnerability and reciprocity, written informed consent was not collected. Additionally, not all participants could speak English or struggled to read, and thus, written consent would have been limiting and created a distance. Instead, I was transparent about the research process and its purpose for my master's thesis. I answered any questions about the project and then asked them for verbal informed consent. All participants agreed to participate in the project and remain anonymous; therefore, all names used in this written piece are pseudonyms. Ten informants agreed to have the conversation audio recorded; all recordings were deleted after the project. Recordings were used exclusively for taking notes, transcribing, and translating. Only the specific quotes used were approved by informants who wished to review them prior to their use. The informants agreed to understand that participation was entirely voluntary, accepting that they could withdraw their consent at any point and, if they wished, review the material in the final piece before submission. However, this was not requested by any informants. For more information on ethics and privacy, including the Erasmus University Checklist, refer to Appendix B.

Informants

As Amsterdam is one of the primary cities with a Latin American presence (Solano Dolcel, 2014), twelve informants shared their stories of migration to the city and its surrounding areas through this project. Informants were invited to participate in the research with a visual invitation, *Image 2.*, which was shared via WhatsApp communities such as *Amigas en Holanda* and *Mujeres Líderes en Países Bajos*. Additionally, some informants were met in person at events of *Feministas en Holanda* and *Casa Migrante*.



*Image 2.
Inviting informants*

Eighteen women initially expressed interest in participating. However, only twelve met the inclusion criteria of spending most of their time in Amsterdam and self-identified as both women and Latina. All twelve informants had an individual *cafecito*. Ideally, all participants would have joined at least one group picnic. However, Mila, Riana, and Mara were unable to join any due to unforeseen personal circumstances.

Meetings location and dates

All meetings took place between April 16th and May 19th at various locations in Amsterdam, except for Mara, who preferred to meet in Utrecht. The locations can be seen in *Image 3.1*, and the map legend in *Image 3.2*

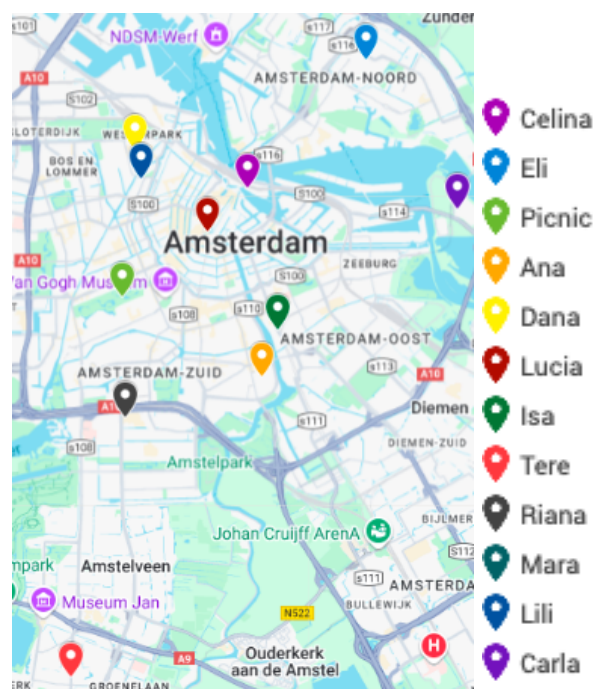


Image 3.1
Cafecito & Picnics Map

Image 3.2
Map legend

Group Demographics

It is essential to provide general background information to situate the knowledge of each informant. Informants came from diverse backgrounds, influencing their experiences and positionality. There were six represented countries in the group: Chile (Lucia, Carla), México (Riana, Dana), Colombia (Ana, Mila, Isa, Eli), Venezuela (Celina), Ecuador (Lili, Tere), and Peru (Mara). The age range was from 23 to 56 years. The time lived in the Netherlands ranged from 1 to 32 years. All informants are cis-gender and identify as women. Half of the informants are in romantic relationships that motivated their immigration or decision to remain in the Netherlands. Importantly, they had the time, 3-9 hours, available to meet, which would be unattainable for many. Moreover, all informants hold a university degree, with 80% speaking both Spanish and English and 90% being multilingual. These can be seen as indicators of a middle- or upper-class socioeconomic status in Latin America. All informants expressed their legal status in the

Netherlands. Three informants have EU nationalities, while the rest are here with partner or employment visas. These are brief yet important demographics that provide context for each of our experiences while also limiting the generalizability of the project.

Analysis

To explore the material, a thematic analysis was conducted. Themes were identified by listening to all the recordings of *cafecitos* and *group picnics*, as well as reading the field notes, with consideration for their relevance to MDC. Four sections were created to understand best what MDC is and how it is enacted. Desire and rejection of privilege illustrate how whiteness and power, displayed through class and race, are at stake when migrating to the Netherlands. Followed by belonging and identity that provide insight into why translations and tensions matter, using the need to belong and forming our own identity as guiding examples. Next, the negotiating silence section illustrates how these negotiations occur through migrant debt and internalized stereotypes. Lastly, the section MDC as a strength represents the tone with which most informants closed the *cafecitos* and *group picnics* in an empowering manner. In each section, there are selected quotes that best exemplify and articulate the experiences of MDC yet represent struggles shared by various informants. The quotes were selected by identifying the voice that most clearly shared or contrasted with the experiences of informants. The analysis is based on dissecting what the quotes are saying in combination with some cultural translations of the specific manner in which they are said and in the context of the literature provided in the theoretical framework.

It is essential to note that I have translated these quotes and occasionally paraphrased them due to the absence of a recording. The original quotes in Spanish can be found in Appendix C, along with their translations, which are denoted by superscript numbers. Note that translating

from our Spanish dialects into Castellano (standard Spanish) and then into English increases the risk of misunderstandings and assigning alternate meanings, which poses a limitation to the study.

