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**Internal and External Ethnicities:
With Special Reference to Central America**

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Internal and External Ethnicities: With Special Reference to Central America

1. INTRODUCTION

A. The Loci of the Definitions of "Ethnicity"

If the Greek term *ethnos* "covers a variety of usages,"¹ then the popular and current uses of the stem "ethno-" are even more plentiful. It is of little use to seek "the meaning," however, because the term really means no more or less than whatever a speaker may want it to mean. Indeed, the term itself confronts exactly the same problem as does the subject matter to which it generally refers. If the speaker is referring to his or her own ethnic group, then the definition may be in one set of terms. However, if the reference is to another, an externally identified group, then it may be in different terms. *Internal* definitions can never be framed as, or be identical to, *external* definitions.

Pierre Van den Berghe's observation² that ethnicity is simultaneously an objective and a subjective phenomenon is correct, then, but does not go far enough. The issue is not that there are ethnic groups about which there are objective and subjective aspects. Rather, the definition that the members of a group give themselves may delineate a different set of people than may belong to a group defined by outsiders. It is not merely that the way that Guatemalan *ladinos* and *indigenas* define "*indigena*" differs, but because the definitions differ, the actual persons who are being referenced differ. The ladino definition delineates quite a different set of people from those defined by the indigenous definition. Moreover, the two assemblages of people thus defined may, in fact, manifest somewhat different behaviors. Thus, as suggested in Figure 1, an urban bourgeois ladino might define as "indio" a group of people that include *campesinos* whom the indigenous language-speaking "naturales" would exclude from their own definition of themselves. Thus, it is not that there is a single reality with separate objective and subjective

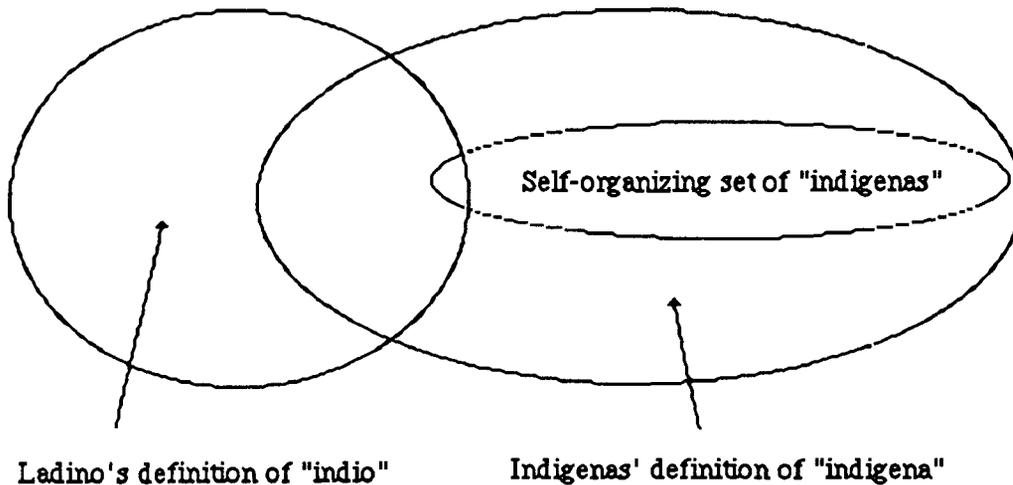


Figure 1. Different definitions of ethnicities³.

aspects. Rather, there are two or three (or more) "realities," depending upon whom one asks.

This picture is further complicated because each of these "realities" has both objective and subjective phases. Any definition of a social entity presumably has a subjective reality for the speaker. However, whether the aggregate referred to has a functioning objective reality is another question. Merely to say that some 2,000,000 people are "indios" does not make them a functioning reality. To become a functioning reality they must exhibit some characteristics of self-organization; that is, collectively they must be so composed as to act out behavior under their own dynamics, totally independent of an external observer. Thus, while the urban bourgeois ladino's "indio" may have a subjective reality for the speaker, it is doubtful that it is itself self-organizing as conceived and, therefore, has no objective reality. In contrast, the self-defined "indigena" group is self-organizing. Therefore, it has an objective reality, as well as a subjective reality for its members.

Even though the term "ethnicity" may be confusing, it is extremely important in contemporary parlance because it draws attention to *identity*, the feature that will shortly be argued to be the central issue in ethnic grouping.

B. The Substantive Nature of Ethnicities

The adjective "ethnic" can be used to refer to anything that has an ethnic association. An "ethnicity," however, is a concrete human population, a set or group of people who have been set off either by their own definition or by the definitions applied to them by others. The fact that it is a substantial population would appear to make it easy to manage; however, the fact that it can be created either by or about people complicates the issues unmercifully.

"Ethnic group" or "ethnicity" is used to refer to two different things. One is a subjectively defined, self-identified aggregate of people that is a functioning reality because it is self-organized as a part of the self-identity process. This is an *internally defined ethnicity*, or merely *internal identity* or *ethnicity*. Such is the aggregate defined by the Guatemalan indigene when he refers to himself as "natural." The other is an externally defined category of people, which may or may not have a functioning reality as it is defined. This is an *externally defined ethnicity*, or merely *external ethnicity*. Such is the categorical identification of "indio" made by ladinos, or of "Indian" made by foreign anthropologists.

The failure to recognize that the two kinds of ethnicities are different phenomena, and not merely different aspects of a unitary thing, has caused much misunderstanding. The next point to be made, then, is that both kinds of ethnicities can have some kind of objective reality. Let us start with definitions:

An internally defined ethnicity is a population whose members self-define their collective survival by replicating a shared identity through cultural and biological self-reproduction.

An externally defined ethnicity is a population whose collective reproduction is externally ascribed in terms of their replicating a shared characteristic through cultural and biological reproduction. An external ethnicity may exist objectively (i.e., be self-organizing in the manner ascribed) with or without self-identity. It must be kept in mind, however, that the mere assertion that such a category "exists" does not, in itself, constitute sufficient evidence that there is such an independent, self-organized entity, nor, if there is, that it also enjoys self-identification.