Personal Reflections | Autoethnography

The ethnographic aspect of this project involved a commitment to continuous presence in the field with planned research practices. These included preparing for *cafecitos* by practicing grounding exercises to enact active listening. Additionally, I briefly refreshed my knowledge of each participant's home country to gain a deeper understanding of their overall context, enabling more in-depth and meaningful conversations. This approach not only fostered trust but also enriched the narratives shared, creating an environment where participants felt valued and heard. As previously mentioned, the research was informed by my personal experience as a Mexican Latina living in the Netherlands, where I often engage with and in groups of Latinas in Amsterdam. As a researcher, it was a challenge to inform the field and share my findings, incorporating my own experiences and perspectives while also allowing space for contrasting experiences, beliefs, and ways of being. My own experiences and positionality limit the scope of this study. Yet, they also offer insights into the humanistic interpretation of the group's cultural norms and communication practices, which are revealed through in-depth self-reflection. These include my field notes, some of which are included in this report under each section, in subsections, to provide insight into my process and engagement with the material and informants, as well as my insights on the topics.

Positionality

I am a young Mexican woman of mixed ancestry who grew up in an upper-class, predominantly white community with a bilingual upbringing and access to high levels of education. I was born and raised in Querétaro, México, in a community highly influenced by Western beliefs and values. In this environment, I internalized classism and the colorism it disguises as truths, and I continue to decolonize myself to get rid of them. I have little knowledge of my non-Spanish heritage, except some rumored family history of my 'humble' heritage, as it is something neglected and disguised, like in many upper-class families in México. I am primarily white presenting, putting me in a position of privilege and, with it, power. Apart from displaying the physical characteristics of my Spanish ancestors, I also inherited a Spanish passport. This advantage of dual citizenship allowed for my migration process to be easy and independent from visa processes, allowing me to make unbound decisions from my partner or family, express my discomfort with national and international politics without risking my stay in the Netherlands, and receive governmental benefits which allowed me to study in the Netherlands and thus make employment opportunities more accessible. My own experience and difficulties inspired this project, where I have experienced being sexualized and racialized in ways that have affected various aspects of my life since I began immigrating.

Doña Nobody

The word “Doña” is used in Latin America as a sign of courtesy and to establish social distinction; here, a translated version of the Spanish phrase “Doña nadie” is used to refer to someone insignificant with no social standing. This phrase represents the contrasting experiences of privilege through migration, as explored in this section by MDC. There is a close connection between privilege, power, and whiteness. For Latinas in Amsterdam, there is a continual struggle between the desire for the power and privilege of whiteness and resistance to it. There is a tension between these apparent opposing relationships to power that is at stake, as we hold different positions and levels of closeness to privilege depending on the context in which we are situated. Difference in power and privilege for Latinas changes as it is influenced by the specific surroundings and cultural context in which we are physically situated, yet always holding the knowledge of both realities of being closer and further from whiteness, and thus desiring and rejecting simultaneously. This tension is best exemplified by the contrast between the quotes of Lili and Ana and those of Isa regarding their experiences of moving to the Netherlands.

“They[host university] would have never let this happen if I were a white woman [...] I regret it, I would never do it [moving to the Netherlands] again and I would not recommend it for anyone else. [...] I do love the freedom...going out at night even if I am tipsy without having fear of being raped or killed“ - Lili ^[1].

Lili’s experience has been filled with struggle as she faced racism from her host university on various occasions in which context she said the first part of the quote, where she realized that her distance from whiteness is the one that determines privilege. From her confrontations with being othered, isolated, and rejected, her mental health has suffered. She describes the cost of her migration and loss of privilege as too high; she expresses regret for having decided to migrate

and would be skeptical about recommending it to anyone else. During our *cafecitos*, there is a hesitation among most informants to decide whether they recommend that other migrants come to the Netherlands or not, specifically due to the high level of cultural shock at play, which is most evident in the change in social class and the complex legal procedures required to obtain a visa. This change comes from being, in our cases, an upper-middle-class citizen with commodities and power to suddenly, in the Netherlands, being a second-class citizen, a brown woman. Simultaneously, she describes in her last quote the privilege of freedom that women in the Netherlands gain, reflecting on her own reality back in Ecuador and that of all women in Latin America who fear for their lives and security daily, especially at night.

Ana reflects primarily on her privilege in relation to visiting her home country as it is during her visits that she notices more her MDC, Colombia.

“Hmm, I feel like here I am obviously in a lower [socioeconomic] level than the one I had in Colombia, and for example, every time I go back, I wonder: What am I doing in the Netherlands? ... like.. Why did I leave these commodities? One forgets the excessive and comfortable commodities they would have back there [...] Here I am a Doña Nobody” - Ana^[2].

This feeling is not exclusive to Ana's experience; instead, it is shared by the majority of us when we return home, where we see and feel the commodities in abundance due to privilege, which many of us take for granted in our home countries. The privilege is evident, as concluded by most informants, in the houses, larger spaces, cars, and easy independent mobility, as well as household support through domestic employees and the ease of hiring affordable labor, among other things. These are often missed and highly valued when compared to not having access to them while living in the Netherlands. The contrast with life in Latin America is Starkened as one

conforms to a lower socioeconomic class and is in a culture where some of these practices are not commonly practiced, affordable by a middle-class person, or frowned upon. Nonetheless, when we do not have these commodities, questioning the exploitation present in some of these practices, such as permanent domestic labor, becomes more apparent and easier to do so. The position within a social class and its associated status, as well as the loss and grief that accompany it, are evident in the second part of the quote by referring to a loss of privilege in 'Doña Nobody'. Nevertheless, Ana shares that she is fond of life in the Netherlands, especially of safety and freedom, and would like to stay living here.

Isa has been unpacking her migrant experience, along with the changes in status and privilege that come with it. Through years of exploration, she articulates her discomfort with whiteness and her rejection of this privilege when discussing whether she would like to return to live in Colombia.

"I am also of a similar socioeconomic family as the one you share [upper-middle class with Spanish ancestry], and I am absolutely benefited from whiteness in the Colombian context. [...] I have many found and conflicting feelings about that decision [of moving back] because... hmm as my husband says it very clearly when we are talking about racism and all of that. He says: 'You want to go back to your situation and position of power, and it is because of that, that returning to Colombia seems appealing. It is because as soon as you are back, you go back into a position of privilege and power; you are comfortable.' I don't like that position; I really do not want to take it. [...] You [speaking to herself in the third person] need to recognize that you are also an accumulator of power, and if you are willing to do something about it, it means you are willing to give up your power, and that has many implications: voice, vote, money,

prestige. The true story, if you want to talk about this [inequality and exploitation], if you recognize it, will you only stay at intellectualizing this reality, or What will you do with this information? How will you live what you preach? Where is the justice that you say you care so much about? And that is why the system prevails, and it continues to be shit, because no one is willing to leave and sacrifice their power”- Isa^[3].