For example, the rural *campesino* population that the urban bourgeois categorize as "indio" may manifest some common patterns of behavior—such as low commodity consumption, poor health and unsanitary living conditions, low literacy and educational levels, high rates of unemployment or underemployment, and so on,

and these may account for some important dynamics in their collective behavior. However, neither the behavior itself nor its reproduction requires a collective identity, nor is the population in question necessarily self-organizing.⁴ So they constitute an external ethnicity.

It follows that whatever dynamics may derive from internal identification are separate from those that derive from the organization may occur among those categorized externally. There are behaviors that poor "naturales" share with poor ladinos, but these are not produced by the fact of ethnic identity. Similarly, the dynamics of indigenous behavior are not necessarily derived from poverty as such.

The social interrelationships in a society can be affected by both kinds of ethnicities, but in quite different—and by no means always complementary—ways. They are, in short, separate variables in social life. The job of the analyst is not to identify or confuse these processes, but to discover how they interact with other factors.

2. THEORIES OF ETHNICITY

Over the past fifteen years, the theory of ethnicities has been extensively discussed and developed by a number of authors whose works have, collectively, contributed much to our current level of understanding. Among prominent contributors are Frederick Barth,⁵ Leo Deprés,⁶ Anya Peterson Royce,⁷ Anthony D. Smith,⁸ Guillermo Bonfill Batalla,⁹ and Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira.¹⁰ It is not my purpose to recapitulate or synthesize this background. The intellectual advances evident in this work, however, have not been universally accepted by many active in using ethnicity for individual and political ends. Consequently, confusing definitions and concepts are constantly being reintroduced at various levels of the discussion. In view of this, a word of clarification on some contentious theories may be worthwhile.

A. Ethnicity as Culture

The use of cultural features for defining ethnic groups was brilliantly disposed of by Barth in a work that really opened the contemporary era of ethnic analysis.¹¹ Nevertheless, these features continue to be used broadly in many sectors—especially political—to define groups. Of course, cultural features are characteristic of ethnic groups; but to use them to define an ethnic group is unworkable in the long run. The reason for this apparent contradiction is that the central issue at stake in identifying

ethnicities is not a configuration of cultural features, but the *reproduction of the internal identity*. In contrast, external definitions of an ethnicity can only be expressed in terms of cultural features. The outsider has no alternative but to give an external, or categorical, definition; he or she cannot ever really "know" the nature of the internal identity that may exist in the minds of the members.

The result is that culture plays a different role in the definition of the two different kinds of ethnicities.

B. Ethnicity and Biology

It is impossible to carry a discussion about ethnicity far without confronting the issue of biology. This is entirely reasonable, but perhaps not for the reason that is often thought to be the case. It is not because ethnicities have to be defined "racially." Indeed, there is probably no ethnicity that has ever been defined wholly and exclusively on the basis of race. Clearly, also, cultural and social forms are *not* determined through the operation of (usually poorly defined) biological mechanisms. Nor can it merely be asserted,¹² however, that biology is so unimportant that it merits no discussion.

The role of biology has been obscured by the assumption that biological continuity and reproduction are central to ethnic definitions. Actually, the central issue is not biological reproduction but the reproduction of identity, and that can be done only through culture. What is crucial is that culturally controlled biological reproduction enhances the social enculturation that takes place when children are raised by parents. Biology is important as an adjunct to culture for assuring the reproduction of identity, not the reverse. The identification with ancestors is part of creating a tradition; it is not difficult to create ancestors should they be lacking.

That the role of biological continuity is defined in terms of identity and culture rather than the reverse is evident in comparing the Miskito and Sumu peoples of Nicaragua and Honduras. These peoples were probably closely related, if not culturally and biologically indistinguishable, at the time of the sixteenth-century appearance of the western colonists. Through an intriguing history, the Miskito emerged as a biologically Africanized population that has little problem incorporating people of almost any racial antecedents, providing that the children are brought up in the Miskito household as Miskito.¹³ The Sumu, in contrast, have maintained themselves as a much more biologically pure indigenous population, having decided at

some point in time to define identity in terms of sheerly Sumu antecedents. Each group, however, retains a strong ethnic identity. The biological "purity" of the Sumu has apparently not generated a "stronger" ethnic identity than the highly mixed Miskito.

A similarly divergent case is that in some ladino populations in Central America biological preference is expressed for whiter mates, and not to marry Indians. However, since ladinos themselves are usually a biological product of white and indigenous (and often African) antecedents, the preference seems to be more a matter of aesthetics than of ethnic definition.¹⁴

In sum, the importance of biology lies in how it is defined to be of service to the reproduction of culture and identity in ethnicities. The racism that is common in Euroamerican populations is merely a (perhaps slightly deranged) Sumu-like choice to define identity in biological terms.

C. Ethnicity and Class

Because in Mesoamerica class and ethnicity have been quite congruent in the ladino-indigenous relations, it has been asserted that ethnicity is really little more than class relations dressed up in ethnic garb: "la relación ladino-indígena," asserts Guzmán Böckler and Herbert, "constituye una relación de clase."¹⁵

Theoretically, the problem here is rather similar to that of biology. In general terms, ethnicities clearly can and do exist apart from class relations. There are bourgeois ladinos happily exploiting ladino labor. In practice, however, both self-identification and the labeling of others can readily lead to mapping ethnic differences along class lines. This is particularly the external definition of ethnicities, such as the case cited early in the paper of ladinos considering all rural poor to be "indio." When one tries to sort out the major obstacles to economic improvement of depressed ethnicities—and in Mesoamerica this means primarily indigenes—it becomes obvious that it is political-economic relations closely related to class that provide some of the major problems. However, it is also the case that there are many class differences operating that do not coincide with ethnic boundaries and definitions.