Recognizing privilege in an environment where it is treated as the norm and thus is invisible to most is a challenge in and of itself. During the journey of uncovering privilege and our own internalized and situated whiteness, we verbalize the tension and struggle within our MDC and name it as such. The combination of the historical embodied knowledge that accompanies Mestiza Consciousness, of being both the oppressed and the oppressor, with the wisdom of Double Consciousness for navigating a white space as a person of color, makes MDC most evident. This confrontation is accentuated by being a Mestiza, which is an impossibility within the colonial racial binary.

It is through being situated in this space of Latinas in Amsterdam that the newly found and conflicting feelings that Isa shares are expressed. As she continues to desire privilege, as it is shared by Lili and Ana, while simultaneously being aware of where the privilege originates and what that means in terms of our complicity in maintaining an exploitative system that we become victims of when we migrate. For Isa, moving back and being in the same space as her family also means, regardless of whether she wants it or not, returning to a position of power, one which is highly difficult to break from within and seems hypocritical to her after learning about the harm done by maintaining oppressive infrastructures. For Isa, staying in the Netherlands is a political act of resistance. She prefers to live as a minority, experiencing othering than living more comfortably yet complicit in maintaining social hierarchies back in Colombia, nonetheless, with

an acute awareness of the privilege she maintains in the Netherlands by still living an economically profitable life in a white capitalist society.

Isa also had the realization, during our *cafecito*, that part of her migrant journey, and specifically migrant grief, involves grieving the position of power she does not have anywhere except in Colombia. Her mixed emotions towards returning to her home country, beyond being with her aging parents and her sister's family, are also ones that involve negotiating her MDC as she sees power differently and tries to redistribute it. We will always have a position of colonial privilege while simultaneously losing that privilege by changing the context where we live and becoming part of those who are othered. Nonetheless, these experiences are not independent of or opposing to one another but rather coexist and build upon each other.

Isa's reflection resonates with various informants, although expressed at different levels and in unique ways. There is a clear resistance to recognizing our privilege. This can be contrasted with the prior examples, as represented by Ana and Lili's quotes, where a desire for privilege is also evident, driven by a familiar comfort, especially when compared to the solitude experienced when facing othering and racism.

Accepting privileges in some contexts while lacking them in others poses a challenge and, through that, a negotiation of MDC. Lili and Ana articulate how and what aspects of privilege become apparent when they are absent, particularly as we migrate to the Netherlands and are situated in a lower status. Here, we confront our brown identities, which are often overlooked in Latin America. Meanwhile, Isa shares her process and decision-making of staying embodied by MDC. It is by understanding the fragility of our positions of power and its close connections to fluctuating based on where we are situated. MDC becomes visible in this section

through an understanding of the longing for commodities and privilege that one part of our identities misses while simultaneously rejecting it as a political decision or as a necessary sacrifice for living in the Netherlands. MDC embodies the dual realities that Latinas in Amsterdam navigate and use to make complicated decisions like returning to our home countries to visit or move back permanently.

Personal Reflection

It was particularly interesting and challenging to find the words to articulate the mixed emotions and the simultaneous yet contradicting experiences concerning the desire and rejection of privilege, power, and, through that, whiteness. I see my white privilege in México yet also in the Netherlands, as I am not ‘visibly latina’ as has been said to me, as talking with Lili made me realize the privilege of being white-passing and how it protects me from more direct racism and experiences of othering despite being visibly (through my hair and height primarily) and audibly (my accent) an outsider to Dutch society. The conversation with Isa was hard to process as to understand how my migrant grief encompasses the loss of privilege and the revealing of an unjust hierarchy in which I have been complicit and struggle to break away from. I had never phrased or vocalized this dilemma and continuous tension as Isa did, nor had I admitted to my missing privilege in México, as Ana shares.

First and foremost a Latina

The Spanish version of the title phrase was frequently used in *cafecitos* and group *picnics*. In contrast to nationality being a pillar of identity in Latin America, in the Netherlands, a Latina applies to us all regardless of our differences. It represents how migrating to the Netherlands involves being associated with the label of Latina as a primary identifier, which

carries various connotations of othering within this new environment. As we move through different spaces and environments, our identities and sense of belonging shift. Whether we are insiders or outsiders often depends on the context and specific situation. Holding positions of privilege and disadvantage simultaneously means that we find ourselves in a constant state of translation and transition, navigating between feelings of belonging and not in ways that are complex and deeply shaped by our identities. These changes are most evident in connection to personal identity, as seen in the contrast between how Riana and Lili exemplify different ways they feel like outsiders. In contrast, Tere feels like she belongs in the Netherlands; Mila views this change as an inherent aspect of migration, and Lucia identifies how she is othered in some situations and welcomed in others.

Riana shares her experiences and feelings of belonging by saying: *“Since the beginning I knew that I did not and will not belong here, and not because of who I am but because of their racism”*^[4]. Riana has a great relationship with her community back in México and has been utterly disappointed by the exclusion in the Netherlands. By expressing both past and future terms of a state of belonging, she articulates the discomfort experienced and realized by her double consciousness, in which she exists in a place that is not made for her to exist, regardless of her actions. She displays an internalized understanding of her experience as the other, yet does not accept the blame and responsibility that most migrants do. Instead, she says that it is not because of her but because of the racism embedded in Dutch society.

Lili shares her similar experience and connects belonging with her identity: *“There [in Ecuador] I had a voice and I knew who I was, here its the opposite”*^[5]. Lili clearly related her external experience of having a voice and, with it, a recognized and valid position in society, guiding her identity. Demonstrating the clear connection between external perceptions of how we

are treated by having a voice in this example and internal perceptions of who we are. Lili is not the only one feeling confused about who she is and facing a crisis when she is categorized and treated differently upon arriving in the Netherlands. However, for many informants, this is something intimidating and confronting to say out loud as it accepts the reality of being an outsider. It is a challenge being, first and foremost, a Latina; with all its racial and sexualized connotations, we face social hierarchies from a different position and thus define ourselves differently.

It is by switching parts of our identity that we construct different perceptions of ourselves, as is the case for Tere:

“I’ve not felt out of place or othered here, most of my friends are Dutch or expats but I did learn the language within a year of arriving, have a light skin and arrived at a time with many less migrants so there wasn’t really an option”-Tere (paraphrased) ^[6].

Tere shares a different experience of contentment and assimilation in the Netherlands. She quickly learned Dutch and, with it, some of the culture and ways to connect, primarily through work, which was deemed impossible by the experiences of other informants to combine personal and professional Dutch culture. She recognizes her light skin as an advantage and that there were fewer migrants from Latin America when she arrived, and thus fewer stereotypes or connotations associated with it. To her, belonging came from her embrace of assimilation into Dutch culture, which involved sacrificing and neglecting certain aspects of her Latina identity, such as language and cultural traits. She is not alone in this experience; Eli and many others share a similar experience. Mila agrees by saying, *“You are abandoning one part of yourself for another and exchanging some privileges for others”* ^[7]. However, the idea that belonging requires leaving parts of oneself behind is problematized by MDC, as we will always carry and embody multiple

histories, identities, and consciousnesses. Even if denied, MDC can unintentionally exist. Thus, rather than sacrificing parts of our identity to fit in, MDC embraces the complexity of our experiences and the ability to hold multiple identities simultaneously.

Lucia shares a different feeling of belonging, as she also moves in another social context.

“I have never, or well, almost never, been called ‘latina’ here...yet I am the only one who wears colors and long big earrings, and dresses ‘strangely’ and have an accent [within Dutch social circles]”-Lucia [8].

By not being often associated with the term Latina, Lucia did not think she carried the connotations of not belonging and being an outsider that this term implies. Nevertheless, most of her social life and community are within the Latino population in the Netherlands. Therefore, more minor distinctions or more specific ones to country-specific references come into play more often than generalized Latina constructs. When introducing herself to new spaces, such as attending events and interacting with more Dutch and European people, she notices her MDC more, as she could belong in both spaces and thus must translate between them. However, by asserting her culture through her wardrobe and accessories, in addition to having a Dutch accent, she experiences being othered. The feeling of belonging or not, regardless of how explicit it is, and being simultaneously in and out of place is, in itself, a space of MDC, which is situated in each unique situation and space where it is enacted. We carry it within us, and once we name the experience, it can feel like seeing the invisible veils that had tinted all of our experiences.

What they grab

Given the stereotypes and sexual connotations associated with Latinas, it is not uncommon for some to initially find sexual attention and invitations as a sign of acceptance, belonging, and being welcomed. Nonetheless, being sexualized continues to be an issue for the

majority of the informants as we realize the objectification and dehumanization that is taking place with these invitations. By problematizing these invitations, we also recognize the distinct treatment we receive in comparison to white Dutch women and, thus, the underlying tropicalization and intersectionality that affect our sense of belonging.

“When I moved here, obviously when I arrived, I was the sexiest of all, just because I am Latina and Colombian. Of course I loved it [the attention] but then after like 4 months it got to be very repetitive and annoying [...]” -Mila ^[9].

Mila shares her process of initially perceiving compliments on her physical appearance and sexual assumptions about her as forms of belonging, embracing self-sexualization as a tool. She showed this by stating her experience of being sexualized as something obvious and natural, which might not be something limited to her identity as Latina but generally of being a woman. She is not the only one who has this experience; Eli and Celina share similar stories where being sexualized can be seen, in a way, as a form of acceptance, especially at a younger age. It is through self-sexualization and objectification that negotiating meanings of gendered concepts takes place. Through the inner struggle of wanting to belong and thus accepting and engaging in (self)sexualization and (self)objectification, we accept the culturally imposed reality of dominant paradigms that place us as outsiders. It is in this tension that our experience of belonging is at stake, as we find ourselves in a space where we are seen primarily as sexual objects yet are at least welcomed.

Becoming aware of the realities and risks associated with being sexualized and objectified based on our nationalities is crucial for grasping the actual cost of our belonging, particularly when it involves our bodies. However, this cost seems fair as long as the risk is less than that faced in our home countries, just for being women. This awareness highlights the

significance of Double Consciousness in our desire to fit in, as well as the role of Mestiza consciousness in striving for fair acceptance and understanding. This awareness becomes clear to others quite quickly, as seen in Dana.

“You feel it [sexualization] a lot at like at latin themed parties like ‘Fiesta Macumba’, I like them but hmmm ehh... It varies a lot, like between Latinos it is usually fine but there is also a lot of other people who only go to watch and see or see what they grab”

-Dana^[10].

Dana sets the scene on how she feels Latinas are objectified at Latin-themed parties, which attract a Latina audience to attend but are also there to cater to our exoticization and sexualization. The use of words where Dana bluntly phrases the intent of people who are not Latinos to watch and grab something, note not someone but something, increases the emphasis on the experience of being objectified. Moreover, the emphasis on Latin-themed parties instead of simply a party scene implies the specific targeting of Latina women, which was later discussed in the cafecito, noting that this is one of many ways in which we are subtly targeted. Implying an entitlement to touch and harass specifically Latinas and leaving a sensation of being targeted by the idea of being overly sexual, an object of desire, and less deserving of respect. Becoming aware of the objectification that we are subjected to is awakening to the realization that by being ‘exotic,’ we are closer to violence, contradicting a significant motivator of escaping gender violence that led many of us to the Netherlands. In this environment, it is through media representations of our sexualities that they are inscribed by and into social structures that we must conform to if we want to belong unless we engage with them as a power struggle and understand what is at stake beyond our own experiences. Nonetheless, it is repeatedly highlighted by informants that the risk of being the target of gender violence in the Netherlands

is significantly less than just the risk of existing as a woman in Latin America and, thus, a cost worth paying.

The negotiation between feelings of belonging and not belonging, as well as their connection to identity, is shared in the above quotes. Simultaneously illustrating the distinct experiences of informants of translation and othering, along with ways of navigating with MDC. MDC becomes explicit for many of us as we feel welcomed in some aspects and rejected in many others; this is exemplified by (self)sexualization.

Personal Reflection

Despite learning the language and surrounding myself with loving and supportive people, I often find myself feeling ‘too Mexican for the Netherlands and too Dutch for Mexican culture.’ The only people who share this experience are my informants. However, I realize that my previous resistance to finding a Latina community stemmed from a desire to assimilate and prioritize my individualistic and European identity rather than embracing MDC, as I cannot make an impossible choice between parts of myself without neglecting an important part of my identity. It is only through this project and these reflections that I begin to embrace my differences and resist assimilation as a strength rather than a weakness.