One way to clarify the difference between class and ethnicity is to see the former as being a collectivity based on the *reproduction of control over the means of production*, whereas the latter is concerned with *reproduction of identity*. Where identity depends on some economic processes—as it very often must—then ethnic

reproduction may be congruent with class reproduction. However, even a brief inspection makes it clear that the real identification of class with ethnicity is most commonly favored by the controllers, not the controlled; with the dominators, not the suppressed. It is the ladinos who have political economic reasons for wanting to categorically define "indios" as being separated politically and economically. While the indigenous population wants to be separate, is it for reasons of identity. Thus, the appearance of economically or professionally successful indigenes—wealthy merchants, lawyers, doctors, professionals—poses a problem of definition for the indigenes. Some of them do not want to be placed in the same class with bourgeois ladinos; others are seeking precisely that change in identification.

Thus, class is an important, but separate, variable that must simultaneously be available when analyzing ethnic dynamics. It should, however, never be confused with ethnicity.

3. ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

A. Definitions from Two Kinds of Ethnicity

As is surely obvious by now, the present paper follows the lead of those who find identity to be a central issue of ethnicity. The distinction between internally defined and externally defined ethnicities, however, severely complicates the issue.

Internal definitions. While people can readily argue that it is their identity that distinguishes them from members of other ethnicities, it is not always that easy to formulate the nature of identity explicitly, and it can be even more difficult to agree on details. While this can pose serious political problems, it is merely one indicator of what an important role the individual's identity plays in the collective definition of the ethnicity. It can become particularly painful when new realities seriously challenge the viability of the ethnicity as internally defined, implying that some change is going to be necessary. Progressive components may be ready to take the lead in redefining their identity, whereas conservative members may refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new proposals. This is repeatedly illustrated under conditions of severe acculturation pressures. Some sectors of the population can hold that changing the culture is necessary to adapt and survive, but that it does not threaten the identity; others will insist that to lose certain cultural traits is tantamount to destroying the ethnicity.

External definitions. To insist that the definition has to be internally constructed, however, poses a serious problem for external definitions. On examination, there are two different considerations that play different roles in structuring the nature of external definitions, depending upon whether the collectivity of the observer is in direct interaction with the group being defined or not. One is merely to specify defining cultural characteristics that differentiate the population from others (e.g., language, social organization, clothing, diet, etc.). The other is specifically to relate the population to the ethnicity or collectivity to which the observer pertains. Both these features—differentiating on a cultural basis, and asserting interethnic social relations—are active in all external definitions.

When the observer's collectivity interacts with the group in question, then the primary consideration is social relations. The question of cultural differences is used descriptively but is formulated in terms of the relations as perceived by the outsider. When there is no significant interaction, then the issue is handled in terms of descriptive cultural characteristics. The difference can be readily seen in comparing the way that, prior to World War II, Guatemalan indigenes were described by Guatemalan ladinos, such as Miguel Angel Asturias or Antonio Batres Jaragui,¹⁶ with how they were portrayed by American anthropologists such as Sol Tax or Oliver LaFarge¹⁷ in the same era. The former dealt primarily with considerations that affected their relations with the ladinos—their participation in the national society and their subordination to ladinos—and only secondarily with cultural traits such as clothing and language. The latter, however, were most concerned with their cultural differences, among which relations with ladinos were only one item.

Thus, in making an external definition, the observer separates the population in terms of how it is seen to relate to other populations, including that of the speaker. When a ladino refers to "indios," he is asserting that he, the observing ladino, *identifies* a collectivity in terms of certain relationships that they hold with others, mainly ladinos. Such definitions will cite characteristics that are meaningful to the external observer, and may miss features that the group members regard as being their identity. The only way that outsiders can include consideration of internal definitions is by asking members how they identify their own ethnicity. Whether they do this depends on the interests of the observer and it can, in any event, be quite misleading of the members' wishes to deceive. In practical terms, external definitions have to be made in terms of features that are perceptible to the observer and can be described.

They have to be much more explicit than do internal definitions. An indigene has various ways of identifying whether another person is indigene or not. The ladino, however, can apply only certain explicit criteria.

What one must conclude from these differences is that, while identity is central to internal definitions, in external definitions it is at best a secondary issue and may be entirely absent. What is central to the external definition is the relationship that is asserted to exist between the ethnicity and others, and differentiating characteristics as seen from the perspective of another collectivity.

B. Ethnicities and Social Organizations

Internal definition. Thus far the social organizational aspects of internally defined ethnicities have been described in terms of "self-organization." The emphasis has been on autopoiesis in order to clearly differentiate them from those defined externally. There are some common regularities that have characterized the social organization in ethnic organization the world over. Because control over childhood enculturation is so central to ethnic reproduction, it is among the kin organizational forms that ethnicity can more readily be seen to historically emerge. Extended families, clan organizations, and other consanguineous kin groupings framed in terms of common ancestry provide the same basis for identity as is found in ethnicities. Family units, however, are by nature short-lived and have to be recreated each generation. Clans have an indefinite tenure, and thus are more similar.

Perhaps the social form that is most commonly paired with ethnicity is the "nation," especially when defined in terms of identity, myth, memory, and destiny.¹⁸ The terms are sometimes used interchangeably and it is especially likely that an ethnicity will claim nationhood when seeking political independence from a superordinate ethnicity. In Europe ethnic groups served as the basis for the formation of many nation-states, and the achievement of nationhood by a state has inevitably involved the subordination, assimilation, or even genocide of other ethnicities. Classically, one ethnicity has been dominant in the formation of modern states—the Prussians in Germany, the English in Great Britain, the Castilians in Spain, the Russians in the Soviet Union, and the ladinos in the Central American states.

It is not until the past few years that we have any real statements from the indigenous population as to how they perceive their own identity. Their emphasis is on how different their self-identity is from ladino and foreign perspectives and how its

very obscurity to outside observers has contributed to its survival.¹⁹ The concern is, above all, to achieve a greater degree of self-organization, and this requires taking over some elements of nonindigenous culture—such as wealth and political power—as well as protecting some indigenous elements, such as language, from acculturation.

External definitions. The social organization involved in externally defined ethnicities tends to have two characteristics. One concerns the relations that hold with the group doing the defining. The other uses descriptive features as perceived by the observers doing the defining. These can again be illustrated by the ladino and North American perspectives alluded to above.