I now notice MDC reflected in small but telling acts, such as wearing more traditional Mexican clothing while in the Netherlands and bringing European attire with me to México. Similarly, since I learned the emotional and cultural significance of earnings in Latin America, I find myself wearing them more often. As a way to visually represent MDC as embodying the part of my identity that is less represented by the environment I am in.

It was only through these conversations that I saw how MDC is deeply interconnected with notions of belonging, assimilation, and identity. Self-sexualization and self-objectification are not isolated behaviors; they are internalized forms of oppression shaped by the desire to be accepted, to be seen, and to belong. Understanding these dynamics has become an essential part of my journey as a researcher and as a Latina.

At What Cost

Living as and in difference as migrants will be further explored in this section, shedding light on the ongoing burdens of migrant debt, and how MDC negotiates silence, conformity, and constant proving of deservingness. Starting with silence, as exemplified by a communal quote, shows the avoidance of calling someone or their behavior racist or sexist as fear of losing the ‘gifts’ and establishing a conditionality to being welcomed. While Tere and Dana further expand upon the emotional tax of conforming to professional opportunities and proving deservingness. *“If you tell someone that they are racist or sexist, it's like telling them... hmm... [Ana] that you don't love them [Lucia] and.... that they are like... inherently [Lili] a bad person [Isa]”* - group sentence ^[11]. The quote highlights the discomfort surrounding discussions of racism and sexism. This is shown by the hesitation of informants to complete this thought on their own instead of sharing the responsibility. This unease arises from the association of such confrontations as acts of unlove and of moral judgments about character. Therefore, placing the responsibility for other people's comfort and, with it, our acceptance as pressure to remain silent. This responsibility becomes internalized by suggesting we interpret offensive comments as innocent, well-intentioned misunderstandings rather than expressions of white superiority. Similarly, we must refrain from getting offended by offensive comments, as pointing out disrespect risks attacking whiteness and positioning us as the problem by making these issues

noticeable. The negotiation of staying silent itself can be seen as an act of survival wisdom rooted in MDC as in the history that constitutes it holds the knowledge of being in both positions, being the one who feels attacked by those who problematize comments of classism and colorism in our home countries, and now being the receivers of such commentary. Representing how the “gifts” received by migrants in the Netherlands can be taken away, asserting a powerful threat. Informants primarily described these gifts as safety as a woman, economic stability, and accessible opportunities.

Migrant debt does not stop at negotiating when to stay silent but is also at work as we feel a necessity to justify our deservingness.

“Sometimes I do feel like I have to work more or double than my Dutch colleagues...I don’t know why, maybe to like prove that I deserve to be here or to prove that I can do this job and safeguard my position” - Tere (paraphrased) ^[12].

Tere expresses the invisible emotional tax of constantly having to exert additional effort to defend or justify our deservingness to others. Emotional tax is not limited to professional settings but also has a significant role in MDC. As we exist in multiple categories simultaneously, we are not fully in any of them. Therefore, we must assert ourselves in any task or role that is associated with one part of ourselves to demonstrate worth or belonging within that identity.

Conformity is exemplified by Dana’s story about the challenges of finding jobs and settling for offers even if uncomfortable with them, which has been a significant challenge for most informants.

“Not many places are willing to hire you as a non-EU citizen even if you have the right to work with the visa and they don’t need to sponsor it. So you have to stay at the first place that makes an offer even if you do not like it.

[...]

Now, for example, that I work in my field [as an engineer], I would like to work less as I see some of my colleagues do like 30 hours per week and have more balanced life but I can't. Because, like... with my current salary I need to work 40 hours to earn the bare minimum and maintain my residence permit. but they will not pay me more than minimum wage, despite some of my Dutch colleagues who do the same thing earning more, which means I have to keep having longer working hours. It is like they charge you for the visa and extra contract [as an international] by giving you a lower salary.” - Dana ^[13].

This testimony reveals that contrary to our expectations, many of us had professional opportunities in the Netherlands that were not as widely available as we anticipated, and complicity is necessary to receive any job offers. While language barriers remain a significant issue in finding viable opportunities, having an EU passport is crucial. Most employees are unwilling to navigate the bureaucratic process of hiring a non-EU citizen, even though the process is straightforward, leaving a sentiment that they are unworthy of the additional effort required. Moreover, for many of us, if the position is obtained, there is an unspoken expectation and power imbalance, which foster a constant feeling of debt. Leading to tolerating exploitation out of fear of being unemployed again. Thus, the fear of losing the position leads to anxiety about replacement and demands compliance as a form of repaying migrant debt.

As exemplified, silence, conformity, and constant proving of deservingness are some of the multiple ways in which we pay our migrant debt. Most of us are complicit in maintaining silence in Latin America in exchange for commodities and belonging. At the same time, we remain silent as migrants to the Netherlands, assimilating and avoiding becoming a problem.

Moreover, conforming to uncomfortable jobs and receiving fewer payments while overworking highlights the constant sensation of having a debt to pay and acting accordingly.

Personal Reflection

For me, negotiating silence is one of the most evident and complex forms of migrant debt, and it is closely tied to MDC. Silence is often compliant with dominant narratives, subtle, internalized as dutiful emotional labor, and can be masked as a display of gratitude. Moreover, in various *cafecitos* and *group picnics*, the recurrence of discussions around the cultural avoidance of confrontation in Latin American culture was interesting. This makes me wonder about the historical roots of this learned behavior, which relates to negotiating silence as a tool of MDC to navigate various forms of oppression. Recognizing that avoidance and silence are culturally learned behaviors does not make it easier to overcome them. For example, despite bringing up racism, colorism, and sexism directly, respondents barely mention them; instead, classism seems more politically correct. I also noticed the discomfort and avoidance within myself when bringing these topics up with informants who have darker skin. I was afraid of how our social roles might regress to those in Latin America and to unconsciously use my privilege in a way that made others uncomfortable. In a similar area, it is interesting to note how, when in a group of Latinas, certain social norms and cultural practices, such as ingrained assumptions about others and social hierarchies, like colorism, come into play, reminding me of the ongoing process and struggle of decolonizing ourselves. There is particularly an intense and ironically loud silence around topics related to privilege, which often come accompanied by defensiveness when associated with our colonial histories. For me, it was through exploring the theoretical framework that I first understood why silence and feeling responsible for ‘taking things the right way’ and justifying microaggressions felt so complicated. I now realize that this is