Ladinos, of course, have historically dominated the indigenous population economically and politically. The classic ladino characterization, therefore, places emphasis on features of the social organization that will generally keep them in a subordinate position, and not encourage or permit them, as indigenes, to become socially dominant. Thus, a concern may be expressed that they be paid better and be made healthier because their labor is important in the economy. There is little overt expression in the pre-World War II literature of ladinos fearing indigenes, but it is manifest in the often-repeated concern that they should be educated in order to become more like ladinos, and hence less indigenous—less different and therefore less strange.²⁰ In contrast, since the 1960s there has emerged a small group of ladinos who have taken a somewhat radical stance.

The interests of North American anthropologists tended to focus on elements of self-organization, on the one hand—the corporate quality of the indigenous community, the strength of kin bonds, the separate identity of the indigene from the ladinos—and the subordinate relations that they had with ladinos, on the other. Sol Tax was one of those anthropologists especially interested in what he saw to be the quality of economic individualism that he likened to capitalism and also to the efforts of the indigenous peoples to escape from some of the more onerous features of their political-economic subordination.²¹ In broader terms, however, the particular features that these foreign anthropologists sought to explore were determined by theoretical concerns that they brought with them from their anthropological backgrounds. They were mainly trained in functionalism; as such, they were interested in how the social organization worked, how the various pieces fit together.²²

C. Ethnic Identities Are Adaptive and Change

Internal definitions. As culture events, identity is adaptive and will either serve the people who practice it or will have to change. Thus, the culture content of an ethnicity is important, particularly as it forms the elements of highly valued parts of the identity. Identity change is a major process in Central America today. Indeed, it is probably not wrong to suggest that some of the indigenous population is in a crisis of identity, deriving from its economic expansion between 1944 and 1975 and its bloody political repression between 1979 and 1985.²³

Something of the problem is evident in the intentional pursuit of obscurity by the indigenous population of El Salvador after the great massacre of 1932.²⁴ Many Salvadorans today will assert with honest conviction that there are no Indians in the country. However, it is clear that there is still a very significant population that both speaks an indigenous language and identifies itself as indigenous.²⁵ The search for invisibility suggests the fearful internal dissonance that the population has suffered for over half a century.

External definitions. Since one of the major elements on which external definitions hinge are cultural descriptions, the question of culture change is much more important for external than for internal definitions. A major problem of external definitions is that they rarely contain sufficient information on the internal dimension to enable them to incorporate the dynamics of identity. While identity is hardly well understood, it is clear that people can change much about their definitions under various circumstances. There is little in external definitions to reflect this. Instead, external definitions depend on the observations of external behaviors and characteristics.

An example of this is the ladinoization continuum proposed by the present author.²⁶ After a survey of thirty-one Guatemalan communities in 1954, the writer was impressed by marked differences in the degree to which indigenous characteristics—so evident in the western highlands—were in evidence throughout the country and suggested a typology for degrees of ladinoization, as well as trajectories by which it took place. Concerning the least "Indian" of the typology, I observed: "The members of the ladinoized Indian group usually consider themselves to be Indian," but that "much of the content of the culture is ladino."²⁷ While I offered guesses at macroprocesses that were contributing to this ladinoization process, I could

give no notion of the real dynamics involved, nor could I say anything significant concerning the identity felt by the indigenous population.

D. Ethnic Identities Have Political Agendas

Internal ethnicities and the state. Ethnicities may be hegemonic or counterhegemonic. Where the nation-states are dominated by an ethnic group, it may be regarded as hegemonic along with the state mechanism that it controls. However, if one ethnicity does dominate the state, and the huge majority does not, then many are explicitly counterhegemonic in practice and in the goals of many of their members. These vary from groups that compose a major sector of the population—such as the Maya indigenes—to some that are either so small or, for other reasons, so weak that they hardly receive the attention of the state—as is the case with the indigenous population of Honduras. The indigenous population of Guatemala (and El Salvador, at least as of 1930) are so large and politically so potentially salient that they inspire a real fear in the dominant ethnicity and in some members of the state apparatus. Guatemala is the outstanding case in point, and the indigenous population has, for the last one hundred years, been a periodic object of state-supported or state-sponsored violence. Those who control the Guatemalan state cannot help but see the indigenous population as a threatening competitor for hegemony. El Salvador has "solved" the problem by terrifying the indigenous population into covert obscurity, and the same technique has recently been tried again in Guatemala.

While the Guatemalan case is exaggerated in comparison with many other states, the basic dynamics are at work almost everywhere. There is a basic conflict between the state and all ethnicities housed therein except that which rules the state. In "ethnocratic"²⁸ states, the interests of all other ethnicities tend to be subordinated, thus creating conflicts that cannot always be readily distinguished from the structural conflicts inherent in the operation of the state. When carried out in the name of nationalism, it is argued to be for the benefit of all members of the nation-state. In fact, one must assume that ethnicities will seek their own collective interests, whether they are in control or not.

Presumably, the ideal state would seek to negotiate the conflicting interests of the various ethnicities for the benefit of all. But in the nature of things, the best interests of the whole can rarely be congruent with the best interests of all the separate ethnicities, and certainly not with those of the dominant one. When specific ethnicities

appear to be competing for the actual control of the state, then the ruling parties will most certainly try to suppress them.

The ladinos, who have long dominated the Mesoamerican states, are divided between those who, on the one hand, favor a rigorous Liberal policy to achieve labor control by ignoring Indian cultural differences, forced deculturation, and social control accentuating caste differences and depending directly on threat of force (as exemplified by the Barrios regime of the 1870s). On the other hand, there are those who favor an *indigenista* policy,²⁹ also Liberal-inspired but designed to obtain the conformance of Indians to labor controls through "civilizing" and "educating" them. What is common to both policies is the wish to get Indians to conform to the interests of the dominant ladinos. All Central American states except Belize are clearly ethnocratically controlled by ladino sectors, although they differ in the extent to which the interests of subordinate ethnicities are ignored or marginalized.

External ethnic labels are political implements. While the political competition can occur only between ethnicities that are internally defined as such, the labels that are applied are more often a product of external definitions. When ladinos speak in political terms of "indios," they are usually referring to some particular set of individuals with whom they have a particular concern. Thus, they might in one circumstance be using the term as a broad synonym for "campesino," and in another be specifically referring to some very traditional communities of the western highlands. Indeed, when the community of San Pedro Sacatepequez (San Marcos) was declared to be "ladino" in the 1870s, and then again declared to be "indio" in 1930, the whole performance was overtly political from beginning to end.

4. DIFFERENCES IN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ETHNIC DYNAMICS

One of the reasons it is important to recognize that ethnic definitions exist in both internal and external varieties is that each plays a role in social dynamics, but the consequences of the two can be quite different.

Definitions are made in order to enhance understanding, control, and coping by those making the definition. This is equally true of internal and external definitions. Internal definitions will select features that are presumed to be advantageous to the members. Certain features are likely to be all but inaccessible to outsiders, and thus

can stand as uniquely representative of the group in question. Much of it, however, is couched in daily ways of doing things, expressions, visions of the world, and mechanisms to protect the identity. Where some piece of land or element of the natural environment is particularly salient, this will be protected with special vigor. Attacks on the visible features associated with the identity—a flag, a charismatic leader, religious places—may bring not only highly emotional, but even aggressive reactions in defense.

External definitions rarely have such emotional attachments. They are made in order to enhance understanding and/or control by outside observers. They are terms of reference, not issues of identity. Thus they may be critical to those who use them for calculating their own activities, for predicting the behavior of the members of the ethnicity in question. They may be defined in certain ways that are of specific convenience to the observers. Thus, the conquering Spanish defined the New World aboriginal population as human beings in order to evangelize them and more easily harness them as labor under the peaceful control of the church. They clearly could not be harnessed as animals.

In recent years there has been a growing indigenous insistence that ladinos are also an "etnia," a thing that the ladinos themselves generally ignore or deny.³⁰ The reason for this is that as long as the ladinos can use "ethnicity" to refer to a subordinate element of the population, a group that is not wholly nationalized and therefore inferior, it gives them an advantage in dealing. To confront this, the demand that they also be recognized as being an ethnicity allows the indigenous population to place them on the same social level, to confront them as equals, not inferiors.

Ethnic definitions will imply different reproductive conditions for the group. Internal definitions are made to enhance the dynamics of social reproduction, both the reproduction of the identity and the reproduction of the biological membership of the group. Reference has already been made to the Salvadoran indigenes' decision to hide their external Indian traits in order that both their identity and their population might survive. A similar process has been underway in Guatemala with the rapid spread of a pan-Indian *huipil* (indigenous woman's upper garment) during the era of political danger of the 1970s and 1980s. The distinctive dress of indigenous communities allowed their members to be identified wherever they might be, in this era a risk. So while the indigenous dress had been a clear identity marker, it could be readily manipulated in the interests of survival.

External definitions may or may not be intended to affect the reproductive capacity of the group in question. Even though the landowning ladino population has long recognized the critical economic importance of indigenous labor, it never led to a consistent and continuing concern for the health and welfare of that population. The most obvious case where external definitions were explicitly used to control reproduction is the case of chattel slavery.

It is more often the case that the definition is made in order to suppress or even destroy, as occurred in El Salvador in 1932 and in Guatemala between 1979 and 1984. In these instances, the indigenous population was labeled as being "communistic," sympathetic to the guerrilla, and therefore dangerous to the national security.

What is critical, however, is that while external definitions may have nothing to do with internal identity, they can have immense consequences for the groups involved.

Inclusiveness and exclusiveness. Internal definitions tend to be exclusive; with the intent of protection, they tend to narrow the field and to exclude people rather than broaden it to open up the membership. There is certainly no indication that Guatemalan ladinos want to include people of indigenous ancestry among themselves so long as they practice distinctive customs. Also, there has long been a tendency among upper and middle-class ladinos to exclude people of known German or North American ancestry from being included as "Guatemalan," irrespective of where they were born or how many antecedent generations they have in Guatemala. To them, only those with Spanish-surname antecedents are real "Guatemalans."

In contrast, external definitions tend, if anything, to be inclusive, to sweep a variety of people into a single category. Thus, some indigenes will categorize all non-Indians as ladino. To the North American tourist arriving in Guatemala, all the brown-skinned people may initially be "Indian"; later, it may be only people with colorful dress. On a more alarming level, the official Guatemalan fear of "communists" was potentially extendable to all indigenes who were in areas where the guerrillas were active.

Internal and external interact historically. It is not uncommon that external names are applied prior to an explicit definition of internal identity. The term "indio" was, of course, applied by the Spanish to all the natives of the New World, but it is only today that the indigenous peoples of the continent are beginning to accept a common term for their collectivity. They reject "indio" for the obvious reason that it

was a misnomer given them by the conquerors. Similarly, the linguistic terms "Quiché," "Cakchiqueol," "Kekchi," and so on, are terms that referred to kingdoms at the time of the conquest, but today are labels for languages. Until recently, these terms were not used by many indigenes, but today they are being reintroduced as internally used terms for regional groups.

Origin myths tend to favor the people giving the myth. The myths that delineate the historical origins and antecedents of an ethnic group will vary between the external definition and the internal definition. There are important differences between the version of the Popol Vuh and that argued by the prehistorians for the origin of the indigenous peoples of the region. The version of history given in the "Danza de la conquista," which is still performed frequently and with vigor in many indigenous communities, is obviously not the same as that recounted in the textbooks used in the Spanish-speaking schools.

5. FINAL OBSERVATIONS

This essay has been an exercise in definition, theory, and conceptualization, focusing on Central American and, particularly, Guatemalan cases. By way of conclusion, it may be useful to apply some of the analytical arguments to some problems. I will deal with two old ones and two new ones.

A. Two Old Problems:

The work of North American anthropologists in Guatemala. Beginning in the 1960s, there began to appear a series of rather bitter attacks by two Guatemalan and one French social scientists on the work of North American anthropologists. While many have come under criticism in this, for better or worse, this writer seems to have been the favored target.³¹ While alluded to earlier, the issue of relevance here is not the political context of the attacks, but rather that there are inevitable substantive differences in what people produce.