self-monitoring, as an internalized duty to avoid causing discomfort is part of the debt I carry as a migrant, something I was socialized into. Knowing this dual complicity, as MDC, which we gain through our migration journeys, allows me to see this paradox. Not making it easier to navigate but making it impossible to ignore. It is through MDC that I see both spaces: one where I avoid conflict and stay silent as a form of love, and the other that demands I remain silent, compliant, and exceed myself at work as a form of gratitude. It is through these that I can recognize how silence protects and benefits me in México while simultaneously reproducing the systems I wish to dismantle. Nevertheless, breaking the silence becomes a betrayal to my family in México, to the Netherlands as my host country, and even to parts of myself that have long learned to survive through silence. This is the borderland I live, not fully here nor there, constantly translating, mediating, and deciding which parts of myself I am allowed to voice.

Our Superpower

Living in difference and with MDC is a complex space to exist within, as it involves continuous tensions, yet there are various benefits to it. For all informants, ending *cafecitos* and *group picnics* by highlighting these strengths was important to show how MDC is empowering. This is further shown in this section. Carla shares how MDC makes part of who we are and that in and of itself is valuable. Lucia shares her reflections on how her MDC enables her to thrive in the Netherlands, allowing her to translate ways of living and being from Chile into her life in the Netherlands. Lastly, Tere articulates how MDC is often at work while we are unaware of it. Each of them shows how for informants, when we give a name to the space of tensions, translations, and negotiations that we live in and as, it becomes a tool that provides strength.

Carla reflects on our difference beyond labels by sharing her perception on MDC:

“ [it is empowering and beautiful] knowing that there are different parts of us and that they can coexist without making us worse or better, or weaker or stronger, it is just part of us and who we are”- Carla ^[14].

Carla gives a voice to having MDC by recognizing the different parts of ourselves and how they interact with each other in a way that is neither inherently positive nor negative but remains a beautiful space to exist in. It often came up that it is also a Latina cultural trait to see the best in all situations and persevere, which can be attributed to our communal history of struggle as Latinas.

There are similar traits that are highlighted by embracing our unique position as being other than the dominant group, as we can see social limitations and find ways to access power and complement each other by introducing elements from the other. Lucia describes it as:

“Having Latina wit and with it, creativity for problem solving and perseverance is like my super power here in the Netherlands”^[15]. Many informants agree with Lucia that an important skill we gained, having grown up in places with more scarce resources and bigger necessities for fixing things creatively with what is available, is a form of creative Latina wit. It is through MDC that we recognize the benefits and limitations of systems in the Netherlands while simultaneously maintaining and fostering the abilities we need in the Latin American context. Thus, through MDC, we are able to transfer those skills, and combining these cosmovision provides a more complete and complex perspective. Tere explains this negotiation as:

“We have to translate and negotiate between the ways of doing and being that we have from our own countries and the ones we have learned here over the years, and being able to pick and choose aspects of each. Of course, We live in a constant space of translation even if we do not notice it [...] I am not less for having aspects of two different places, I

am not in one nor the other but in both, and that does not take away from me or make me less but gives me more, it gives me depth and perspective” - Tere ^[16].

This quote encapsulates a shared sentiment among all informants, despite the struggles of living in tension and navigating constant translation through MDC. It is because of this that we combine worlds and parts of our identities, creating alternative realities. It is not a demeaning characteristic that should isolate us, but one that we can use as a strength to share with others and bridge cosmologies wherever we are situated, as it is not a temporary state but an ongoing reality in which we live and create.

As expressed by all informants, yet articulated by Carla, Lucia, and Tere above, recognizing the strengths in MDC and the unique perspective it brings to our identities and lives is something worth admiring and a tool for empowerment. Regardless of the struggles, accepting it as part of who we are without moral judgment allows us to embrace the wit and distinct skills it equips us with, even if unknowingly, MDC is structuring our experiences.

Personal Reflection

The increased complexity of MDC used to often feel like a burden to me. It is through the informant’s perspective, which views it as a strength and fosters pride in it, that I have also learned to utilize it as such an empowering tool to navigate our reality through understanding complexity and living complexly. It is through seeing MDC as an empowerment tool, a superpower, that I now embrace it in my daily life. Since then, I have found more joy and pride in being different and have stopped trying to assimilate fully; instead, I celebrate the lessons and perspectives that my MDC has provided.

Interestingly, informants may not have had prior knowledge of the specific term MDC, as it is derived from combining academic terms by Anzaldúa and DuBois. However, each of them knew the feeling and abstract concept we were referring to, and by naming it MDC, we were able to own this reality and live in it more comfortably.

Conclusion

MDC embodies the interplay and intersectionality between Mestiza Consciousness, which navigates living in borderlands between cultures, histories, and cosmovisions, and Double Consciousness, which recognizes the co-existence of contradicting parts of our identities based on who we are and what society is. For many of us, it was through migration that we experienced a change in societal contexts, which brought new reflections on race, privilege, and othering, and for many of us, this experience assembled our MDC. This research project explored the role of MDC in structuring the experiences of difference for Latinas in Amsterdam to reveal the intricate layers of our shared and individual experiences. I aimed to re-describe narratives of twelve informants and my own, using MDC to encompass the bordering in which we live and the constant negotiation and translation that take place, and in doing so in a decolonial manner, re-empower informants. The narratives gathered through *cafecitos* and *group picnics* fostered a sense of community, enabling collective reflection on our shared struggles and accomplishments. The community formed through this project will continue to meet monthly to create a collection of Exquisite Cadavers, utilizing this inventive method to discuss these topics further and explore our MDC.

The material illustrated the contrasting experiences of being a Latina in the Netherlands, exemplifying that there is no single experience of MDC but rather a shared understanding of our contradicting and conflicting tensions that distinguish our experiences. In their collection, these findings problematize the oversimplification of Latinas as simply easy and good migrants. Instead, they highlight the complexity of our experiences, marked by navigating the contradictions and tensions inherent in our identities and lived realities, as explored in the four main sections. First, the tension between desiring and rejecting privilege arises as we change our

social positions upon immigrating to the Netherlands, and thus, various commodities are missed. However, it is because of our experience that we better understand the cost of privilege, its inequalities, and its close connection with the colonial history of our countries. While simultaneously understanding that the commodities that we miss are not comparable to the safety that we have gained by moving here. Secondly, one of the most recurring challenges is how we are treated and perceived by becoming, first and foremost, a Latina. Being othered and lacking a sense of belonging among various informants, while others find a community in the Netherlands, shows how their experiences can be contrasting. The feeling of belonging is heavily intertwined with identity, and in order to attain it, sometimes tools like self-sexualization and self-objectification are unconsciously used. Thirdly, the role of negotiating silence, compliance, and proving deservingness as payment of migrant debt. Lastly, the empowerment of MDC as our superpower is one that all informants share as a communal understanding of our living in negotiations of our identities, translating and bordering, which allows us to gain insight into multiple spaces and find ways to thrive. Once again, this emphasizes the distinct ways in which each of us pursues this. It is through our experience as Latinas in Amsterdam that we can see how we navigate between cultures and identities, which enhances our cosmovision instead of diminishing it, as we are often made to feel by not fully belonging to one group but to multiple groups simultaneously. Ultimately, this project offers merely a glimpse into the multifaceted experiences of Latinas in the Netherlands and invites further exploration into the depths of MDC, highlighting the complexity of identity and immigrant experiences that can be further explored in more nuanced ways.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Exquisite Cadaver further analysis and description

During the second *group picnic*, we played with some cloth, outlined Isa's body as the silhouette of our shared cadaver and each began working on a different part. During and after the making of the textile piece we reflected on how it embodies MDC. For example Celina made the heart as one in flames but had to leave shortly after but asked Lucia to connect it to the piece and indicated a spot. Part of why she wanted to include the heart which also has a ribbon as a symbol of union of the people in the continent, of us as latinas coming together. One side is open and has nature components like butterflies and flowers while the other side is covered in various patches, as if to imply injuries that are healing or that it is hiding something. Isa mentioned how she'd put a patch on the right shoulder as she feels like a fish can say something about MDC, flowing and accommodating to Dutch culture. The vulva like cloth is there to symbolize the role, power and ability that we feel we have as women, specially latina migrants, to bridge worlds; very visually simbolizing MDC. It is interesting to note the omission, potentially unconsciously, of all the body curves that stereotypically are associated with our Latinas, hips, breasts, and even hair. It is a noticeable part of omit as being sexualized has tinted many of our experiences. When I pointed it out, Lili said it might be to show that a Latina is more than tropicalized body shapes and European body standards but has earrings as big as our ancestors used, which is more important. The reference to earrings and jewlery as a way of carrying culture is recurrent as shown in a quote by Lucia in the section *Belonging and Identity*.

Appendix B

Ethics and Privacy Check-list



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Bonnie French, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: Mestiza Double Consciousness in Latinas in Amsterdam

Name, email of student: Paula Marquina Gurra 742157pm@eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Rogier van Reekum vanreecum@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 8 March, 2025 3 months

Is the research study conducted within DPAS **YES**

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. **YES**

If 'NO': skip to part V.

If 'YES': does the study involve medical or physical research?

NO

Research that falls under the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act ([WMO](#)) must first be submitted to [an accredited medical research ethics committee](#) or the Central Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects ([CCMO](#)).

2. Does your research involve field observations without manipulations that will not involve identification of participants.

NO

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

3. Research involving completely anonymous data files (secondary anonymized by someone else). **NO**

data that has been

If 'YES': skip to part IV.

PART III: PARTICIPANTS

1. Will information about the nature of the study and about what participants can expect during the study be withheld from them? **NO**

2. Will any of the participants not be asked for verbal or written 'informed consent,' whereby they agree to participate in the study? **NO**

3. Will information about the possibility to discontinue the participation at any time be withheld from participants? **NO**

4. Will the study involve actively deceiving the participants? **NO**

Note: almost all research studies involve some kind of deception of participants. Try to think about what types of deception are ethical or non-ethical (e.g. purpose of the study is not told, coercion is exerted on participants, giving participants the feeling that they harm other people by making certain decisions, etc.).

1. Does the study involve the risk of causing psychological stress or negative emotions beyond those normally encountered by participants?

NO

1. Will information be collected about special categories of data, as defined by the GDPR (e.g. **racial or ethnic origin**, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a person, data concerning **mental or physical health**, data concerning a person's sex life or sexual orientation)?
 - a. **YES**
 1. Will the study involve the participation of minors (<18 years old) or other groups that cannot give consent? **NO**
 1. Is the health and/or safety of participants at risk during the study? **NO**
 1. Can participants be identified by the study results or can the confidentiality of the participants' identity not be ensured? **YES**
 2. Are there any other possible ethical issues with regard to this study? **NO**

If you have answered 'YES' to any of the previous questions, please indicate below why this issue is unavoidable in this study.

6. Participants are selected on a volunteer basis but in connection to their self-identification as 'Latinas', which relates to their racial and ethnic origin, as this is a specific requirement of what the research aims to explore.

9. Participants will remaining anonymous and assigned a pseudonym if they do not wish to chose one themselves. However between participants, as they may know each other some aspects may be recognizable.

What safeguards are taken to relieve possible adverse consequences of these issues (e.g., informing participants about the study afterwards, extra safety regulations, etc.).

Participants always have the possibility of refusing to respond to specific questions. They will also have the opportunity to revise the transcribed and translated quotes and meeting notes used, and take out any information they wish to keep out of the study.

Are there any unintended circumstances in the study that can cause harm or have negative (emotional) consequences to the participants? Indicate what possible circumstances this could be.

Sharing personal experiences about migrating to the Netherlands as a Latina women may lead to confrontational and uncomfortable conversations around sexism, race, colonialism and patriarchy. However these should not have long negative emotional consequences.

Please attach your informed consent form in Appendix I, if applicable.

Not applicable as: To maintain a close relationship in a casual setting that allowed for more vulnerability and reciprocity, and to prevent observers bias in informants responses, written informed consent was not collected. Additionally, not all participants can speak English or struggle to read, and thus, written consent would be limiting. Instead, I was transparent about the research process and its purpose for my master's thesis. I answered any questions about the project and then asked them for verbal informed consent.

Continue to part IV.

PART IV: SAMPLE

Where will you collect or obtain your data?