One criticism made specifically of my work was that I characterized the degree of acculturation of the Indian population as varying over a continuum from "traditional Indian" to "ladinoized Indian." I, along with other North American anthropologists, was accused of conspiring in an imperialist plot to acculturate and to de-Indianize Guatemala for some unexplained advantage to be reaped by the United States.³² Guzmán Böckler went so far as to accuse North Americans of being ideologically

committed to further the decline of the Indian population by characterizing Indians as "malo" and ladinos as "bueno," and that "la ladinoización es el camino para volverse bueno."³³ These rather odd accusations were, of course, substantively unfounded,³⁴ but the issue of the acculturation model does bring up some issues relevant to the present discussion.

The proposed continuum³⁵ argued that there was a relative difference in overt, perceptible traits associated with people and communities identified as "Indian" in various parts of Guatemala. Those with the most obvious retention of such traits were categorized as "traditional Indian" and, as a rule of thumb, characterized both sexes speaking an indigenous language and wearing a distinctive dress (e.g., Sololá, Totonicapán, El Quiché). Those called "modified Indians" were bilingual, and the men would usually have assumed generalized ladino dress, whereas the women would still retain significant portions of distinctive "Indian" dress (such as Magdalena Milpas Altas). The term "ladinoized Indians" was applied to those in a few communities where neither indigenous language nor distinctly "Indian" dress was retained, but an identification of being Indian was still claimed and was manifest in distinctive social organizations—such as separate barrios, separate religious associations, and so forth (e.g., Guazacapán, San Agustín Acasguastlán). Finally, there were communities that historically were known to have had significant indigenous population, but which now are entirely ladino, and individuals who were of direct indigenous extraction, but who identified themselves as ladinos. These were referred to as "new ladinos."

What is salient about this classification is that it is an external definition and analysis. It was done by North American anthropologists who neither could, nor pretended to, have experienced the nature of the identity of the Indian. The best an external characterization can do at this level is to recognize that such identity is there—as was done in the characterization of the ladinoized Indian. The argument was based on reconnaissance and census materials and argued that while the strong, more traditional, Indian areas were not losing Indian population, those with low indigenous percentages were going to see an even greater relative decline in the indigenous population. This trend has been reconfirmed by later censuses (see table 1).

It might be added that the same procedure was followed in a study of El Salvador, insofar as census materials allowed, and it was argued that there were many more Indians there than were popularly thought to be at the time. This is only now being reconfirmed by the work of Julie Maxwell and her colleagues.³⁶

In short, the description provided in my 1950 work was an external statement about the acculturation of the indigenous population. It made no claim to provide an internal view of how things were seen from the standpoint of people who termed themselves indigenes. While much is challenged in polemical essays, the only empirical study that makes a substantial attempt to improve on analysis is that of Daniel Early.

How many Indians there are in Guatemala. A problem that is currently in discussion, but little directly argued in the literature, concerns how many "indigenes" there are in Guatemala. While I am not privy to all the issues here, there is general agreement that the figures set forth by the census are based on differing and often dubious local definitions, and can claim little consistency from one part of the country to another. The comparison of the figures in the post-World War II censuses (see table 1) certainly present inconsistencies that are most difficult to attribute to known social process (e.g., Sta. Rosa, El Progreso, Juliapa, Zacapa); it seems inescapable that we must assume technical irregularities in the censuses themselves. The central issue, however, is that all censuses to date have relied on external definitions. This not only means that the indigenes' own definition of who pertains to their population is not involved, but that the definitions will vary from one region to another. Even with such oddities, however, there is a fairly overall consistency in the census material that suggests two things. First is that the relatively more rapid rate of ladino population increase at the national level continues. Second, however, is that in the most heavily indigenous areas, the indigene/ladino ratio is increasing. This is a most significant change as it suggests an actual geographical differentiation of an area that is increasing in indigenous content.

The charge made by contemporary indigenistas, that there is a serious and consistent effort on the part of ladino census takers to reduce the number of recorded indigenes, is hard to sustain in view of the figures on the accompanying table. While it is likely that in some local instances the authorities might have tried to play down the size of the indigenous population, there is no evidence that figures have been intentionally manipulated by the national census offices since the corruption of the 1940 census under the apparent orders of Ubico.

Nevertheless, some contemporary indigenista interests claim that the census is reducing the indigenous figure to promote the de-Indianization of the country. The highest figure I have heard is a claim that 80 percent of the total population is

indigenous. This might be supportable if we were defining "indigenous" in terms of evidence of indigenous ancestry. This, however, would be an external definition, even if it were to have been made by a person with legitimate indigenous identification.

While there seems to be little support for a claim as exaggerated as this, it does suggest that studies are needed on what the real variation is between an interior identity-based population count and that done by ladinos. This is a question of social and political importance. What is the nature and the size of the discrepancy, and is it possible to better understand the dynamics that create and manipulate the figures, are both important questions. Perhaps an ultimate solution would be to have two census questions, one expressing the position of the person being tallied, and the another from the perspective of the census taker. Whether this is politically feasible in a ladino-dominated state is the question.

B. Two Current Problems

Can ethnicities exist without a state? Ethnicities are generally seen today as enclaves, often (but by no means always) minority groups whose differing identity keeps them separate from the dominant and ruling population of the nation state. The differences are manifest in tension and often open conflict between the two groups. The power of the state usually prevails by keeping the divergent ethnicity economically marginal and politically dependent.

While ethnicities were clearly in evidence during the colonial era, and during the nation-state building of the nineteenth century, they have become especially conspicuous in recent decades. There is no major nation-state—and probably few minor ones—that do not find themselves facing contentious ethnicities that claim rights, privileges, autonomy, or even independence. The problem faces states of all ideologies and political economic philosophies.

So linked is the expression of ethnicity to the subordination to state domination that there is an open question whether ethnicities could even exist without the hostility of a nation-state to invigorate them.