In-person through meetings with Latinas in groups and individual settings to have conversations, observations and interviews.

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the (anticipated) size of your sample?

13

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

What is the size of the population from which you will sample?

NA

Note: indicate for separate data sources.

Continue to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

Pen & paper notes, digital notes after meetings, audio recordings in iPhone 15 voice memos application, without informants names to protect privacy but using dates and locations of meetings. These recordings will be deleted after the study.

Note: indicate separate data sources, for instance, for paper-and-pencil test data and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

Me, Paula Marquina Gurrea

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

Weekly

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

Keeping personal details separate from the data, maintaining a key/code for personal details.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Paula Marquina Gurrea

Name (EUR) supervisor: Rogier van Reekum

Date: 14 March, 2025

Date: 19-03-2025

Appendix C.

Transcribed Quotes in Spanish

[1] “No hubieran [la universidad] dejado que esto me pasara si fuera yo una mujer blanca [...] Me arrepiento, no lo volveria a hacer ni lo recomendaria [...] Si me encanta la libertad de ir por la noche hasta happy sin miedo de que te maten o te violen” -- Lili.

[2] “Hmmm Siento que aca obviamente estoy en un nivel.. mas bajo de lo que estaba en colombia y por ejemplo cada vez que voy digo no se que estoy haciendo en holanda osea [...] porque deje todo esto... a uno se le olvidan las demasiadas comodidades que la gente tiene alla [...] Yo soy una Doña nadie aqui”--Ana.

[3] “Tambien soy de una familia socioeconómica parecida a la que comentas tu [media-alta de descendencia española], y absolutamente beneficiada por la blanquitud en el contexto Colombiano. [...] Tengo grandes sentimientos encontrados con esa decision porque es que mi esposo me lo dice clarisimo, cuando hablamos del racismo y todo eso y el Me dice, usted quiere volver a su situacion de poder, por eso es que a usted la llama volver a vivir a colombia. Porque usted se va y vuelve. A un lugar de privilegio, a mi no me gusta por esa posicion, esa posicion no me gusta [...] Reconocer que tu [hablandose a ella misma] eres un acumulador de poder y que estas dispuesto a hacer algo, quiere decir que estas dispuesto a entregar el poder y eso tiene muchisimas implicaciones: voz, voto, dinero, prestigio. La verdadera historia es usted si quiere hablar de esto [de la desigualdad y explotacion], pues si usted lo reconoce, ¿solo se va a quedar intelectualizando? ¿Qué va a hacer con esta información? Como lo va a vivir y donde esta la

justicia que usted dice que tanto le mueve. Entonces si es por eso que el sistema no se derrumba y sigue siendo una mierda, porque nadie quiere dejar y si sacrificar su poder"-- Isa.

[4] "Desde el principio supe que aqui no pertenecia y no voy a pertenecer.. No por quien soy pero por su racismo" - Riana (sin traduccion directa, parafraseado)

[5] "Ahi [en Ecuador] tenia una voz y sabia quien era, mientras aqui es lo opuesto" - Lili.

[6] "Yo aquí no me he sentido fuera de lugar, aunque claro aprendí el idioma en cuanto llegué, al año ya hablaba (...) y cuando yo llegué había menos migrantes entonces también necesitaba más el idioma y la comunidad aquí" - Tere.

[7] "Estás abandonando una parte de ti por otra y intercambiando un privilegio por otro" - Mila

[8] "Nunca, o bueno, pocas veces me han llamado Latina directamente en mis grupos europeos, pero siempre soy la unica que se viste raro, viste en colores, con aros grandes y tiene un acento [dentro de los circulos de holandeses o europeos]" - Lucia.

[9] "Cuando tambien me mude aca obviamenete cuando llegue era la mas sexy de todas solamente por ser latina, obvio me encantaba, pero luego como ya despues de 4 meses se volvio muy repetitivo y desesperante [...]" - Mila.

[10] “Lo sintes [el ser sexualizada] mucho en estas fiestas latinas como fiesta macumba. Me gusta pero hmm ehh, depende mucho que vez entre tipo entre latinos esta bien pero que tambien va mucha de otra gente que solo va a ver o ver que agarra” - Dana.

[11] “Decirle a alguien que es racista o sexista es como decirles... ehmm... [Ana] que no los quieres [Lucia] y... que son como [Lili] mala persona [Isa]” - Picnic Grupal 1.

[12] “A veces si siento que trabajo más, o el doble que mis colegas holandesas... no se como tal ves para probar que merezco estar aquí o como demostrar que puedo o cuidar mi posición” - Tere

[13] “De hecho el lugar en donde me he sentido mas incomoda fue en mi trabajo [en un restaurante]... desde en la forma en la que me trataban hasta en las tareas y cosas que hacer que me daban. [...] No son muchos lugares los que estan dispuestos a contratar a alguien que no es europeo, ni aunque tu visa lo permita y no lo tengan que pagar ellos. Entonces pues toca quedarse en el primer lugar que te ofrece un trabajo, aunque no te guste tanto. [...] Ahora por ejemplo que trabajo en mi ambito [ingenieria], me gustaria trabajar menos, como veo le hacen otras personas con las que trabajo. Tipo 30 horas a la semana y asi pues tener una vida mas balanceada, pero no puedo. Porque tipo... con mi salario apenas me pagan suficiente, el salario minimo, y necesito trabajar las 40 horas para ganar lo minimo que necesito para mantener el permiso de residencia... pero no estan dispuestos a pagarme mas del salario minimo, aunque se que otros compañeros de trabajo que hacen lo mismo y son holandeses les pagan mas,y pues entonces no tengo opcion mas que trabajar dias mas largos. Es como si te cobraran la visa y el proceso extra con darte un salario mas bajo.” - Dana

[14] “saber que hay distintas partes de nosotros y que pueden coexistir y no te hace peor o mejor persona o mas debil o mas fuerte osea es parte de nosotros” - Carla

[15] “El tener mi ingenio latino y con el la creatividad y perserverancia es como mi super poder aqui en Holanda” - Lucia

[16] “Tenemos que traducir y negociar entre los chips que traemos desde nuestro país natal y los que hemos aprendido aquí... así poder escoger aspectos de unos y de otros. Claro es que vivimos en un espacio constante de traducir aunque no lo notemos” - Tere