How much does the creation and definition of an identity depend on this confrontation and contrast with others? It is certainly the case that there was no "Indian" identity until the arrival of the Spanish. And, it should also be argued that the Spanish—or Castilian—identity was also nebulous until the contrast with the indigenes provided a basis of opposition.

However, the fact that there were no "Indians" does not mean that there was no identity. The Cakchiquél, Quiché, and Tzutujíl were separate states, and they were clearly distinct from the Mexican troops brought in by the Spanish. Identity delineates and separates one's social universe from others'. One must suppose that it has played a role in social definition since long before the emergence of culture, although culture allows a definition to be more readily revised.

Perhaps the question must remain theoretically undecided. However, on a more pragmatic basis, it is clear that in today's world it is precisely the nation-state that provides the major conditions for the belligerent definition and defiant behavior of subordinated ethnicities.

Can ethnicities exist without conflict in a state? A much more important question that all Guatemalans unceasingly confront is whether distinctive ethnicities share a nation-state happily. Can they exist with peace and stability without the domination by one ethnicity being intolerable for another? Are the ethnic conflicts of Northern Ireland, Lebanon, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Guatemala structurally insolvable? Can states not evolve that share power among multiple ethnicities? Is the psychology of antagonism and fear that pervades Guatemala and many other ethnocracies inherent and unavoidable?

These are the fundamental questions that ethnic and national leaders are rarely willing to confront or take to the negotiation table. The rulers of states do not want to risk their hegemony, and the subordinated ethnicities are almost inevitably forced into an irreconcilable position.

When the rulers of the state hide a deep apprehension, a fear of a politically subordinate ethnicity, is it possible for them to allow an opening for the other to obtain some balance of power? Can ladinos open the state to share power with indigenes?

I have elsewhere detailed an analysis of the newspaper treatment of the Patzicia massacre of 1944 that clearly shows how the ladino press—on the eve of the revolutionary era of Arevalo and Arbenz—could not directly confront the fact and the implications of the interethnic hostility that led to that massacre.³⁷ Indeed, it appears that the only response ladinos can make is either a patronizing nineteenth-century indigenista position—or slaughter.

Table 1. Indigenous Population of Guatemala According to National Censuses of 1950, 1964, and 1981.

Department	1950	1950	1964	1964	1981	1981
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
	Pop.	Indig.	Pop.	Indig.	Pop.	Indig.
Totonicapan	99,434	96.6	142,873	94.2	204,419	97.1
Sololá	82,869	93.8	107,429	93.1	154,249	94.2
Alta Verapaz	188,758	93.4	263,160	92.0	322,008	89.4
El Quiché	174,882	83.7	255,280	84.9	328,175	85.2
Chimaltenango	122,310	77.5	161,760	76.1	230,059	79.8
Huehuetenango	198,872	73.5	285,180	67.5	431,343	65.9
San Marcos	230,039	72.1	328,420	60.5	472,326	48.5
Suchitepéquez	125,196	67.4	182,524	54.0	237,554	56.4
Quetzaltenango	183,588	68.0	270,100	55.4	366,949	60.6
Baja Verapaz	66,432	58.6	95,680	52.3	115,602	57.3
Chiquimula	112,837	62.1	145,800	49.6	168,863	35.5
Sacatepéquez	59,975	51.2	79,120	45.5	121,127	46.8
Jalapa	75,091	50.5	99,300	42.4	136,091	33.5
Retalhuleu	66,066	51.5	115,977	32.1	150,923	31.1
El Petén	15,897	28.1	27,720	24.9	131,927	22.6
Izabal	55,191	14.7	114,380	11.9	194,618	22.7
Zacapa	69,533	18.9	98,560	11.3	115,712	2.6
Guatemala	441,085	18.3	792,594	10.2	1,311,192	12.2
Escuintla	123,809	15.9	266,488	13.9	334,666	9.8
Santa Rosa	109,812	9.5	158,505	1.9	194,168	3.0
El Progreso	47,678	9.1	64,866	<0.1	81,188	<0.1
Jutiapa	138,768	19.2	189,460	<0.1	251,068	8.1
TOTAL	2,788,122	53.5	4,245,176	43.4	6,054,227	41.9

Notes

1. As observed by Anthony D. Smith, *The Origin of Nations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988, p. 21.
2. Pierre van den Berghe, "Ethnicity and Class in Highland Peru," in L. A. Després, organizer, *Toward a Theory of Ethnic Phenomena*, La Haya: Mouton, 1975.
3. The example here is a version of the Guatemalan scene that is simplified for purposes of illustration.
4. Although there may be efforts by political activists to try to find, or even to create, such a collective identity.
5. Editor, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1969.
6. Editor, *Ethnicity and Resource Competition in Plural Societies*, La Haya: Mouton, 1975.
7. Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
8. *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986.
9. Editor, *Utopia y revolución. El pensamiento político contemporáneo de los Indios en América Latina*. México: Editora Nueva Imagen, 1981.
10. *Identidade, etnia e estrutura social*. São Paulo: Poneira, 1976.
11. Cardoso de Oliveira, *Identidade*, 1976.
12. As does G. Bonfil Batalle, "La teoría del control cultural en el estudio de procesos étnicos," *Anuario Antropológico* 86, Brasília: Editora Universidade de Brasília, 1986, p. 19.
13. Mary W. Helms, "Domestic Organization in Eastern Central America: The San Blas Cuna, Miskito, and Black Carib Compared," *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology*, VI, no. 3 (1969): 133-163.
14. "Matrilocalidad and the Maintenance of Ethnic Identity: The Miskito of Eastern Nicaragua and Honduras." *Sonderdruck Aus Verhandlung des XXXVIII. Internationalen Amerikanistenkongresses*. Stuttgart-München. 12. bis 18. August 1968.
15. Azzo Ghidinelli, "Los grupos humanos que se originaron después de la conquista en la Costa Atlántica de Guatemala y Honduras," in *Costa Atlántica de Centroamericana*, compiladores David A. Smith W. y Carmen Murillo Ch. San José: CSUCA, 1983, pp.10-30.
16. Carlos Guzmán Böckler and Jean Loup Herbert, *Guatemala: Una interpretación histórica-social*. Mexico: Editorial Siglo XXI, 1970, p. 95. Cited in Figueroa Ibarra, 1974, p. 6.
17. Miguel Angel Asturias, *Sociología Guatemalteca: El problema social del indio*. Guatemala: Tipografía Sánchez y De Guise, 1923; Antonio Batres Jaragui, *Los Indios: Su historia y su civilización*. Guatemala: Est. Tipog. La Union, 1894.
18. Sol Tax, "The Municipios of the Midwestern Highlands of Guatemala." *American Anthropologist*, 39:423-444, 1937; Oliver La Farge, *Santa Eulalia: The Religion of a Cuchumatán Indiana Town*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947.
19. As it is handled in Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations*, 1988, p. 2.
20. Burgos-Debray, Elisabeth, ed. *I ... Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Thetford, Norfolk: Thetford Press, 1984; Victor Montejo, *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*. New York: Talman, 1986.
21. Sol Tax, *Penny Capitalism: A Guatemalan Indian Economy*. Institute of Social Anthropology, Publication No. 16. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution, 1953.
22. For example, see the work of John Gillin, Arden King, Manning Nash, Benjamin and Lois Paul, Robert Redfield, Sol Tax, Charles Wagley, and the present writer in the 1950s.

23. The literature on the economic expansion of indigenes in this era is scarce; that on the repression is growing. See Robert Carmack, editor, *A Harvest of Violence*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press; Ricardo Falla, "El hambre y otras privaciones inducidos por el ejercito de Guatemala sobre la poblacion civil." *ECA*, 420, Año 38, pp. 845-868. 1983; *Voices of the Survivors. The Massacre at Finca San Francisco, Guatemala*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cultural Survival, Inc., and Anthropology Resource Center, 1983.

24. For the events in question, see T. P. Anderson, *Matanza: El Salvador's Communist Revolt of 1932*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971

25. Judith Maxwell, "Nahuatl-Pipil: Muy Político." *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 6, 1:17-18, 1982; Theodore MacDonald, "El Salvador's Indians." *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 6, 1:14-16, 1982.

26. *Cultural Surveys of Panama-Nicaragua-Guatemala-El Salvador-Honduras*, Pan American Sanitary Bureau, Scientific Publication No. 33, Washington, D.C., 1957. Pp. 270-274.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 272.

28. This term has been attributed to Rodolfo Stavernhagen.

29. The term *indigenista* in Latin America has been used for over a century to refer to policies that have been established by mestizo-controlled governments and private interests for dealing with Indians. They have been specific policies that were argued to be for the benefit of the Indian. This is the usage of the Instituto Indigenista Interamericano and the various corresponding national Institutos Indigenistas. Today, in Guatemala, however, the term is also used to label a particular sector of pro-native American activists who favor complete autonomy of the indigenous population, breaking all state ties with ladinos.

30. See conference on "La cuestión etnica," FLACSO, Guatemala City, July 1988.

31. I have no full bibliography on this, but perhaps the first book was that by Humberto Flores Alvarado, *La estructura social guatemalteca*. Guatemala: Editorial "Rumbos Nuevos," 1968; followed closely by Carlos Guzmán Böckler and Jean-Loup Herbert, *Guatemala: Una interpretación histórica-social*. Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editora, 1970, and later by Flores Alvarado's *El Adamsismo y la sociedad guatemalteca*, Guatemala: Piedra Santa, 1973. Most recently the paper by Olga Perez de Lara ("El desarrollo de la antropología en Guatemala: Necesidades y perspectivas," 39 pp., mimeographed, no date [ca. 1988]) seems bent on reinvigorating this game.

32. It has nowhere been made explicit, nor is it self-evident, just what advantage would accrue to either the United States or to the North American anthropologists by the disappearance of the Guatemalan indigenous peoples.

33. Carlos Guzmán Böckler, *Donde enmudecen las conciencias*, Mexico: SEP/CIESAS, Editora Frontera, 1986, p. 176-177, claims that this author further poses intentional misinformation concerning his role in the study of prisoners after the fall of Arbenz. He quotes, as true, statements by S. Schlesinger and S. Kinzer (*Fruta Amarga*, Mexico, 1982, pp. 246-247) that are in error. It is asserted that I was sent to Guatemala by the Department of State's Division of Intelligence and Research at the request of Peurifoy, and that I worked under a pseudonym. In fact I had been in Guatemala since 1950, working for the WHO since 1952, and I conceived of and solicited the opportunity to do the research because I suspected the claims that Arbenz had converted the peasantry to "communism," which has been part of the argument for the CIA action, were unfounded. I did not work under a pseudonym. Rather, the WHO gave me leave to do the study providing that I did not publish the material under by own name, and thereby avoided association with the WHO; consequently, I subsequently did publish it under another name. My association with the project was, however, never otherwise hidden or in doubt (Guzmán Böckler 1986, pp. 176-177).

34. Richard N. Adams, *Encuesta sobre la cultura de los ladinos in Guatemala*, Seminario de Integración Social Guatemalteca, Publicación No. 2, 1956, p. 37, states, "El cuadro número 4 indica que el incremento de la población indígena fue aproximadamente de 4.8 veces entre 1778 y 1950, en tanto que el de la población ladina fue de 16.1 veces en ese mismo lapso, o sea cerca de tres veces más rápido que el de los indígenas." On p. 41, it further argues that, "En vista de la alta tasa

indígena de nacimientos, es notorio que una reducción de 10 por 1000 en la tasa de defunciones daría por resultado un incremento relativo de la población indígena sobre la ladina." This hardly constitutes hiding the fact of indigenous population growth. In any event, that growth is chronicled in the table and text of the study. Indeed, the relative decline of indigenes in comparison with the growth of ladinos, coupled with the obvious ladinoization of the oriente, a region that had once been indigenous, posed a serious problem for understanding just what was happening to the indigenous population. Recent work by Lovell and Lutz is throwing important light on this.

35. Adams, 1956, pp. 22-28.

36. See Note 25.

37. Richard N. Adams, "Ethnic Images and Strategies in 1944," in a volume currently being edited by Carol Smith.